



The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History

David Thelen

The Journal of American History, Vol. 86, No. 3, The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History: A Special Issue. (Dec., 1999), pp. 965-975.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8723%28199912%2986%3A3%3C965%3ATNABTP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-A>

The Journal of American History is currently published by Organization of American Historians.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/oah.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History

David Thelen

When I was in graduate school in Madison, Wisconsin, in the 1960s, nation-states were the self-evident focus for the discipline of history. Nations expressed people's identities, arbitrated their differences and solved their problems, focused their dreams, exercised their collective sovereignty, fought their wars. Modern professional historical scholarship grew up alongside the nation-state, its mission to document and explain the rise, reform, and fall of nation-states. And professional history developed a civic mission to teach citizens to contain their experience within nation-centered narratives.

Now, a mere third of a century later, familiar nation-states look fragile, constructed, imagined, even as they possess the very real capacities to collect taxes, recruit and deploy armed forces, manage legal systems, and allocate resources. Their capacity to govern was battered from the Left in the 1960s and the Right in the 1980s, in slogans like "self-determination" that evoke people on the march and those like "globalization" that seem beyond human reach. While some movements challenged the sovereignty of established nation-states from above in the name of the European Union or the North American Free Trade Agreement, others challenged the sovereignty of established states from below in the name of the potential nation-states of Kosovo, Serbia, Chiapas, Quebec, Palestine, Scotland, Lombardy, East Timor, and Catalonia. With nationalisms exploding not only in movements for new nations but also in such diverse directions as "Queer Nation," "black nationalism," and "Nation of Islam," the greatest threat to nation-states seemed often to come from nationalist movements.

The spread across national borders of institutions such as multinational corporations and CNN, of social movements such as feminism and environmentalism, and

David Thelen is professor of history at Indiana University and former editor of the *Journal of American History*. He organized and superintended this special issue throughout.

You hold in your hand the sixth draft of this introduction. I have tried to balance my responsibilities as an organizer and editor of this issue, as the representative of more than a dozen smart and frisky scholars, with my own prejudices of the moment. I am deeply indebted for far-ranging and helpful criticism to the following readers of this essay who, in some cases, dissent from some of its conclusions and emphases: Susan Armeny, Nicholas Canny, Ken Cmiel, Donna Gabaccia, Gary Gerstle, Nancy Green, Robin Kelley, Alice Kessler-Harris, Rob Kroes, Bruno Ramirez, Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, Ilan Troen, Ian Tyrrell, Marcel van der Linden, Richard White. I want to thank them for making it a better essay.

Readers may contact Thelen at thelen@indiana.edu.

of unprecedented migrations of people have unleashed processes of hybridization and creolization as people shape new and multiple identities. Even the concept of citizenship, the unquestioned right of nation-states to bestow, has been shaken by movements that claim that people's rights should accompany them as human beings, not be bestowed on them as residents of a nation-state.¹

As the challenges have multiplied, it has become possible, even necessary, to take a critical look at what had once seemed so inevitable as to be nearly invisible, to view from new angles key moments when nations were made, challenged, changed, and unmade, to explore how they confronted internal and external threats and opportunities, how they developed and may now be losing their privileged position as the focus for popular identity and sovereignty. With nation-states seeming fragile and contested in the present, scholars have reexamined assumptions about their stability and inevitability in the past. In generating a huge new literature to illuminate contemporary debates, scholars have traced a variety of paths to the present, finding the source of nations in shared sentiments and traditions, in manipulations by writers and elites, and in the scale and scope of economic activity. In the eight years between 1983, when Benedict Anderson blazed new trails for the study of nations and nationalism in *Imagined Communities*, and 1991, when he published a second edition, not only had nations developed in ways he had not anticipated, Anderson observed, but "the study of nationalism . . . ha[d] been startlingly transformed—in method, scale, sophistication, and sheer quantity."²

As we are led by events to question nation-states, we are also led to interrogate missions fundamental to the modern practice of history. One thing is very clear. The past has provided the storehouse of materials from which people have constructed national peoplehood and sovereignty over the past two centuries. Sometimes historians have justified national claims by their regimes, have developed stories of national origins and fate to provide common national identity for their heterogeneous peoples. At other times historians have contested those claims, as recently in Mexico, South Africa, and the United States. But in both cases they have assumed the centrality of the nation-state and thus reinforced the nation-centered traditions of historical practice.

From this perspective history's commitment to the nation-state looks both clear and strange. Modern historians created a new discipline that freed history from philosophy early in the nineteenth century, as Leopold von Ranke and other new "scientific" historians told the story, with the claim that people's thoughts and actions

¹Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago, 1994); William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, eds., *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston, 1997); Masao Miyoshi, "A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State," *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 1993), 726–51; Robert B. Reich, *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for Twenty-First Century Capitalism* (New York, 1991); Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How the Planet Is Both Falling Apart and Coming Together and What This Means for Democracy* (New York, 1995); William Greider, *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism* (New York, 1997); Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, 1991); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996).

²Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), xii.

did not follow universal and timeless patterns but were shaped by time and place. Von Ranke and particularly his disciples connected their study of change over time to the state and its public records. But it was the development over the next half century of romantic nationalism and self-enclosing professionalization that catalyzed the new discipline's collapse of its promise to explore influences of time and place into the assumption that the most defining differences were those between nation-states. By the turn of the twentieth century, history had added pedagogy as a civic justification (as formulated, for example, by the American Historical Association's Committee of Seven in the late 1890s): loyalty to and focus on the nation-state should define the events to be studied in classes on modern history and the perspective from which they should be studied. The organizing narrative should identify and link events from the past by one theme—the nation in which those events occurred. History departments parceled out the past into mainly national units. The function of history, particularly in the schools, was to provide the vision of a single people with a national destiny. Trying to define and contain experience within national borders, such history was particularly vulnerable to and suspicious of boundary-crossing ideas, institutions, and people—immigrants, mestizos, half-breeds, mulattoes, Creoles, people whose liminal experiences and identities could not be easily corralled.³

Since it seemed increasingly strange that history had centered its concern with time and place on the nation-state, we wanted to design a special issue that would interrogate, not assume, the centrality of the nation-state as the organizing theme for American history. We wanted to explore how people and ideas and institutions and cultures moved above, below, through, and around, as well as within, the nation-state, to investigate how well national borders contained or explained how people experienced history. We wanted to observe how people, moving through time and space according to rhythms and relationships of their own, drew from, ignored, constructed, transformed, and defied claims of the nation-state. To make our project recognizable to others we tried, perhaps foolishly, to find a single term to encompass the many questions that sprang from our goal of reexamining history's embrace of the nation-state. We finally settled on *transnational*. We could trace the use of that term to describe many of our sensibilities back to Randolph Bourne's classic 1916 essay, "Trans-National America." Resisting attempts by an Anglo-Saxon ruling class to narrow American culture to British nationalism, Bourne argued that the United States "is coming to be, not a nationality, but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth,

³ For a fuller picture of the encounter of historicism and the new discipline of history with philosophy, see Benedetto Croce, "Historicism, Complete and Incomplete," in Benedetto Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty*, trans. Sylvia Sprigge (London, 1941); and Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, trans. J. E. Anderson (1959; New York, 1972). On changing nation-centered constructions in the United States since the 1780s, see David Thelen, "Making History and Making the United States," *Journal of American Studies*, 32 (Dec. 1998), 373–97. On the development of linear, nation-centered history, see Prasenjit Duara, "The Regime of Authenticity: Timelessness, Gender, and National History in Modern China," *History and Theory*, 37 (1998), 287–308. For an assertion that "history definitely came into its own as the primary medium for citizenship education" in the 1890s, see Robert Wendell Frederick and Paul H. Sheats, *Citizenship Education through the Social Studies: A Philosophy and a Program* (New York, 1936), 18.

with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors." More than eighty years later, scholars have shared Bourne's vision of Americans as people whose individual lives and identities involve multiple, rich "threads" and his suspicion of those who invoke the nation-state to constrain people from expressing their full humanity. For contemporary scholars, as for Bourne, the term connotes movement and connection through time and space. In explaining her choice of the term to describe emerging patterns of citizenship, Aiwah Ong recently wrote:

Trans denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something. Besides suggesting new relations between nation-states and capital, transnationality also alludes to the *trans*versal, the *trans*actional, the *trans*lational, and the *trans*gressive aspects of contemporary behavior and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism.⁴

On a more prosaic level, the prefix *trans* suggests three angles for observing the encounter of phenomena we are interested in—popular culture, politics, migration—with the nation-state. We might imagine from afar how the phenomenon passed *over* the nation, observing the nation as a whole; or how it passed *across* the nation, seeing how it bumped over natural and manmade features; or how it passed *through* the nation, transforming and being transformed. And, we hoped, transnational history would convey the open-endedness both of the past and of our desire to explore border crossings and to look critically at the nation-state itself.⁵

Because of the fluidity and breadth of the term *transnational*, to say nothing of the contradictory impulses packed within it, the road to the issue you hold in your hands was hard to build. Participants brought differences to the task. We began in the fall of 1995 when six scholars from six countries met at the Centro Bairati at the University of Turin (courtesy of Maurizio Vaudagna) to try to define transnational history and to argue for its desirability. From this experience we concluded that it would be better not to prescribe a single transnational agenda but instead to seek authors who were doing suggestive work with transnational implications. Diversity of interests and perspectives should be the strength of the issue. And to widen those transnational perspectives, we sought people who had developed their approaches to American history in varied ways and places: with audiences outside the United States, in film, in collaborations of all sorts. Beyond the variety of their topics and practices, we sought authors who would be committed to a collective process, who could respect different paths people were taking to the theme and even consider how their own paths might advance the project as a whole. The authors would explore how people's lives, activities, and ideas moved above, below, through, and around the American nation-state, sometimes intersecting with and overlapping that state,

⁴ Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America," in *War and the Intellectuals: Essays by Randolph S. Bourne, 1915-1919*, ed. Carl Resek (New York, 1964), 107-23, esp. 121; Aiwah Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, 1999), 4.

⁵ For this argument, see John Higham, "The Future of American History," *Journal of American History*, 80 (March 1994), 1289-1307.

sometimes moving on other planes. Rather than take a position in the exploding debates over the desirability of nation-states, we would suggest ways of defining and raising questions about the nation and what lies beyond it. We could have easily selected other topics—corporations, religion, art, for example—or other authors, but we expected that the authors we did recruit, though in many cases unknown to each other when we began, could produce something exciting together.

We wanted the individual essays to speak to each other, to make some sense as a whole. In order to develop common issues and terms, authors brought their experiences and practices, together with some of the boundary disputes and crossings involved, to three days of exploratory discussions at New York University in January 1997. (We are indebted to Tom Bender for hosting that meeting.) We read and discussed some common readings. As the discussion unfolded, it became clear that an exclusive focus on border or international phenomena artificially constrained the concern of all participants to explore how nations work, how they get constructed, how they gain power, how people in a nation balance their national identities against other ones and what those other identities might be. The authors spent the next year and a half writing first drafts of their articles. We next convened in June 1998 to criticize each others' drafts and to identify and sharpen common perspectives for authors to refer to in revising their articles. (Marcel van der Linden arranged for us to meet at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, which generously supported the gathering.) Two days later, we presented individual projects and common themes at a special colloquium of British Americanists arranged by Tony Badger at the University of Cambridge, which gave invaluable criticism and support to the project. From this feedback authors revised their essays for this issue.

We recognized that by questioning the nation-centered focus of American history we were questioning historical practice at its core. Who, for example, would be the audiences for transnational history when a major justification for history had been civic enlightenment for citizens of particular nations? In an age when national historiographies were increasingly specialized, how could scholars engage literatures on other countries? Many authors overcame these obstacles through their own experiences as individuals. Half the authors taught and researched history outside the United States, and half (not the same half) lived deeply transnational lives, having grown up or trained as historians in different countries from the places where they now teach. Many had experienced nation as an artificial barrier to understanding life and history.

To help address such concerns and situate our projects in the development of history, many of us were delighted to discover (or, from our new perspective, rediscover) pioneers who had presented alternatives to the nation-centered focus of professional history. Those pioneers pointed toward possible audiences, contexts, and uses for transnational history and suggested questions and methods for drawing on material from more than one nation. We became interested in those alternatives and how and when they became marginalized. In bringing such historians out of the shadows, Ian Tyrrell emphasized how recently and briefly—peaking in the 1940s and 1950s—nation-centered approaches had prevailed over transnational alternatives. And,

Donna R. Gabaccia reported, it was only after World War I that nations grew obsessed with making individuals into members of nation-states.

Alternatives to nation-centered professionalism came from many places. Some pioneers wrote before professionalization claimed to define the formal meaning of history. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, argued that history carries experiences from other times and places so one can use them in the present: "What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done." In his pioneering 1860 book, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Jacob Burckhardt analyzed "the state as a work of art" in a brilliant picture of the constructedness and contingency of nation-states.⁶

Other alternatives came from people whose experiences were invisible to the professionals who made the pedagogy of citizenship the justification, the pivot, for their nation-centered narratives. Many people who could not act as full citizens—blacks, women, some immigrants—developed narratives that were not grounded in nation but in other experiences, such as those of race and gender. In his exploration of the first seventy years of black history, Robin D. G. Kelley recovers the intensely transnational perspectives of African Americans, whose invisibility to professionals was illustrated by the *American Historical Review's* failure to notice or review W. E. B. Du Bois's pioneeringly transnational *Black Reconstruction*. In describing the "double consciousness" of African Americans and calling the color line the problem of the twentieth century because it prevented blacks from drawing on both their African and American identities, Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* anticipated by more than a decade Bourne's vision of a "Trans-National America" where people would be encouraged to draw on all their experiences and histories.⁷ Marginalized by professional historians, local historians, amateurs, women, immigrants, and blacks had long described and contextualized experiences for which national borders were only marginally relevant. Workers and their champions have long insisted that the activities and study of the "workers of the world," their unions and political parties, must transcend national borders.

The exclusion of transnational perspectives was not an inevitable feature of modern historical scholarship and professionalization, as Tyrrell shows. In Great Britain the work of local and amateur historians blended easily with that of professionals to create rich traditions of British social history, and in France Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, and the *Annales* tradition bypassed the nation-state and focused on local, subnational communities and on transnational regions such as the Mediterranean world. Among professional historians transnational perspectives have recently grown most rapidly among those who study the time before modern nation-states were

⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "History," in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays: First Series* (Boston, 1903), 1; Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, vol. I (New York, 1958), esp. 21–142.

⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York, 1935); W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (1903; Greenwich, 1961), 16–17, 23.

established. Nicholas Canny traces how historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have moved from the study of modern nations in the making to the study of the Atlantic world. By focusing on the circuits that link families and communities in Sicily or Michoacan with those in New York or California, immigration historians such as Gabaccia have developed transnational perspectives on their field. In turning from the study of policies and texts to the study of how they were received and used, some diplomatic and intellectual historians have also questioned the central position of the nation in their field.

Our challenge, we thus concluded, was not to imagine experiences differently from how people in the past had lived them or to develop narratives that had never been imagined before. Our challenge was the reverse: to recover and reuse experiences and narratives that have been evident to many kinds of historians. What is new about this project is the effort to recover lines of inquiry that were submerged during the high tide of professionalization and the nation-state, roughly between 1900 and 1970, most sharply in the middle third of the twentieth century, to return to and develop older and still helpful questions and angles of vision.

Leaning on earlier works, we tried to suggest angles of vision, terminologies, even metaphors, that could at once interrogate, and free us from, nation-centered categories for making sense of how people experienced life. We sought flexible approaches that would explore changing dynamics among a variety of levels and scales. Richard White issues the challenge that authors picked up. The kind of history we write, he argues, will be profoundly shaped by the frame we choose—personal, local, regional, national, global—with each frame having particular strengths and weaknesses. White draws on pioneering work by geographers to suggest that we focus on how things can be envisioned in many spatial scales. A house might seem a “local” unit, White notes, but its inhabitants derived their perspectives not only from the handful of individuals who lived in or visited it but also from local newspapers and national periodicals delivered in the mail, from wires, airwaves, and signals transmitted through such media as television and the Internet, most of which were not national. Was the house more or less local when its inhabitants watched television or gossiped with neighbors? How does a historical phenomenon look different when interpreted as individual or national or global, and what changes make that phenomenon more local, national, or global?

Some responded to the challenge to come up with new angles of vision by thinking in terms of levels. Gabaccia reported how Italian immigrants lived lives below, above, and outside (as well as within) the nation. In his proposal for a comparative labor history, Marcel van der Linden distinguished subnational interactions of individuals across borders (immigrants, for example), international border crossings of groups and movements (working-class and socialist internationalism, for example) and states (in the United Nations, for example), and supranational processes that transcended and ignored nation-states (culture, economic slumps, or the greenhouse effect, for example).

Others proposed different tools and techniques for interrogating the centrality of nation. Reporting his own experience in turning his scholarship on migration into

screenplays, Bruno Ramirez called our attention to different time scales people use to comprehend an experience: individual cycles of birth and death, of conversations and relationships, the daily and seasonal rhythms of nature, the rhythms of institutions, cultures, and, indeed, of the nation-state. Responding to the screenplay's challenge to convey the rhythm and pace of a conversation and a relationship as well as those of a culture and a nation, Ramirez underscores the need to attend to time scales, as Braudel had a half century ago when he called on us to "divide historical time into geographical time, social time and individual time."⁸ Since a conversation or a document can be seen in many temporal or spatial scales at the same moment, we must be sensitive to how, for what purposes and what audiences, on what rhythm or scale, participants frame texts and events. We need to ask why they adopt one scale over another. To observe intersecting scales, Ramirez advises us, we should focus on moments of transit, when a person or idea comes up against man- and culture-made boundaries. The moment of crossing a border was a moment of individual creativity, as it was a moment when border police brought the nation clearly into view.

As we stepped back to find themes linking the individual contributions, we saw three basic if overlapping transnational approaches that authors have often blended and hybridized in their articles. In the first, the classic one of comparative history, authors explored how a single phenomenon was experienced differently in different nations. A transnational method can bring the nation-state itself into sharper focus, as S. Ilan Troen and Nancy L. Green demonstrate, because comparison highlights national variations in similar phenomena.⁹ Troen shows how the need to settle a frontier, which strengthened individualism in the United States, strengthened collective ideals in Israel. Analyzing recent American and French debates about multiculturalism, Green explores the divergence in two forms of civic nationalism born of related eighteenth-century republican revolutions.

In the second approach authors zoomed in on individuals and debates that were constructing national policies and nationalist ideas to scrutinize the contingency of the moment, the transnational range of alternatives people were choosing among, and the significance of national differences. In an account of the debates that led to the Social Security Act, Alice Kessler-Harris suggests the transnational significance of gender by presenting it as a vehicle for transporting, reshaping, and resisting ideas that moved across national borders before they took shape as national laws. She shows how makers of social welfare laws in several nations in the 1930s defined and gendered liberty differently, creating dramatically different policies. By tracing Theodore Roosevelt's developing visions of nationalism, Gary Gerstle uncovers the contradictoriness and fragility of national identity in a man usually thought of as American

⁸ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds, abr. Richard Ollard (1949; London, 1992), xiv.

⁹ For a critique of the privileged position of nation-states in comparative history, see Frederick Cooper, "Race, Ideology, and the Perils of Comparative History," *American Historical Review*, 101 (Oct. 1996), 1122-38. See also William H. Sewell, "Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History," *History and Theory*, 6 (1967), 208-18; Juergen Kocka, "Comparative Historical Research: German Examples," *International Review of Social History*, 38 (1993), 369-79; and Marc Bloch, "A Contribution towards a Comparative History of European Societies," in *Land and Law in Medieval Europe: Selected Papers by Marc Bloch*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London, 1967).

nationalism's strongest supporter. He places Roosevelt's twists and turns against a background of transnational debates about race and empire.

In the third approach authors focused on interactions, exchanges, constructions, and translations that people made as they engaged each other across national borders. Michael Geyer and Charles Bright have read in such interactions "a history of mobility and mobilization, of trade and merchants, of migrants and diasporas, of travelers and communication. . . . Key words for this history are 'diaspora' and 'borderlands,' both as the 'privileged site for the articulation of [national distinction]' and as the site for hybrid and mixed identities, created at the crossroads of many [national] histories."¹⁰ And that approach draws on a tradition foreshadowed by Du Bois and Bourne and elaborated by Norbert Elias that understood individuals as larger than groups (or nations) because they contain within themselves so many possible identities; an individual may be a woman, Methodist, Chicagoan, lawyer, lesbian, Republican, and, of course, American. Studying social science in Mexico and the United States, Mauricio Tenorio Trillo traces how a German Jew from New York, Franz Boas, worked with his Mexican student Manuel Gamio to redefine race as, not a biological, but a cultural category. From their mutual gaze, a Mexican and an (immigrant) American developed an explanation for a phenomenon that had become an urgent concern all over the world. But in observing how scholars from both countries came to a similar understanding of race, Tenorio notes that Mexicans interpreted the boundary crossing involved in the mixing of races (*mestizaje*) as good while Americans generally interpreted it as bad. Writing from Montreal, with its deeply polarized "national" conflicts, Ramirez focuses on how individuals crossed boundaries and in the process imagined new cultures and social relations. His article addresses a basic concern: Under what circumstances did and do individuals choose one or another identity?

Some authors adopting the third approach wanted to explore how people had constructed and experienced nation to help them live their lives and understand their worlds. Rob Kroes reports how twentieth-century Europeans used popular culture made in the United States to widen possibilities in their lives and to frame trajectories for both national and Pan-European cultures. Troen explores how Israelis responded to, and resisted, plans for Israel developed by experts in the United States. Green shows how French commentators have appropriated the American concept of the "melting pot" to bolster their own ideal of civic republicanism while constructing—and vigorously rejecting—a terrified vision of rampant American multiculturalism. Kelley shows how black historians drew on conceptions of Africa as the basis for their peoplehood to situate themselves in their world. Ken Cmiel explores how the human rights movement criticized, contended with, and accommodated individual nation-states.

Scholars can use transnational movements and moments as sites for listening to people as they look beyond national borders to place in larger context and find solu-

¹⁰ Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, "World History in a Global Age," *American Historical Review*, 100 (Oct. 1995), 1034–60.

tions for problems they first discovered within their nations. Movements—including those for the abolition of slavery, women's rights, protection of the environment, democracy, labor unions and socialism—often grounded their identities and dreams outside the nation-state even as they confronted states or sought new nations to fulfill their dreams. In 1848 revolution against entrenched authorities flashed from the Paulskirche in Frankfurt to the Wesleyan Methodist chapel at Seneca Falls, New York, from a call for republicanism to a call for women's rights. Struggles for self-determination flashed in 1917–1919 between African Americans, Irish, Egyptians, Russians, and German revolutionaries. And movements for participatory democracy flashed in 1968 between Berkeley, Mexico City, Paris, and Shanghai. In the transnational eruption begun in 1968, the trial of Lt. William Calley of the United States Army for war crimes committed in Vietnam inspired war crimes charges against Dutch officers in Indonesia.

Much of the contemporary talk about transnational history takes us back to debates over the desirability of nation-states in a global world and of postmodern perspectives in history. And those issues came up during this project. Some participants found nation-states generally oppressive or irrelevant and looked forward to what they hoped would be transnational expressions of popular sovereignty. Others feared the growing economic and cultural power of transnational corporations in the globalizing economy and looked forward to newly energized nation-states as a focus in the future for more, not less, social and economic democracy. Some emphasized the material circumstances of historical actors, others their social constructions. Some saw individuals as reflections of groups, others as autonomous actors. Some believed that national traditions or circumstances strongly affected how individuals lived their lives, others believed that they did not. But we found congenial common ground in the conclusion that nation-states have performed important functions, that they have been challenged by those with trans- and subnational perspectives, that those challenges are changing and increasing, and that we as historians should do what we do well: Instead of taking positions on abstract debates—over the desirability of nation-states, for example—we should interrogate the state and nation of the United States, to see how people there and elsewhere experienced and constructed nation, to ask what the nation-state has done well and poorly through its political institutions and cultural patterns, to examine transnational realities to see how they changed and were changed by nation-states.

We drew another conclusion. Given the individualistic traditions of historical scholarship, the self-enclosing habits of national historiographies, and the growing specialization of historical scholarship, it will be hard to set American history in transnational perspectives. How can we master not only our own literatures but also the literature on Brazilian slavery, French or Mexican revolutions, Italian migration to Argentina and Australia, German or Nigerian federalism? Part of the answer lies in strengthening a tradition of collaborative scholarship. Gabaccia reports for the Italian Workers around the World project she coordinated with Fraser Ottanelli, and Marcel van der Linden reports for projects coordinated by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. Collaborations can draw not only on different top-

ics and languages but also on practices and questions generated within different national historiographies.¹¹

But collaboration is not a condition for viewing history transnationally. Daniel Rodgers has written one of the most exciting books of the last decade on Progressivism and the New Deal by tracing how members of a transnational community of social progressives worked with different national realities as they sought to enact their common goals of social and industrial justice.¹² And, as Geyer and Bright have observed, before world history became a research agenda, it originated and flourished in classrooms as individual teachers developed transnational perspectives with their students.

¹¹ For notable contributions, see Ira Katznelson and Aristide Zolberg, eds., *Working Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton, 1986); Jean Heffer and Jeanine Rovet, eds., *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States* (Paris, 1988); and Aristide R. Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (New York, 1989).

¹² Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).