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Comparative Perspectives on the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

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Comparative perspectives on the United States have received increased attention in recent years, stimulated apparently by the rise in world history's popularity. David Thelen's sponsorship of transnational history as a subject of three special issues of the *Journal of American History* no doubt has contributed to the trend. The reprinting of C. Vann Woodward's *The Comparative Approach to American History* in 1997, the publication of George Fredrickson's essays on comparative history, and the report of the La Pietra Project reflect recent efforts to put United States history in an international perspective.¹ While comparative history hardly has gained equal footing with nationally-centered studies, enough work on the Gilded Age and Progressive Era has appeared over the last decade and a half to warrant an assessment. This essay takes note of scholarship on economics, business, politics and governance that has examined the United States within an international context during the 1870s-1914 era. My objective is to discern trends in the literature and suggest opportunities for future research rather than to provide a comprehensive bibliographical survey.

¹Special issues of the *Journal of American History*, "Toward the Internationalization of American History: A Round Table," 79 (September 1992): 432-52; "Rethinking History and the Nation-State: Mexico and the United States as a Case Study," 86 (September 1999): 439-697; and "The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History," 86 (December 1999): 965-1307.

C. Vann Woodward, *The Comparative Approach to American History* (New York, 1968; reprinted 1997); see the retrospective review by Carl J. Guarneri in *Reviews in American History* 23 (September 1995): 522-63. George M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements* (Berkeley, 1997). Thomas Bender, "La Pietra Report: Project on Internationalizing the Study of American History: A Report to the Profession" (Organization of American Historians, 2000).

The Geography of Comparison. Comparative history that includes the United States leans decidedly toward Britain and Western Europe. Juxtaposing the United States with England has long been popular, for obvious reasons, as have studies that compare the United States with Western Europe.² Two of the most important comparative works that appeared in the 1990s, Alfred Chandler's *Scale and Scope* and Daniel Rodgers' *Atlantic Crossings*, fall into this geographic pattern.³ Chandler examined Britain and Germany in addition to the United States, while Rodgers' European matchmates were England, Germany, and France. Michael Mann's monumental exploration of classes and state-building during the long nineteenth century included Great Britain, France, Prussia-Germany, and Austria-Hungary, in addition to the United States.⁴ Studies set within the tradition of western civilization perhaps account for more than one-half of the comparative scholarship reviewed here. Almost all discussions of American "exceptionalism" are set within the north Atlantic community.⁵

²See for example, Jeffrey Haydu, *Between Craft and Class: Skilled Workers and Factory Politics in the United States and Britain, 1890-1922* (Berkeley, 1988); Tony Freyer, *Regulating Big Business: Antitrust in Great Britain and America, 1880-1990* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); H.C. Allen and Roger Thompson, eds., *Contrast and Connection: Bicentennial Essays in Anglo-American History* (Athens, OH, 1976); Morton Keller, "Anglo-American Politics, 1900-1930 Perspective: A Case Study in Comparative History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (July 1980): 458-77; David Englander, ed., *Britain and America: Studies in Comparative History, 1760-1970* (New Haven, 1997).

³Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA, 1990); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1998). Recent comparisons of France and the United States include Alisa Klaus, *Every Child a Lion: The Origins of Maternal and Infant Health Policy in the United States and France, 1890-1920* (Ithaca, 1993); Gerald Friedman, *State-Making and Labor Movements: France and the United States, 1876-1914* (Ithaca, 1998).

⁴Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. II, *The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760-1914* (Cambridge, UK, 1993). Europe is the principal focus of comparison in James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York, 1986); Ulla W. Kander, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Jane Lewis, eds., *Protecting Women: Labor Legislation in Europe, the United States, and Australia* (Urbana, 1995); Gary W. Marks, *Unions in Politics: Britain, Germany, and the United States in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Princeton, 1989); Thomas P. Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore, 1983); Peter Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times: Comparative Responses to International Economic Crises* (Ithaca, 1986); Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York, 1993). Most cross-national comparisons in Vann Woodward's *The Comparative Approach* measured the United States against Western Europe.

⁵Rick Halpern and Jonathan Morris, eds., *American Exceptionalism? U.S. Working Class Formation in an International Context* (New York, 1997) and Seymour M. Lipset and

Canada has not received the attention one would predict given its proximity to the United States. Perhaps scholars conclude that Canada is too much like its southern neighbor to warrant instructive comparison. Nonetheless, research that has paired Canada with the United States may rank behind Anglo-American studies in popularity for two country comparisons.⁶ Walter Nugent's study of international migration is one of the few works that focuses on both sides of the Atlantic *and* the southern and northern portions of the Western Hemisphere.⁷ A few scholars have set their research within the English-speaking world, which brings Australia into the field of view.⁸ George Fredrickson's study of white supremacy in the United States and South Africa is among the few recent studies that examine an African location.⁹ Mansel Blackford's historical survey of big business included Japan with the United States and England, a rare combination of sites. Few scholars have made all of the continents their canvas, although surveys of industrialization frequently include Japan.¹⁰ Daniel Yergin's history of the oil industry is notable for its global perspective.¹¹

Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York, 2000) cite most of the relevant recent literature.

⁶Seymour M. Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (New York, 1990); Margaret Beattie Bogue, *Fishing the Great Lakes: An Environmental History, 1783-1933* (Madison, WI, 2000); Michael R. Haines and Richard H. Steckel, eds., *A Population History of North America* (New York, 2000); Norbert MacDonald, *Distant Neighbors: A Comparative History of Seattle and Vancouver* (Lincoln, NE, 1987); Ronald L. Watts, "The American Constitution in Comparative Perspective: A Comparison of Federalism in the United States and Canada," *Journal of American History* 74 (December 1987): 769-91; Milton J. Esman, "Federalism and Modernization: Canada and the United States," *Publius* 14 (1984): 21-38. Robert Kelley, *The Transatlantic Persuasion: The Liberal Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York, 1969) includes Canada as well as Britain and the United States.

⁷Walter Nugent, *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870-1914* (Bloomington, IN, 1992).

⁸Robert C. Allen, "Real Incomes in the English-speaking World, 1879-1913," in *Labour Market Evolution*, eds., George Grantham and M. Mackinnon (New York, 1994); Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, 1991).

⁹George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York, 1981).

¹⁰Tom Kemp, *Historical Patterns of Industrialization* (New York, 1993); David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York, 1998).

¹¹Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York, 1991).

The predominance of Western European nations as matchmates with the United States raises questions about case selection and variations. All nations in the north Atlantic community are derivatives of western civilization. Balanced against criticisms that these countries embody fundamental commonalties are the practical difficulties of doing any cross-national research. Comparative history requires a scholar to gain familiarity with a second society and its historical literature. For historians working at the monographic level, visits to archives in the host country are usually obligatory. This can be costly, especially for younger scholars. Inclusion of a second or third foreign site doubles and triples this degree of difficulty.

Western Europe's predominance in comparative works no doubt is partially the function of language skills. Far more students of United States history have some training in German, French and Spanish than in Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and other non-European tongues. In this regard the scarcity of comparisons with Spanish-speaking cultures during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, aside from studies of foreign relations, is puzzling. One can broaden this observation a bit: there is no North American (Canada, Mexico, and the United States) economic or political history to my knowledge.¹² Language and cost barriers explain why comparative analyses tended to rest heavily on secondary works, a reliance that is especially conspicuous among political scientists, sociologists, and economic historians.

The Nature of Comparative History

Studies undertaken from a comparative perspective are known by several rubrics: transnational, cross-national, international, world history, and global history, as well as comparative history. While differences between these approaches are partially semantic, some distinctions exist. World history largely reflects concerns of historians who seek to trace the course of whole civilizations, with an emphasis on human cultures. Global history tends to lie more in the province of social scientists who are interested in tracing the evolution of globalization, and in articulating theoretical propositions about development within an international framework.¹³

¹²Haines and Steckel, *Population History of North America*, includes chapters on Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean.

¹³Bruce Mazlish, "Comparing Global to World History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary*

To the extent that comparative history involves observations about nation-states, it gravitates toward global history. Transnational history tends to fall within the orbit of world history. In Thelen's articulation, transnational history consciously seeks to transcend "the self-enclosing habits of national historiographies."¹⁴ By this formulation transnational history represents a devaluation of political history and elevation of race, class, ethnicity, and gender to a global perspective. Some scholars apparently see comparative history as the internationalization of older national political history, whose substance and stylization are juxtaposed to the reconstruction of cultures, identities, and memories.

Such a dichotomy should not be allowed to crystallize into a rigid disciplinary cleavage. Even if comparative and transnational perspectives reflect differences of emphasis and objective, both orientations can co-exist. Historical research that utilizes nation-states is both necessary and proper. There are several components to this argument. First, it is difficult to avoid use of nation-states for many historical questions, especially for the 1870s through 1910s. Archival and data collections are entwined with nation-states; socio-economic time series, for instance, are customarily reported in terms of countries and their political subdivisions.¹⁵ Information about politics such as election returns, parliamentary proceedings, and financial reports usually were gathered by governments for their own territory. For many questions concerning politics and economic development the nation-state is a logical unit of analysis. O'Rourke and Williamson's important study of economic globalization before World War I, and Mann's

History 28 (Winter 1998): 385-95; Meyer Geyer and Charles Bright, "World History in a Global Age," *American Historical Review* 100 (October 1995): 1034-60. David Held, et. al., *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture* (Stanford, 1999), synthesizes globalization from a social scientific perspective. Also see Charles Tilly (a sociologist), *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1984).

¹⁴Thelen, "The Nation and Beyond," 974. Also see Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *American Historical Review* 96 (October 1991): 1031-55, and Michael McGerr, "The Price of the 'New' Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 96 (October 1991): 1056-67.

¹⁵For example, see the valuable collection of international statistics compiled by Brian R. Mitchell, *International Historical Statistics: Africa, Asia, and Oceania, 1750-1993*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1998), *International Historical Statistics: Europe, 1750-1993*, 4th ed. (New York, 1998), *International Historical Statistics: The Americas, 1750-1993*, 4th ed. (New York, 1998).

analysis of classes and state-building, for example, pivot entirely around nations.¹⁶

Second, the state is immensely important in the political history of the world. The most developed states since the 1870s have gained a monopoly of sovereign authority within their territories, and have enlarged their use of these prerogatives. The growth of the power of government has been associated with profound trends in the modern age, such as militarism, imperialism, nationalism, welfare state programs, commercial regulation, as well as both the expansion and the denial of individual rights. Affecting virtually every aspect of social, economic, and political life after 1870, state-building and the use of civic authority is simply too important for historians to ignore.¹⁷

Third, comparison of “states” need not be framed in terms of whole countries. The persistence of localism and tensions between center and periphery are part of most national histories. This is certainly true for the United States, as the historian Frederick Jackson Turner noted long ago. Each section, Turner wrote, “has its own special geographic qualities, its own resources and economic capacities, and its own rival interests, partly determined in the days when geological foundations were laid down.” This regional amalgam, he continued, “may be likened to the shadowy image of the European nation.”¹⁸ The nation’s social diversity paralleled the country’s non-centralized political arrangement, which dispersed official power through a federal system.

These economic, structural and historical realities offer compelling reasons to compare American localities with regions and provinces in other large nation-states, such as Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, and China. Stepping down further toward the micro-level, cities offer opportune settings for comparative study. Urban centers in the Western Hemisphere from Montreal to Buenos Aires and numerous sizeable cities in between seem well-suited for comparative research. So

¹⁶Kevin H. O’Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

¹⁷Mann, *The Rise of Classes and Nation-States*, offers a five country comparison of the expansion of state power during the long nineteenth century. Fredrickson, *Comparative Imagination*, ch. 3, discusses the criticisms of using nation-states for comparative history.

¹⁸Frederick Jackson Turner, “Sections and Nations,” *The Yale Review* (October 1922), reprinted in Ray A. Billington, *Frontier and Section* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1961): 136-37.

do the great metropolises of the world that emerged in the decades around 1900.¹⁹

The logic of comparative history does not, however, derive from the particular localities selected or the kind of experiences studied. Its utility rests with the inherent nature of comparison. The art of historical analysis obligates the researcher to extract meaning from observations (evidence) by composing statements that identify similarities and differences, or, in short, by constructing generalizations. Every generalization is comparative. Our decisions about what is commonplace and what is unusual, what is great and small, situations that represent continuity as distinct from change, ultimately are linked to referents that guide assessment. Generalizations inherently are statements about patterns, about whether events are replicated and connected, and if so, how. The narrative tradition in historical writing downplays explicit specification of the baselines used to formulate generalizations. Comparative history elevates the visibility of the writer's measuring rod.

The question of how many cases to select is a perennial dilemma for comparative history. Fredrickson, a historian, thinks two cases are appropriate.²⁰ Findings based on a pair of units, however, can not easily delineate commonality from abnormality. Enlarging the number of units adds confidence to generalizations about the evidence, but Mann, a sociologist, argued that even five nations were insufficient to establish patterns with certainty. Substantially enlarging the number of cases, however, impedes the ability to probe deeply into the evidence in particular locales. Studies based on a large number of cases, say, six or more, tended to be undertaken by political scientists, historical sociologists, and economic historians.²¹ As the number of cases increases, so does likelihood that scholars will employ quantitative analysis. Generally speaking, historians tend to blend comparative observations into a continuous narrative, while social scientists tend to

¹⁹See for example David Hamer, *New Towns in the New World: Images and Perceptions of the Nineteenth-Century Urban Frontier* (New York, 1990). The populations of larger cities of the world are given in Mitchell, *International Historical Statistics*.

²⁰Fredrickson, *Comparative Imagination*, 4, 11, 56, 62.

²¹Mann, *The Rise of Classes and Nation-States* and Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times*, used five countries. Gourevitch's cases were Germany, Britain, France, Sweden, and the United States. O'Rourke and Williamson, *Globalization and History*, used up to 17 countries in their study.

use historical evidence in comparative analysis to frame and test theories.

Thus, comparison can serve both as a principle of organizing observations for descriptive purposes and as a format designed to locate causal effects. These dual objectives are manifest in the literature. A sizeable portion of the “comparative” literature takes the form of multi-authored anthologies, in which each author reports on developments within a single nation.²² This style has utility but it does not maximize the potential of comparative analysis.²³ A second stylization introduces cross-national segments into studies that are essentially concerned with the history of one nation. Theda Skocpol’s study of income assistance policies, Preston and Haines’ study of infant mortality, Jon Teaford’s examination of urban politics during the Gilded Age, and Morton Keller’s review of business regulation in the Progressive Era all used this approach for studies of the United States.²⁴ A final category of works centers its research designs around integrative comparisons. The writings of Daniel Rodgers, Alfred Chandler, Walter Nugent, and Michael Mann exemplify this approach.

Industrialization and the World Economy

The United States’ economy during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era proceeded along dual tracks of growth. One path expanded the nation’s agricultural base, while the other built a dynamic industrial complex. As corporations multiplied and as various industrial sectors developed, the workforce shifted proportionately toward wage labor in manufacturing, mining, sales, and services. Innovations in

²²For example, Kander, *Protecting Women*; Koven and Michel, *Mothers of a New World*; Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., Franco Amatori, and Takashi Hikino, eds., *Big Business and the Wealth of Nations* (Cambridge, MA, 1997); Michael D. Bordo and Forrest Capie, *Monetary Regimes in Transition* (Cambridge, UK, 1993).

²³C.E. Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization: Study in Comparative History* (New York, 1966) discusses the properties of comparisons.

²⁴Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Samuel H. Preston and Michael R. Haines, *Fatal Years: Child Mortality in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, 1991); Jon C. Teaford, *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900* (Baltimore, 1984); Morton Keller, *Regulating a New Economy: Public Policy and Economic Change in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, MA, 1990). Most of the essays in Vann Woodward, *Comparative Approach*, fall into this category; with a few exceptions, most of the chapters used comparison to amplify aspects of American development rather than as the principal fulcrum of analysis.

railroads, steam shipping, and electronic communications increasingly linked American producers to markets around the world, integrating the United States into the emerging “global” economy. These developments attracted millions of migrants from Europe, the Americas, and Asia. The flow of migrants as well as grains, goods, and capital tended to move in rhythms generated by international business cycles.

All of these subjects have been explored in comparative scholarship to varying degrees. Numerous surveys of economic development within an international framework exist, but they generally have little to say about the United States.²⁵ A variety of studies include the United States as one of several nations concerning specific dimensions of economic activity, such as the operation of monetary systems, transnational financial flows, technological exchanges, and international migration. Paul Bairoch and other scholars have constructed estimates of national products and income.²⁶ Yet no single volume offers a comprehensive synthesis of economic change in the United States between 1870 and 1920 from a global perspective.²⁷

Alfred D. Chandler’s *Scale and Scope* offers a valuable model of comparative synthesis. Chandler sketched industrial development in the United States, Great Britain, and Germany to set the stage for his examination of industrial corporations in these nations.²⁸ The work provides a rich set of case studies of various industrial sectors, examined both within each nation and comparatively. Chandler documents how the United States blazed the trail in creating large,

²⁵See for example Andrew Tylecote, *The Long Wave in the World Economy* (New York, 1991); Rondo Cameron, *A Concise Economic History of the World*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1993); Kemp, *Historical Patterns of Industrialization*; Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*; Peter Stearns, *The Industrial Revolution in World History* (Boulder, CO, 1998).

²⁶Paul Bairoch, “The Main Trends in National Economic Disparities since the Industrial Revolution,” in *Disparities in Economic Development Since the Industrial Revolution*, eds., Paul Bairoch and Maurice Levy-Leboyer (New York, 1981); O’Rourke and Williamson, *Globalization and History*, as well as income studies cited therein. Robert E. Gallman, “Economic Growth and Structural Change in the Long Nineteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, vol. 2, eds., Stanley Engerman and Robert Gallman (New York, 2000) provides recent estimates of national income.

²⁷Philip S. Bagwell and G. E. Mingay, *Britain and America, 1850-1939: A Study of Economic Change* (London, 1970), is a partial exception; the authors called their work a text. Also see John Agnew, *The United States in the World-Economy: A Regional Geography* (New York, 1987).

²⁸Chandler, *Scale and Scope*. Mansel G. Blackford, *The Rise of Modern Business in Great Britain, the United States, and Japan* (Chapel Hill, 1988) is a fine short treatment of its subject.

hierarchically ordered corporations. Germany followed, with England lagging.

First to industrialize, England was slow to shed its preference for family-based businesses and reluctant to move into large scale industrial enterprises. Chandler credits this retention of “personal capitalism” as a key cause of Britain’s relative economic decline during the late nineteenth century.²⁹ German business leaders, on the other hand, were less reluctant to build large-scale industrial corporations. One conspicuous example occurred in steel making. By the end of the century both American and German steel production had surpassed that of Great Britain. Germany’s chemical industry also became the largest in the world, and its electrical industry rapidly dwarfed competitors in England.³⁰

By permitting companies to forge alliances through cartels, Germany’s legal environment facilitated corporate growth. Ironically, Britain’s legal environment also tolerated cartels and inter-firm agreements, unlike the United States, where antitrust prosecutions occurred. Tony Freyer has written a detailed comparison of antitrust policy in Britain and the United States. He concurs with Chandler that the legal climate in the United States provided an incentive for American firms to expand by merger and acquisition.³¹ As Frank Dobbins has shown, state control of railroad development in France demonstrated a third pathway of industrial development.³² The state’s nurturant posture toward big business in Japan outdid Europe in this regard.³³ Against this comparative background, Chandler saw antitrust law in the United States as “uniquely American.”³⁴

Besides multinational industrial corporations, innovations in transportation contributed to the formation of the world economy. Between the opening of the Suez Canal (1869) and the opening of the Panama Canal (1914), transcontinental rail linkups, faster and larger

²⁹Chandler, *Scale and Scope*, esp. 286-94.

³⁰Also see Robert C. Allen, “International Competition in Iron and Steel, 1850-1913,” *Journal of Economic History* 39 (December 1979): 924-34, which examined the U.S., Britain, and Germany.

³¹Freyer, *Regulating Big Business*.

³²Frank Dobbin, *Forging Industrial Policy: The United States, Britain, and France in the Railway Age* (New York, 1994).

³³Blackford, *Rise of Modern Business*, 105-14.

³⁴Chandler, *Scale and Scope*, 73. Also see Keller, *Regulating a New Economy*, esp. ch. 2 and 3.

ocean vessels, and intercontinental wire communications reduced global geographic barriers. Still, the world economy of 1900 was centered among nations in the Atlantic communities (mainly, the British Isles, western Europe, and North America), with South America and Australia occupying an important, although peripheral role. Europe's colonies and concessions in Asia and Africa joined these second-tier economies. The re-emergence of the global economy in the late twentieth century has stimulated interest in understanding this pre-World War I history.³⁵

Kevin O'Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson's *Globalization and History* is a sophisticated analysis of the international economy during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. They argue that falling transportation costs forged closer trading connections between the Old World and the New. The Western Hemisphere, as well as the Ukraine, sent its cheap grains to Europe, which in turn sent millions of migrants to the New World. O'Rourke and Williamson argue that globalization produced a convergence of wages among Atlantic nations. Mass migration from Europe to the New World was a pivotal dynamic in this process. O'Rourke and Williamson's wage series for urban workers show that Australia ranked first and the United States second in 1870; Canada came in first and the United States second in 1913 among 17 countries surveyed. New World workers still commanded higher pay than the average European on the eve of World War I, even though the international pay gap had narrowed over four prior decades, as the poorer countries of Europe, especially Ireland and Sweden, caught up rapidly. Based on samples taken from six cities in four English speaking countries, Robert C. Allen questioned the O'Rourke and Williamson wage convergence thesis.³⁶ O'Rourke and Williamson admit that convergence had little bearing for "the Third World."

These economic changes prompted millions of migrants to journey to the Western Hemisphere. Walter Nugent's *Crossings* provides a succinct review of this flow during the peak of pre-war

³⁵O'Rourke and Williamson, *Globalization and History*; Cameron, *Economic History of the World*; Tylecote, *The Long Wave in the World Economy*; Held, *Global Transformations*; Michael D. Bordo, B. Eichengreen, and Douglas Irwin, "Is Globalization Today Really Different than Globalization a Hundred Years Ago?" National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 7195 (June 1999).

³⁶Allen, "Real Incomes in the English-Speaking World." Also see E. H. Phelps Brown with Margaret H. Browne, *A Century of Pay: The Course of Pay and Production in France, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, 1860-1960* (London, 1968).

globalization.³⁷ The work is especially valuable for its comparison of assimilation in rural Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and the United States. The dominance of wealthy landholders and public policies that favored elites retarded immigrants' ability to acquire a farmstead in South America. Immigrants fared better in North America, where more liberal land policies existed. Nugent's work contributes to the comparative study of frontiers, a subject that many have recommended.³⁸ Nugent's study of rural landholding patterns suggests the logic of tracing urban home-ownership trends across developing nations, employing the approach that Oliver Zunz used for Detroit.³⁹

American firms spearheaded the penetration of corporate capitalism around the world. European firms joined this trend but on average were smaller than their American counterparts. American overseas business created marketing branches abroad, sometimes in partnership with foreign firms. If sales warranted, Americans built manufacturing plants in foreign markets.⁴⁰ A global company early in its history, Standard Oil Corporation had sixty-seven foreign affiliates before the court dissolved the behemoth.⁴¹ Corporate globalization helped to diffuse new technologies across national borders.⁴² Key technical innovations in American industrialization, such as the steam engine, the Bessemer process of steel making, the electric motor, and the wireless radio, had European roots.

³⁷Nugent, *Crossings*.

³⁸See for example Paul F. Sharp, "Three Frontiers: Some Comparative Studies of Canadian, American and Australian Settlement," *Pacific Historical Review* 24 (November 1955): 369-77; Henry C. Allen, *Bush and Backwoods: A Comparison of the Frontier in Australia and the United States* (East Lansing, MI, 1959); Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar, *The Frontier in History: North America and South Africa Compared* (New Haven, 1981). See also Walter Nugent, "Frontiers and Empires in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Western Historical Quarterly* 20 (November 1989): 393-408, and Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Going West and Ending Up Global," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 32 (Spring 2001). Version used here is <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/whq/32.1/> See also Michael Adas, "From Settler Colony to Global Hegemon: Integrating the Exceptionalist Narrative of the American Experience into World History," *American Historical Review* 106 (December 2001): 1692-1720.

³⁹Oliver Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago, 1982), ch. 6, esp. 152-74.

⁴⁰Mira Wilkins, *The Emergence of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from Colonial Times to 1914* (Cambridge, MA, 1970); Chandler, *Scale and Scope*.

⁴¹Wilkins, *Emergence of Multinational Enterprise*, 84. Also see Yergin, *The Prize*.

⁴²Hughes, *Networks of Power*; David J. Jeremy, ed., *International Technology Transfer: Europe, Japan, and the USA, 1700-1914* (Aldershot, Hants, UK, 1991).

Foreign trade represented a much smaller proportion of overall economic activity in the United States than for European nations. But the large scale of the American economy made it a formidable influence around the world. The flow of American products into Britain led one writer to fret in 1902 about the “Americanization of the world.”⁴³ The flow of European capital into the United States during the nineteenth century is a well-known story.⁴⁴ By the late nineteenth century capitalists in the United States were looking abroad for profitable investments. Mexico was the favorite destination for American international investment in 1897. The Mexican revolution caused American investors to redirect their dollars to Canada after 1910.⁴⁵

The internationalization of investment increased global financial transactions. The flow of funds between investment houses sucked national financial systems into the draft of the international business cycle. A financial crisis in a key country, triggered by banking failures or stock market collapses, increasingly affected other nations, sometimes significantly. The two serious depressions that the United States experienced between the Civil War and the outbreak of World War I (1873-1878, 1893-1897) and the disruptions of 1907-1912 all had connections to events abroad. The panic of 1873 in the United States, for example, was linked to stock market crashes in Berlin and Vienna. After infecting the United States, the contagion leapt back across the Atlantic to destabilize financial centers in England, France, and Russia.⁴⁶ Based on his examination of the peaks and troughs of business cycles in the four major economies during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, the

⁴³Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, 1987), 245.

⁴⁴Mira Wilkins, *A History of Foreign Investment in the United States to 1914* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

⁴⁵Wilkins, *Emergence of Multinational Enterprise*, 130-34, 139-44, Table V.2 at 110. Harold U. Faulkner, *The End of Laissez Faire, 1897-1917* (New York, 1951), ch. 4, “Development of Economic Imperialism,” remains a good introduction despite its age; esp. see 73-77.

⁴⁶Charles Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises* (New York, 1996), esp. 120-21; Michael D. Bordo, “The Impact and International Transmission of Financial Crisis: Some Historical Evidence, 1870-1933,” *Revista di Storia Economica* 2 (1985): 41-78; Michael D. Bordo and Antu P. Murshid, “Are Financial Crises Becoming Increasingly More Contagious? What is the Historical Evidence on Contagion?” National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 7900 (September 2000), esp. 13.

economist W.W. Rostow stated that “the rhythm of cyclical fluctuations was international.”⁴⁷

Vulnerable itself to financial shocks from abroad, the United States in turn disrupted other economies, particularly in the Americas. When commerce in the States sneezed, business in Canada and Mexico caught a cold.⁴⁸ The depressions of the 1870s and 1890s, and the economic dislocations of 1907-1912 were significant economic events, both in the United States and abroad. These periods of stagnation are prime subjects for comparative research. John Post’s investigation of the economic troubles that followed the Napoleonic wars and Garraty’s study of the 1930s provide models for examining hard times during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.⁴⁹

Democracy and State-building

Comparative history can offer fresh insights on basic questions about politics and government during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. The most widely held impression of Gilded Age politics alleges its irrelevance and ineffectiveness. How does this indictment fare from a comparative standpoint? The causes of progressivism have intrigued historians for generations. Can an international perspective help us understand the roots of reform? A third question, whether the United States was “exceptional,” focuses primarily on socialism and labor politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To these hardy perennials I would add two further inquiries. First, how did American democracy compare with political conditions around the

⁴⁷W.W. Rostow, *The Great Population Spike and After* (New York, 1998), 101.

⁴⁸Laura Randall, *A Comparative Economic History of Latin America, 1500-1914*, 4 vols. (Ann Arbor, MI, 1977), esp. vol. 1 (Mexico), 217-18, 232, 262; Keven J. Cahill, “The U.S. Bank Panic of 1907 and the Mexican Depression of 1908-1909,” *The Historian* 60 (Summer 1998): 795-811; E. J. Chambers, “Late Nineteenth Century Business Cycles in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 30 (August 1964): 391-412; K. A. J. Hay, “Money and Cycles in Post-Confederation Canada,” *Journal of Political Economy* 75 (June 1967): 263-73; Bordo, “International Transmission of Financial Crisis,” 61; Allen, “Incomes in the English-Speaking World,” 116.

⁴⁹John D. Post, *The Last Great Subsistence Crisis in the Western World* (Baltimore, 1977); John A. Garraty, *The Great Depression: An Inquiry into the Causes, Course, and Consequences of the World Wide Depression of the Nineteen Thirties As Seen by Contemporaries and in the Light of History* (San Diego, 1986). Also see Charles Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929-1939* (Berkeley, 1986). The problems of 1907-1912 entailed a combination of elevated unemployment and rising prices.

world? And second, did economic downturns produce analogous governmental responses across nations?

The United States spearheaded the advance of popular politics in the modern world. In 1900 its eligible electorate included most white adult males, which put the country in the company of a few other nations that supported liberal political regimes. Universal manhood suffrage existed in France, Switzerland, Australia, and New Zealand around 1900. Canada, Britain, and several other Western European nations enfranchised most, but not all, adult males. None of these polities, however, possessed the kind of partisan competitiveness and popular style electioneering that thrived at the local, state, and national levels in the United States. Yet the actual conditions of liberal democracy worldwide during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era remain blurred and warrant study.

Some facts are more or less established. In 1900, property qualifications disfranchised a sizeable segment of the British working class. Germany supported a class-based electoral system in most of its states, including Prussia, that advantaged the wealthy. Austria copied the arrangement in 1897. Moreover, the central regimes in Germany and Austria-Hungary left important powers in the hands of the emperor. Canada retained property qualifications for voters in the provinces of Quebec and Nova Scotia. Belgium, Holland, Italy, the Scandinavian countries, Hungary and Spain had taken steps in varying degrees toward universal manhood suffrage by the turn of the century.

Outside of Europe, western democracy was seriously compromised and frequently non-existent. Popular participation in politics was largely absent in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Although Mexico conveyed manhood suffrage on paper (constitutionally), the regime was in fact a dictatorship under Porfirio Diaz. Analogous situations existed throughout Latin America, where elites, the church, and the military compromised nominally-based liberalism. Monarchs presided in Russia, China and Japan, although the latter country allowed two percent of its population to vote in 1900. Colonial rule kept power in the hands of Europeans in Africa and much of Asia and the Caribbean. The influence of the Ottoman Empire still prevailed in southern Europe and much of the Middle East.⁵⁰ Competitive elections, open electioneering, and

⁵⁰On suffrage conditions world-wide, see Richard Katz, *Democracy and Elections* (New York, 1997), esp. tables 13.1 and 13.3; Stein Rokkan, *Citizens, Elections, Parties* (New York, 1970); Mann, *Rise of Classes*, 344, 346; Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 35, 36, 124, 283;

peaceful transition of officeholders existed among a minority of the world's population in 1900.

Class, race, and gender were stumbling blocks to universal suffrage everywhere. Women were excluded from voting at the national level of politics worldwide until New Zealand adopted female suffrage in 1893. Over the next quarter century Australia, Finland, Norway, Canada, Denmark, and Britain (partial) extended the vote to women, all prior to the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in the United States. Carrie Chapman Catt, an American, led the world crusade for female suffrage, which she initiated with the formation of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1902. Catt made numerous trips to Britain and elsewhere overseas over the next twelve years, but another American, Alice Paul, was responsible for importing the militant tactics of British suffragettes to the campaign in the United States.⁵¹

Democracy in 1900 was confined not only to men, with a few exceptions, but also to whites. The disfranchisement of blacks in the United States puts its treatment of non-whites on a plane with the Afrikaner republics (later, the Union of South Africa).⁵² In South Africa, race was an overt disqualification while in the United States various subterfuges disbarred blacks from voting. Non-whites were also effectively excluded from the electorate in Cuba, Brazil, and the Philippines (under U.S. control), in part due to property and literacy requirements. Property requirements restricted the size of electorates throughout the world, including most of western Europe and Canada, places where political liberalism was relatively advanced.

Regrettably, no modern comparative synthesis of global democracy during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era exists. Another void in the literature concerns legislative activity in regimes that

Stanley L. Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, "The Evolution of Suffrage Institutions in the New World," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 8512 (October 2001), esp. table 3. Still useful is James Bryce, *Modern Democracies* (New York, 1921). I supplemented these sources with *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (New York, 1910-1911), esp. vol. 28, 216-17, and sundry national studies.

⁵¹Richard J. Evans, *The Feminists: Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America, and Australasia, 1840-1920* (London, 1977); Jacqueline Van Voris, *Carrie Chapman Catt: A Public Life* (New York, 1987); Ida Husted Harper, "The World Movement for Woman Suffrage," *American Review of Reviews* (December 1911): 725-29; David Morgan, "Woman Suffrage in Britain and America in the Early Twentieth Century," in Allen and Thompson, *Contrast and Connection*, 272-95.

⁵²Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*.

possessed representative systems. Curiously, the most ambitious comparison of legislative voting in the era dates to A. Lawrence Lowell's 1902 study.⁵³ Political ideas have received greater attention, most notably from Robert Kelly's study of Tilden, Cleveland, Gladstone, and Canadian leaders, and James Kloppenberg's broad-ranging examination of ideas and reform in western Europe and the United States.⁵⁴

Jon Teaford's re-examination of municipal governance during the Gilded Age addressed a classic preconception about politics in American cities. Teaford drew on comparisons with Britain and Germany to assess urban policy concerning infrastructure development and social services. He found that large American cities were equal or superior to municipalities of similar size in England and Germany on most public services and measurable qualities of life. Mortality in American cities, for example, was equivalent to or lower than European counterparts, in good part because of investment in sewers and clean water supplies. Schools in the large cities of the United States, the only nation in the world that offered tuition-free education, surpassed Europe.⁵⁵ These comparisons put the charge of failed municipal government in the United States in a new light. Our understanding of urban governance would profit from asking similar questions about cities throughout the western Hemisphere.

Michael Mann's survey of the "history of power" in five nation-states (U.S., Great Britain, Austria, Prussia-Germany, and France) during the "long" nineteenth century (1760-1914) constitutes the most comprehensive overview of the rise of the modern state in the Atlantic community. The book covers an extraordinary range of history from the American and French Revolutions to the outbreak of World War I. Mann's chapters on public finance, professionalization of the military, bureaucracy, and the expansion of public services represent the historical centerposts of his analysis of state-building. Especially valuable are his cross-national data series on state revenue, governmental

⁵³A. Lawrence Lowell, "The Influence of Party Upon Legislation in England and America," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1901*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1902): 321-542.

⁵⁴Kelley, *Transatlantic Persuasion*; Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*.

⁵⁵Teaford, *Unheralded Triumph*, ch. 8, 9, esp. 247, 263. On comparative infant mortality, see Preston and Haines, *Fatal Years*, 58-60. On education, see Albert Fishlow, "Levels of Nineteenth Century American Investment in Education," *Journal of Economic History* 26 (December 1966): 432-35.

expenditure, and public employment. On most dimensions of state-building the United States lagged behind Europe, yet all five regimes expanded their public functions, incidence of taxation, and bureaucratic capacity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵⁶

Despite its panoramic breadth, *The Rise of Classes and Nation-States* will leave some historians uneasy. Mann is a historical sociologist whose first objective was to construct a model of social power, which he coupled to economic and political organization. The work is at times abstract, theoretical, highly synthetic, and written in a vernacular common to his discipline. His chapters on class formation, labor, and politics in each of the five featured nations will likely engender criticism from specialists. On the other hand, his analysis of labor violence and review of American exceptionalism represents skillful synthesis and thoughtful assessment. Heavily dependent on secondary literature and phrased in synthetic generalization, *The Rise of Classes and Nation-States* embodies the dilemmas inherent in multi-state, macro-analytic comparison.

Mann's exploration of state-building addresses militarism and nationalism, and touches on imperialism, topics suited for comparative study. Most western states substantially expanded and modernized their militaries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the partial exception of the army of the United States. William McNeill's *The Pursuit of Power* is an engaging essay on the connections between technology, tax capacity, bureaucratic evolution, and military expansion.⁵⁷ His chapter on "Intensified Military-Industrial Interactions, 1884-1914" summarizes these interactions and the rise of military-business complexes. Paul Kennedy posited a direct relationship between industrialization, national wealth, and the projection of military power.⁵⁸ The rise of nationalism in the Atlantic community and in Asia

⁵⁶Mann, *The Rise of Classes and Nation-States*, esp. ch. 11-15, and Appendix. Approximately two-thirds of Mann's 817 pages concern the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Comparative taxation is traced in Carolyn Webber and Aaron Wildavsky, *A History of Taxation and Expenditure in the Western World* (New York, 1986) and Franz Kraus, "The Historical Development of Income Inequality in Western Europe and the United States," in *The Development of Welfare States in Europe and America*, eds., Peter Flora and Arnold J. Heidenheimer (New Brunswick, NJ, 1981). Also, Bernard S. Silberman, *Cages of Reason: The Rise of the Rational State in France, Japan, the United States, and Great Britain* (Chicago, 1993).

⁵⁷William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society Since A.D. 1000* (Chicago, 1982).

⁵⁸Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, esp. ch. 5. Yergin, *The Prize*, ch. 8, reviewed Britain's petroleum industry and the conversion of its navy to oil-based engines.

in the waning years of the nineteenth century occurred in tandem with these trends. All are subjects that warrant further attention.⁵⁹

Depressions and Governance

The impact of depressions on governance also calls for comparative research. Economic disruptions during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era sent shock waves around the world, subjecting governments to various stresses. A common response to the decline of commerce and public revenue during the depression of the 1870s was tariff protectionism. Here Britain, not the United States, was out of step with Europe and Canada. O'Rourke and Williamson see protectionism in Europe as derivative of the impact of grain imports on local economies.⁶⁰ Peter Gourevitch, who examined the responses of four nations to the depressions of the 1870s, 1930s, and 1970s, contends that coalitions of economic groups determined the outcome of tariff politics.⁶¹ John Hobson agrees that the impact of price dislocations played a role in tariff politics, but points to revenue slumps as an independent determinant of customs legislation. He argued that revenue considerations were especially salient in Germany, where Bismarck turned a fiscal crisis into an opportunity to increase Reich revenues viz. a viz. *Lander* financial contributions to the central regime.⁶² Fiscal crises at the municipal level in the United States produced numerous restrictions on urban and state finances.⁶³

The economic disruptions of the 1870s appear to have contributed to political changes at numerous points within the Atlantic community. Democrats won control of the House of Representatives in 1874, while the Liberals lost power in Britain in the same year and regained it in 1880. In Canada, Mackenzie and the Liberals lost to the Tories in 1878. The timing of the economic slump in Mexico coincides

⁵⁹Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, UK, 1990); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983); Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA, 1992).

⁶⁰O'Rourke and Williams, *Globalization and History*, ch. 6, esp. 110-13.

⁶¹Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times*, esp. ch. 3.

⁶²John M. Hobson, *The Wealth of Nations: A Comparative Sociology of International and Political Change* (Cambridge, UK, 1997), esp. ch. 2.

⁶³Ballard C. Campbell, "Tax Revolts and Political Change," *Journal of Policy History* 10 (1998): 160.

with the election of Porfirio Diaz. The depression in Quebec sent French Canadians streaming into New England mill towns. The Great Railroad Strike of 1877, a capstone event of the depression in the United States, induced state governments to beef up their militias and tighten vagrancy laws. The attempted assassination of the emperor in 1878 in the wake of hard times in Germany provided the rationale for Bismarck to orchestrate a swing to the right, attack socialists, and inaugurate social welfare programs.⁶⁴ These parallels suggest that the global impact of the 1870s' depression can help to illuminate the dynamics of political change in the modernizing world.

The effects of the 1870s' slump were manifested at local levels as well as in central regimes. Canada, Mexico, and the United States all possessed federal systems, which delegated varying degrees of authority to state or provincial governments. Switzerland, Argentina, Venezuela, Germany and Brazil also acquired federal structures between 1824 and 1891. Australia joined the list in 1901 and the Soviet Union was organized along federal principles in 1917. Students of federalism have long held that America's political structure affected the nation's politics, such as retarding the process of national state-building. Centralized regimes in France and Britain, by comparison, had older, more advanced bureaucratic traditions.

Few scholars have looked closely at the connections between governmental structure and political activity. Hobson's study of the late nineteenth century is unusual for integrating federalism into his research. Bismarck's behavior, he argued, can only be understood within the context of contentious relations between the Reich and the *Lander*. More generally, he argued that centrally unified regimes tended to adopt income taxes, while weak states (federal regimes) relied on indirect taxes and protective tariffs.⁶⁵ Less interested in formulating theory than in documenting practice, Margaret Bogue studied how Canadian and American governments responded to the decline of commercial fish species and rising pollution in the Great Lakes during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her work is distinctive for comparisons of American state governments with Canadian provinces, which she integrated into a comparison of national policies. Bogue

⁶⁴On Bismarck and the depression, see Hans Rosenberg, "Political and Social Consequences of the Great Depression of 1873-1896 in Central Europe," *Economic History Review* 13 (1943): 58-73. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 222.

⁶⁵Hobson, *Wealth of Nations*, 205-10, 240-1, and tables 5.9 and 5.10.

concluded that federalism contributed to the regulatory stalemate that blocked effective remedies to the decline of the fisheries on both shores of the Great Lakes.⁶⁶

Global Progressivism.

Local variations in politics are manifest during the Progressive Era, when reform peaked in the international arena. Daniel Rodgers' graceful reconnaissance of this process within the Atlantic community reiterates the importance of transnational connections on politics during the early twentieth century. Rodgers argued that most of these influences traveled from Europe to the United States, in good part via the activities of American visitors. His portrait of municipal reform in England and on the Continent, and its impact on American observers, underscores the non-centralized roots of progressivism. Like comparative scholars before him, Rodgers documented how Americans pointed to Europe's policy innovations as an argument on behalf of reform at home.⁶⁷

The pathways of political change beyond Europe are less understood. But a case can be made that challenges to orthodox politics occurred around the world between 1909 and 1912 (see Table 1). Between 1909 and 1911, revolts, revolutions, or coups occurred in Nicaragua, Greece, Spain, Mexico, Brazil, and China. In 1911 Peter Stolypin, the Russian prime minister, was assassinated. Portugal and South Africa established republics.

During these politically volatile years, the revolt against Joseph Cannon stripped the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives of traditional powers, and a constitutional crisis gripped the British Parliament that reduced the power of the House of Lords. In France the Clemenceau government fell in 1909, and in the 1910 elections Democrats captured a majority in the House of Representatives. The Socialists reached the apex of their voter strength in both Germany and

⁶⁶Bogue, *Fishing the Great Lakes*. Watts, "American Constitutionalism in Comparative Perspective," and Esman, "Federalism and Modernization" cite much of the literature on American and Canadian federalism.

⁶⁷Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, esp. ch. 2, 4; George Mowry, "Social Democracy, 1910-1918," in Vann Woodward, *Comparative Approach*, 271-84; Kenneth O. Morgan, "The Future At Work: Anglo-American Progressivism, 1890-1917," in Allen and Thompson, *Contrast and Connection*, 245-71. Keller, *Regulating a New Economy*, offers succinct comparisons with Europe.

the United States in 1912, and continued as a significant factor in French politics. During this period, France, the United States, and Britain adopted or increased income taxes, while budgetary disputes unsettled German and Japanese politics.

The clustering of these events around 1910 suggest some common stimuli. The growth of labor organization and worker militancy is one influence. The period between 1897 and 1913 witnessed a significant expansion of union membership in the United States and Western Europe. Socialists grew stronger on the Continent and in the United States, pressing governments for social reforms. Workers accelerated confrontations with employers. The scale and scope of strikes surged between 1910 and 1913 in Europe, Britain, and the United States. Repression of working men and women was common everywhere, but Russia and the United States formed a league of their own in terms of the high number of strike-related fatalities.⁶⁸ Meiji Japan, which did not allow labor unions, joined the list of states that were hostile to collective action.

Michael Mann cited this “domestic militarism” as a critical factor that retarded labor politics in the United States. Gary Marks saw the condition of American electoral politics, especially the emergence of popular parties prior to the mass organization of labor, as a major deterrent to the development of a working class political movement. Both acknowledge that the failure of independent labor politics in the United States resulted from numerous factors, and concur that American politics was exceptional. Daniel Rodgers questions the usefulness of exceptionalism as a construct for explaining America’s lag behind European social reform. He argued that a distinct constellation of pressures in nations on each side of the Atlantic advanced welfare states and that World War I cut short these diverse pathways of reform.⁶⁹

Although European-style welfare measures developed slowly in the United States, most nations in the Atlantic community adopted a variety of social reforms in the early twentieth century. Women played instrumental roles in these politics, especially concerning maternal and

⁶⁸Marks, *Unions in Politics*, 73-75, 83-92; Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 58-59; Mann, *Rise of Classes*, 633-35, 644-54; Friedman, *State-Making*, esp. 40, 46, 254, 181-83.

⁶⁹Mann, *Rise of Classes*, 644-54; Marks, *Unions in Politics*, 198-220; Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 255-64. Similarities between the German and American polity are noted in Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), esp. 21, 26-27, 61-62, 432.

child welfare policy in the United States and Europe. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel argue that extant models of welfare state formation are too restrictive because they exclude the influence of gender, a position that Theda Skocpol reinforced in *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*. Despite the more open politics in Britain and the United States and hence the greater freedom afforded women's political movements, both of these nations tended toward voluntary programs, while France and Germany adopted the more state-centered policies.⁷⁰

The case is compelling that women, labor leaders, and middle-class reformers played instrumental roles in the politics of reform within the Atlantic community. Yet the geographic scope of political crises in the early twentieth century suggests that other triggering mechanisms were also at work. The economic stagnation that trailed the panic of 1907 certainly deserves a close look in this regard. The problems of the 1907-1912 delivered a double-barreled blow to economic stability in the United States. First, unemployment rose, initially in 1908, and then again in 1910 and 1911. Wages stagnated during the slow-down, especially for lower-skilled workers.⁷¹ And second, the cost of living continued to rise.⁷² The coupling of inflation and persistent unemployment spelled an early case of stagflation. Strains of this malady reached into England, Germany, Russia, Australia, Mexico, Canada, and, one presumes, elsewhere.⁷³ The American slowdown disrupted Mexico's economy, a connection that some scholars see as instrumental in provoking the Mexican revolution.⁷⁴ The defeat of the

⁷⁰Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, "Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920," *American Historical Review* 95 (October 1990): 1076-1108, and Koven and Michel, *Mothers of a New World*; Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*; Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, ch. 6. On the comparative development of social welfare legislation, see Flora and Heidenheimer, eds., *The Development of Welfare States in Europe and America*, esp. ch. 2.

⁷¹Faulkner, *Decline of Laissez Faire*, 30-31, 252-55. On wages, see Claudia Goldin, "The Political Economy of Immigrant Restriction in the United States, 1890-1921," in *The Regulated Economy: A Historical Approach to Political Economy*, eds., Claudia Goldin and Gary D. Libecap (Chicago, 1994), 245-53.

⁷²Daniel Pope, "American Economists and the High Cost of Living: The Progressive Era," *Journal of the History of Behavioral Science* 17 (January 1981): 75-87.

⁷³See for example W.W. Rostow, *Politics and the Stages of Growth* (Cambridge, UK, 1971), 206, 208; Allen, "Incomes in the English-Speaking World," 116; Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 233; Joshua S. Goldstein, *Long Cycles: Prosperity and War in the Modern Age* (New Haven, 1988), 351; Randall, *Comparative Economic History*, vol. 1: 218.

⁷⁴Cahill, "The United States Bank Panic of 1907."

Liberals in Canada owes something, if indirectly, to economic problems that drifted northward from the States.

Confirmation that economic fluctuations contributed to reform and revolution around the globe between 1907 and 1912 will require research framed in an international context. The payoff may be a view of American progressivism that looks quite different than readings taken from customary vantage points. The same holds true for other aspects of the history of the United States. In this regard comparisons confined only to Europe may be too limiting. On many dimensions of the modernizing world, such as industrialization and consumerism, corporate capitalism, labor organization, militarism, imperialism, social reform, and liberal democratic politics, the United States exhibited variations of the western experience.

Table 1. Revolution and Reform in the Progressive Era, 1909-1912

- 1909 China: provincial assemblies established
Nicaragua: revolution (1909-1912)
Greece: military coup
Persia: Mohammed Ali, Shad of Persia, deposed
France: dissolution of Clemenceau government
U.S.: revolt against Speaker Cannon in the House of Representatives
U.S.: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People formed
U.S.: Congress adopted an income tax amendment
- 1910 U.S.: Democratic Party victory in congressional elections
South Africa: self-rule established
Mexico: revolution began (Porfirio Diaz resigned 1911)
Brazil: naval revolt
Britain: violent tactics by female suffragettes
Britain: constitutional crisis over Lloyd George's 1909 budget
Revolution in Portugal
Albanian revolt
Japan annexed Korea
- 1911 China: revolution began (uprising in Szechwan Province)
Russia: Minister Peter Stolypin assassinated
Canada: Conservative Party defeated Liberals in dominions elections
Italy: suffrage expansion
Britain: Parliament Act resolves constitutional crisis
National Insurance Act
Germany: Workmen Insurance Code adopted
Spain: unsuccessful revolution
- 1912 Albanian independence
Balkans: first Balkan War
Japan: cabinet crisis over military budget
U.S.: apex of Socialist and Progressive party vote
Germany: Social Democrats (socialists) outpolled rival parties