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Elizabeth Borgwardt. *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005. 437 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-01874-7.

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A New Deal for (most of) the World

Elizabeth Borgwardt's *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* is an outstanding book. It is elegantly written, deeply researched, and gracefully analytical. Borgwardt argues that the Roosevelt administration, confronted with the chaos and destruction of the Second World War, reached for the familiar. Believing in many ways that the New Deal's idealistic pragmatism could stabilize an international system blown apart by militarism, human rights violations, and economic protectionism and parochialism, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration set out to construct on the international level what it had built in the United States. Although not exactly a TVA for the world, it was close. This internationalist New Deal framework had an unshakeable faith that government could be harnessed for good and that political and economic rights, protected by multilateral institutions, could create a lasting peace

The "*Zeitgeist* of 1945," Borgwardt argues, was instrumental in unleashing the creative, problem-solving energies of the New Dealers onto the international system. There was something in the air. A Grotian transitional moment in the system that, if properly sculpted, held the promise of peace, abundance, and prosperity. That promise, which was so much more substantial than the vaporous hopes following World War I, was rooted, oddly enough, in the lessons of the Great Depression and the experiences of the Second World War. Borgwardt asserts that the economic and psychic toll that the Great Depression took on the American population coupled with the unprecedented and positive intervention of the federal government to ease the burdens of massive unemployment, homelessness, and starvation, reconfigured the assumptions about the role of government in society. Moreover, mobilization for and involvement in total war shook millions of Americans out of their tight, bordered lives and exposed them to areas and conditions of the country and the world that were heretofore beyond their vision. Veteran upon veteran talked of what it meant to leave small-town, Nowheresville America, train at bases throughout the United States, and then strike out for their tours of duty in a number of locales in Europe and Asia. These internationalized veterans, with a strong sense of other peoples and lands, then reaped the life-altering benefits of the GI Bill and higher education. In short, a large, much more cosmopolitan constituency

had now emerged on the American political landscape that not only understood the warp and woof of international stability to domestic prosperity but also had come to believe strongly in the role and effectiveness of government intervention to provide that very stability and prosperity. In this milieu, through the Atlantic, Bretton Woods, United Nations, and Nuremberg Charters, which Borgwardt examines at length, the New Dealers set out to remake and stabilize a world torn apart.

The guiding star of this endeavor was the Atlantic Charter, which encapsulated the quintessential qualities of Franklin Delano Roosevelt: it was strong, flexible, open to interpretation, pragmatic, chimerical, chameleon-like, hope-inspiring, inflammatory–all depending upon the audience. For the British it was affirmation, albeit faint, that the United States would not totally abandon Europe to Adolf Hitler. For the New Dealers it was the road map that finally welded political rights–Freedom of Speech–to economic rights–Freedom from Want. And, for those like Nelson Mandela, who were locked behind the boundaries of oppressive states, it meant a powerful recognition that human rights had now transcended national sovereignty. The Atlantic Charter and the emerging human rights regime that coalesced around it elevated the individual to an entity protected by international norms, regardless of a state's repressive domestic laws. Yet, these ideas of freedom now required institutions to put them into practice. They required the institution-building of the New Deal.

The Bretton Woods Agreement, the second charter that Borgwardt covers in rich detail, was designed to institutionalize a free trade global economy. Currency, trade, and development would be harmonized and stabilized through the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the International Trade Organization, and a system that pegged the dollar to gold. This was a daunting task. Indeed, as Borgwardt makes clear throughout the negotiations for each of these charters, the vested interests, recalcitrance, backroom deals, and personality clashes consistently made the New Deal vision difficult to implement. Yet, implemented it was and Truman's ascendancy to the presidency only reified what FDR had put in place.

The crowning jewel was the United Nations, whose initial charter was drafted at Dumbarton Oaks. Yet, Dumbarton Oaks–an exclusive Great Power confab, which barely mentioned human rights and avoided the volatile colonialism issue at all costs–could not speak to the outrage that the world felt at Nazi atrocities and the hopes that the Atlantic Charter's promise of self-determination had created. The UN founding conference at San Francisco, therefore, unleashed forces that even the New Dealers had not anticipated. Non-governmental organizations and smaller powers, "punched above their weight," and wrought changes to the UN Charter that would have historic effects, particularly in the areas of human rights and decolonization.

Not surprisingly, then, the Nuremberg Charter, which set the parameters of the Nuremberg Trials, had similar unintended but beneficial consequences, as well. Its intended purpose of defining and upholding the legal concepts of an unjust war and war of aggression fell by the wayside as they got trapped in the apparent permafrost of the Cold War. Nonetheless, Nuremberg was a triumph. It became a defining moment in human rights history that finally brought meaning and resonance to the amorphous term "crimes against humanity." Indeed, the progeny of the Nuremberg Trials–the Genocide Convention, the Convention against Torture, the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Criminal Court–have forever changed the terms of debate. Those engaged in systematic murder could no longer act with impunity and assurance that the international community would forever look the other way. King Leopold walked, Slobodan Milosevic did not. That is the legacy of the New Deal's institution-building and the Atlantic Charter's caress of the individual even through the barricade of national sovereignty.

Borgwardt concludes this outstanding study with what are essentially essays on the tragic turn that U.S. foreign policy has taken since 2000 and particularly after September 11, 2001. Where there had once been multilateralism and some level of commitment to human rights, in twenty-first-century America unilateralism and human rights violations have fused together in the nation that had once rightly proclaimed its moral authority to lead.

As powerful as Borgwardt's work is, however, one often has the sense that lurking just beneath this iconographic ode to the New Deal, is the much more turbulent, compromised, and yes, even racist, New Deal. Although Borgwardt does mention that not all Americans benefited from the New Deal's programs and that African Americans, for example, were excluded, she does not fully grapple with the implications of projecting this model onto the international scene where not just 10 percent of the population, but nearly three-fourths of the world's inhabitants are people of color. That is to say,

one of the inherent problems with the New Deal model, and why its use as the framework for a new world order has to be more incisively interrogated, was that although "states had to 'give to get' in order to garner the benefits of a stable international system," the clear identification of, exactly, who is required to give so that others can get has achieved a certain elision in this story. At the domestic level, anti-lynching laws–even in the face of horrific anti-black violence–Social Security eligibility, access to low interest home loans, and participation in federal subsidies for starving sharecroppers all ran afoul of not only entrenched Southern hostility to African-American equality but also to liberal New Dealers, who were more than willing to "give" away black access to political and economic rights so that capitalism and white America could be saved.[1] That horse-trading with someone else's freedom has held profound consequences for America's moral leadership and the development of its political and economic terrain. Indeed, this New Deal model writ large on the international system tells us more than even Borgwardt may fully recognize about the ongoing battles over globalization, the laxity of human rights enforcement, and the mounting, volatile fissure between the international North and South.

Note

[1]. See Robert Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*; Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); *Oh Freedom After While*, Narrated by Julian Bond, Produced by Lynn Rubright and Candace O'Connor, Directed by Steven John Ross, California Newsreel, 1999, videocassette.