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Daniel T. Rodgers. *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age.* Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1998. 634 pp.

Daniel T. Rodgers. *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. 672 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-05131-7.



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Daniel T. Rodgers' "search" for progressivism has taken him on a fact-finding tour of the Atlantic community between 1890 and the end of World War II. The result of this long journey and the accompanying arduous research is an important new perspective on progressivism. Upon surveying the historiography of progressivism, Rodgers concludes, "familiar as these explanations are, they leave unstated what every contemporary who followed these issues knew: that the reconstruction of American social politics was of a part with movements of politics and ideas throughout the North Atlantic world that trade and capitalism had tied together" (p. 3). Rodgers traces these movements through four periods—1890 to 1917; World War I and the 1920s; the New Deal; and, World War II and the post-war period—and carefully examines the cross-Atlantic relationships among reformers.

Between the 1890s and the first World War, (the "Progressive Period" as traditionally defined) Rodgers shows that American progressives were recipients of this cross-Atlantic transfer of ideas as intellectuals, reformers, and politicians confronted the "rapid intensification of market relations, the swelling great city populations, and the

rising working-class resentments from below" (p. 59). The United States looked to Europe for examples and models and many influential progressives such as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and John R. Commons gained from their European counterparts a "set of working practical examples" (p. 143). In fact, it is Rodgers's contention that the greatest challenge confronting United States progressives was not finding solutions, but rather sifting through the great number of possible solutions available—many of them the products of work in other parts of the Atlantic community. Progressivism represented a middle ground between the "rocks of cutthroat economic individualism and the shoals of the all-coercive statism" (p. 209) and the fact that United States progressives were able to achieve "momentary emancipation from the geocentricity around them" and use the European models to launch a "preemptive strike against working class socialism" (p. 224) was their greatest accomplishment. Rodgers's insightful discussion centers around social insurance, minimum-wage and hour legislation, and city building.

While Rodgers notes that even many progressives thought that World War I brought a collapse that seemed

“absolute and universal” (p. 274) for progressive ideals, in fact it represented an opportunity that progressives seized when the prosperity of the 1920s provided relief from working class pressures to alter the nature of society and politics. From the United States’s perspective, the 1920s was a period of lasting American achievement in the cross Atlantic relationship, primarily as a result of the prolonged prosperity the American economy enjoyed. This “permanent prosperity” free from “antagonistic class interests” (p. 375) created a fertile ground for progressive ideas. Consequently, the 1920s featured both the re-birth of progressive ideas but also a situation where there was more of a balance in the exchange of ideas and models between Europe and the United States.

If during the pre-war era the United States was the recipient of progressive ideas and models from Europe, and during the 1920s, there was a balance, Rodgers—in what may be the most striking contribution of this work—sees the New Deal as a period when the United States assumed a leadership role. He describes the New Deal as “a culmination: a great gathering in from the progressive political wings of a generation of proposals and ideals” (p. 415). Rodgers argues that New Deal programs were not new, but rather the ideas that had been germinated within the Atlantic community in the early part of the century, with social insurance and the Resettlement Administration as primary examples.

While World War I was an “interruption” in this Atlantic exchange, the Second World War was, according to Rodgers, a “watershed.” (p. 485). The interchange between the various progressive reformers was no longer the pivotal story, as the United States’ situation took on totally different dimensions from the European experience as a reflection of the vast difference in wartime conditions. Following the war, the members of the Atlantic community established the more elaborate welfare states that have dominated the second half of the twentieth century, with their permanent bureaucracies and larger government involvement.

Daniel T. Rodgers makes a compelling argument that the achievement of progressive ideas was a “moment when, across the countervailing pull of nationhood, the world of capital seemed to many a world akin” (p. 508). The connections were of seminal importance and transformed the agenda of progressive politics. The research is prodigious, the book is gracefully written, and will add significantly to the conversation regarding the nature of progressive politics and reform. *Atlantic Crossings* is a remarkable achievement.

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