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Introduction by Nicole Sackley, University of Richmond

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the first volume in Princeton University Press’s “America in the World” series, edited by Sven Beckert and Jeremi Suri. The series has been foundational in establishing what is now a robust field of scholarship on the United States from a transnational perspective. Its aim has been to publish new work emphasizing “networks, identities, and processes that transcend the nation-state” with the goal “writing the history of ‘global America.’”¹ Collectively, the monographs in the series have spanned two centuries of history, deployed a range of historiographical methodologies, and reimagined such diverse topics as empire, development, Cold War diplomacy, immigration, and black nationalism.

The eleventh monograph in this series, Tore C. Olsson’s remarkable and rich *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the US and Mexican Countryside*, both builds upon and offers exciting new directions for the field. Where earlier volumes in the Princeton series emphasized processes of ‘Americanization’ or placed events which have been conventionally treated as U.S. history into global history frameworks, *Agrarian Crossings* explores mutually constitutive nation-state projects and focuses on the interactions between particular national regions.² In doing so, the United States is both productively decentered and fractured.

In brief, *Agrarian Crossings* illuminates how a cast of U.S. and Mexican reformers—heads of state and diplomats, social scientists and policymakers, engineers and research scientists—sought to transform their own impoverished countryside by looking to the reform politics, models, and strategies on the other side the border. These comparisons could be perceived, Olsson argues, in part because by the 1920s, particular regions within each nation—the U.S. cotton South and the ‘plantation zones’ of Mexico—had grown increasingly similar through parallel processes of political disenfranchisement, capitalist transformation, environmental degradation, debt peonage, and populist backlash. Olsson credits the elections of two populist presidents, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lázaro Cárdenas, with creating the conditions by which these parallel trajectories became recognized and ultimately interwoven. A two-way exchange of people, ideologies, and technologies shaped both nations’ agrarian reform politics and, initially, offered a wider range of possibilities for rural transformation than what ultimately triumphed in the 1940s. In particular, Olsson reexamines the agricultural work of the Rockefeller Foundation in Mexico and finds that the Foundation’s experiences in the

¹ America in the World Series, Princeton University Press, <https://press.princeton.edu/catalogs/series/title/america-in-the-world.html> (Accessed 15 January 2019)

² On work emphasizing Americanization of the world, see David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Ian Tyrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America’s Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). On work reimagining U.S. events within a global history framework, see especially Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Kiran Klaus Patel, *The New Deal: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). Closer to Olsson in their interest in the ways cross border interactions and dialogue transformed multiple places are Martin Klimke’s *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) and Adam Ewing’s *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

U.S. South led its scientists and officers to recognize the importance of designing solutions to fit local particularities and address economic inequalities. Only later did Foundation officials abandon these insights for a package of technological innovations that came to be known as ‘The Green Revolution.’ Olsson concludes *Agrarian Crossings* with an epilogue that examines the consequences of these decisions for millions of rural people around the world.

The following roundtable brings together a diverse group of distinguished scholars, all of whom share expertise in the histories of the United States and Mexico and their interactions. But each one approaches these histories from a particular set of interests and methodological foci. Sterling Evans is a scholar of North American environmental and agricultural history; Jody Pavilack’s research focuses on the social and political history of Latin America; Jeffrey Pilcher is an historian of food studies; Christy Thornton’s scholarship focuses on international development, labor and social movements, state formation, and political economy; and Julie Weise is an interdisciplinary historian of citizenship, migration, and race.

The participants in the roundtable uniformly extoll Olsson’s depth and range of historical knowledge and archival research. Evans describes Olsson as “monumental in his knowledge and coverage” of U.S and Mexican history and of the “multinational and regional primary archival sources that Olsson scoured to research this monograph.” Pavilack similarly extols the book’s “rich archival detail” mined in “years of precisely the kind of intensive archival crossings that are necessary to produce a clear, passionate, and significant contribution to the current transnational turn in historical studies.” Reviewers also remark on Olsson’s skills as a writer. Many monographs as thick with research as *Agrarian Crossings* can become bogged down in details. The prose here is crisp, the organizational framework and transitions clear, and the cast of characters are rendered as fully as the ideas and policies they advanced.

Reviewers see *Agrarian Crossings* as making three major contributions to historical scholarship. First, they note how the book’s first section illuminates often unrealized similarities in the histories of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Mexico and United States. While Evans critiques Olsson for shying away from the label of “comparative history,” other reviewers focus on Olsson’s distinction between comparative history and “a history of comparisons.” (8) To borrow ideas and policies across national lines requires that people see or invoke similarities and kinships across lines of difference. The power of Olsson’s work is that he shows that, in the 1930s, comparative affinities were forged not only across the Atlantic, as historians like Daniel T. Rodgers and Kiran Klaus Patel have previously shown, but also across the divide in what we become known as the “First World” and “Third World.”³

Second, reviewers see Olsson as offering a compelling revision of standard histories of the origins of the Green Revolution. Rather than treating the work of U.S. agronomist Norman Borlaug and the Rockefeller Foundation in 1940s Mexico as a prehistory to a Cold War story, Olsson decenters Borlaug and tells a more complicated story of dissension and debate within the Rockefeller Foundation, in which US midwestern and southern agronomists laid out competing visions of rural transformation. Olsson’s research, as Christy Thornton notes, shows us how “the conventional narrative of the Green Revolution’s origins in Mexico

³ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998); Patel, *New Deal*, 2016.

actually miss its true roots in the U.S. South, with Rockefeller's General Education Board program decades earlier."

Finally, and perhaps most exciting, is Olsson's contribution to way we think about the role of national regions when writing histories of 'America in the world.' In Weise's words, by attending to regional differences within the United States, Olsson shows us "how the 'Americanization' of the world's agricultural landscapes was really its Midwesternization; had it been a Southernization instead, things might have turned out differently for millions of peasants the world over."

In the main, criticisms of *Agrarian Crossings* centered on topics or perspectives that reviewers wished Olsson had mentioned or addressed more fully. These include agronomists at the Mexican School of Agriculture in Chapingo, labor and peasant organizers in Mexico, and rural Mexican migrations engaged in their own 'agrarian crossings.' Some wished for Olsson to have contextualized his story within a larger framework of other U.S.-Mexican regions or the broader framework of the Americas, while one reviewer thought Olsson had paid insufficient attention to the heated ideological battles over Marxism that characterized Depression-era politics on both sides of the border. In general, while praising Olsson's command of multiple literatures, the reviewers tended to see the U.S. historical research as deeper and more nuanced.

Ultimately, the reviewers agree that *Agrarian Crossings* will stand as a "crucial intervention" (Thornton) in multiple histories: from the growing transnational history of the American South, Nuevo South, and the history of development to more conventional political histories of the New Deal and modern Mexico.

Participants:

Tore C. Olsson is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. He is the author of *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the US and Mexican Countryside* (Princeton University Press, 2017), which was recently awarded prizes from the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations and the Agricultural History Society. He is currently writing a book on the unlikely travels of American country music in the twentieth-century world – a project that like his first explores the global interconnectivity of the rural United States.

Nicole Sackley is Associate Professor of History and American Studies at the University of Richmond. Her research focuses on the history of development and U.S. non-state institutions and experts as transnational actors. She has published in *Agricultural History*, *Diplomatic History*, *History & Technology*, *Journal of Global History*, and *Modern Intellectual History*, and has received grants from the Mellon Foundation, the Rockefeller Archive Center, and the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library. Sackley is currently at work on two projects: *Coop Capitalism*, a monograph about American cooperatives and global development, and "Mapping the Foundations," a digital project spatializing all international grants given by the Ford and Rockefeller foundations during the Cold War.

Sterling Evans is Professor and Louise Welsh Chair in Borderlands and Southern Plains History at the University of Oklahoma. He is the author of *The Green Republic: A Conservation History of Costa Rica* (1999), *Bound in Twine: The History and Ecology of the Henequen-Wheat Complex for Mexico and the American and Canadian Plains, 1880-1950* (2007), and is editor of *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests:*

Essays on Regional History (1996), and *Farming across Borders: A Transnational History of the North American West* (2017). He is presently at work on *Damming Sonora: Water, Agriculture, and Environmental Change in Northwest Mexico* and is President of the Agricultural History Society (2017-2018).

Jody Pavilack is an associate professor of History at the University of Montana in Missoula. She teaches both colonial and modern Latin American history. Her research focuses on the social and political history of Latin America at mid-20th century. Her book *Mining for the Nation: The Politics of Chile's Coal Communities from the Popular Front to the Cold War* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011) won the Bryce Wood Award for outstanding book from the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) and the Thomas McGann Prize for outstanding book from the Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies (RMCLAS). Her current research project explores Pan-American networks of center-leftists (popular front Marxists and progressive liberals) in the 1940s, with U.S. Vice President Henry A. Wallace as a central protagonist.

Jeffrey M. Pilcher, Professor of History and Food Studies at the University of Toronto, is the author of *Que vivan los tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (1998), *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food* (2012), and *Food in World History*, 2nd ed. (2017). He is the articles editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Global Food History*. His current research examines the globalization of beer.

Christy Thornton is a fellow in the Weatherhead Initiative on Global History at Harvard University and an Assistant Research Professor in the Department of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University.

Julie M. Weise is Associate Professor of history at the University of Oregon. Her first book, *Corazón de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South since 1910* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), won the 2016 Merle Curti Award for best book in U.S. social history from the Organization of American Historians and was co-winner of the CLR James book award from the Working Class Studies Association (2016). Her current project, "Citizenship Displaced: Migrant Political Cultures in the Era of State Control," explores diverse migrant workers' political consciousness and relationships to origin and destination states in the post-World War Two period.

Review by Sterling Evans, University of Oklahoma

Once in a while along comes a book that we know will have to be adopted for a variety of different courses, and that will have to be cited by many other scholars. Even if the book is not adopted for some courses, it will just have to be referred to in lectures. Tore Olsson's *Agrarian Crossings* is one such book. It will need to be adopted, or at least lectured out of, for general classes on the history of the American South and Modern Mexico, and especially for those that deal with the New Deal, North American agriculture, transnational history, diplomatic history, international relations, and U.S. and the World. Even for general survey classes on post-Reconstruction American history and modern Latin American surveys, when there are lectures on the New Deal or the Great Depression or the 1930s in general, professors will now *have* to include vital information from, or at least passing reference to, the thesis of *Agrarian Crossings*.

Why? Because Olsson's work is not only an important corrective to vital aspects of all those subjects, but it adds important transnational contexts, exchanges, connections, and information that any class or lecture on the New Deal or mid-twentieth century Mexico would be highly remiss in omitting. Now we have plenty of evidence to show that President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, especially for agricultural policy in the American South, was much informed by agrarian reform measures in post-Revolutionary Mexico. More recognized, perhaps, is that agricultural modernization schemes in twentieth-century Mexico, especially grain hybridizations, development of synthetic fertilizers, and water projects such as dams and irrigation, were highly influenced by New Deal policies in the United States, especially the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), but Olsson's detailed discussion and analysis of those matters is one of the best treatments in the historical literature. Thus, as Olsson explains, "The conversation between Roosevelt's United States and Cardenista Mexico ... was characterized by dialogue rather than monologue. Each side spoke *and* listened" (emphasis in the original, 72). It is this fascinating two-way street that connects American history with Mexican history, that unites the American South with the Global South, and that offers valuable comparative analysis along the way that Olsson takes us in *Agrarian Crossings*.

But to this reviewer it is odd, and I believe a bit mistaken, that Olsson does not frame his book as either comparative or transnational history. In fact, in the book's Introduction he goes out of his way to say that *Agrarian Crossings* is not comparative history, but rather a work on parallel histories or on the history of comparisons. He suggests that comparison here is "our method rather than our subject" (14). There is of course only a very vague and thin semantic difference between the history of comparisons and comparative history, but even more, there is no reason for Olsson to shy away from branding his work as comparative when in so many ways it is, and in a discipline that really is in need of more great comparative studies like his. He even begins the book with a comparative overview of Ocala, Florida (and the 1890 meeting of the southern Farmers' Alliance) with Ayala, Morelos (where Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata hatched his famous plan for agrarian reform) and provides full comparative analysis of the two earlier movements on pages 20-22. For the 1930s there are chapters that very much compare the New Deal with Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas' concurrent "Six Year Plan," and there is comparison of the two presidents themselves (see 38, 102) or that policies between the two nations were "comparative" (4) and how he offers "comparative analysis" (9) of them. Olsson often uses the term "in comparison" (56) and "transregional comparison" (10) to offer his sound comparative analysis. He even shows that Mexican and American policy makers themselves compared different aspects of reform in each country at the time (see, for example, 77) and his reporting of those times strengthens the book as a comparative history. And finally, the Epilogue compares the more recent agrarian movements of Rubén Jaramillo in Morelos and Ned Cobb in Alabama and offers valuable

conclusions as a whole to the book that Olsson labels “convergent and divergent” histories (192). *Agrarian Crossings* is a great work of comparative history.

The same is true for Olsson avoiding calling his work a transnational history, even though it very much is, and a fantastic one at that. There is no mention of the term anywhere in his introduction where he sets out to define what kind of history he is writing. Yet, all through the book there are many references to transnationality. His agrarian crossings (an inherently transnational term) are “transnational networks” (42), Mexican agrarian development was shaped by “extranational influences” (74), there were “transnational careers” (85) of various New Deal and Six Year Plan technocrats, some of the literature important to this study has been characterized by the “transnational turn” (101), a meeting of “legendary agrarian icons” Henry Wallace and Lázaro Cárdenas “testified to the fusion of transnational political ideologies” (145), Mexican planners in the 1940s made “transnational comparisons” (160) and many Mexican leaders made “transnational pilgrimages” (182) to help them develop water projects. Fleshing out this analysis earlier in the book, and framing it in this light from the beginning, I believe, would help put this on shelves and in classrooms along with other important transnational histories like Matt Matsuda’s *Pacific Worlds*, Gregory Cushman’s *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World*, Edward Melillo’s *Strangers on Familiar Soil*, and my own *Bound in Twine*.¹ More specifically, it will be one of the key works on the transnational history of the American South, along with Judith Carney’s *Black Rice*, Andrew Zimmerman’s *Alabama in Africa*, and Eve Buckley’s *Technocrats and the Politics of Drought and Development in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (that also looks at TVA implications for the Brazilian Northeast).² *Agrarian Crossings* needs to be there and would make an exceptional addition to any seminar or course on transnational history. As Olsson notes, the book “probes the rarely acknowledged link between two geographic containers, the U.S. South and the Global South” (8).

Does this transnational emphasis place *Agrarian Crossings* within the expanding literature of the ‘Nuevo South’? Once again, Olsson does not identify his work in that realm, perhaps especially given the tendency for that literature to be squarely centered in the sociology and anthropology of Latino immigration to the American South, evident by such works as Perla Guerrero’s *Nuevo South* and Steve Striffler’s *Chicken* (although historians Rocio Gomez and Justin Castro have published important articles on *braceros* in Arkansas).³ But in a compelling way, *Agrarian Crossings* could and should be included here, importantly as a

¹ See Matt Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Edward Dallam Melillo, *Strangers on Familiar Soil: Rediscovering the Chile-California Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); and Sterling Evans, *Bound in Twine: The History and Ecology of the Henequen-Wheat Complex for Mexico and the American and Canadian Plains, 1880-1950* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007).

² Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), Eve Buckley, *Technocrats and the Politics of Drought and Development in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

³ Perla M. Guerrero, *Nuevo South: Latinas/os, Asians, and the Remaking of Place* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017); Steve Striffler, *Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation of America’s Favorite Food* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Rocio Gomez, “Braceros in the Arkansas Delta, 1943-1964,” *Ozark Historical Review* 39 (spring

backdrop to connections between the region and Mexico and to show that there were/are more linkages than just immigration and labor between the two. There was a two-way transfer of ideologies, information, and technologies that this book tracks across several decades of the mid-twentieth century.

One of the most interesting of those transfers was the degree to which U.S. New Dealers travelled to Mexico to learn as much as possible about agrarian reform. In chapter 3, Olsson resurrects Frank Tannenbaum and shows that he was an instrumental scholar for informing New Deal technocrats, government officials, and members of Congress about ideologies learned in Mexico that could be applied to much needed land reform in the American South. He meticulously traces Tannenbaum's Mexican-inspired concepts for the Bankhead-Jones Bill, that later morphed into the Farm Security Administration. I was surprised to learn about the degree of interest that Henry Wallace placed on Mexican ideals, and the time he spent in Mexico learning from Mexican officials that helped hone his more leftist bent for agrarian reform in the United States. Here we also learn about a much-transformed Josephus Daniels, from his caustic racist background in North Carolina to a staunch advocate of land reform for tenant farmers (white and black) for his home southern region based on his career as U.S. Ambassador to Mexico during much of the New Deal. All of this, and many more examples, can be added to the corrective analysis of the role the Mexican Revolution played to inspire New Deal leaders that Olsson presents so vividly in the book.

In chapters four and five, Olsson explores the Green Revolution and also attempts to offer some corrective analysis on that. While not backing away from the standard understanding of the long-term disadvantages that large-scale irrigation, chemical inputs, and genetically modified crops wrought from Green Revolution technologies have had on the world agricultural and food security scene, Olsson does want readers to understand the beginnings of the program in a somewhat different light. And he is convincing in his analysis that the pre-Norman Borlaug days of the Rockefeller Foundation's program in Mexico were more in tune (if not completely) with the ideals of Mexican agrarian reform. But missing here unfortunately, especially in the discussion of the Foundation's workers in Mexico who worked with agronomists at the Mexican School of Agriculture in Chapingo, is mention that in that school itself was a very robust anti-Green Revolution effort afoot, guided by Mexico's most preeminent agronomist, Efraím Hernández. Hernández was trained at Cornell, was significantly influenced by the teachings of renowned horticulturalist Liberty Hyde Bailey, became the leading opponent of certain forms of agricultural modernization in Mexico, especially those technologies that would eliminate centuries-old successful and ecologically appropriate farming strategies from rural Mexico, and trained dozens of other agronomists with these values. Yet there is no mention of any of this in *Agrarian Crossings*, despite the work of historian Matthew Caire-Pérez on this very topic.⁴ (But while Caire-Pérez's dissertation has not yet been published, Olsson draws on other unpublished dissertations, like

2010); Justin J. Castro, "Mexican Braceros and Arkansas Cotton: Agricultural Labor and Civil Rights in the Post-World War II South," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 75:1 (spring 2016).

⁴ Matthew Caire-Pérez, "A Different Shade of Green: Efraím Hernández, Chapingo, and Mexico's Green Revolution, 1950-1967," PhD dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2016.

Diana Schwartz's on the Papaloapan water projects, for help in analyzing many other points in the book).⁵ It's a curious and serious omission here.

Finally, I'd like to add a few thoughts about *Agrarian Crossings* as a whole. First, Olsson is monumental in his knowledge and coverage of both Mexican and American South history. There are perhaps only a very few scholars who could so skillfully weave the two together like he does here. He uses all of that information to draw his own conclusions, and I was pleased to read that despite some panegyric for both the New Deal and the Cardenista agrarian reforms – both of which are logical for understanding those moments in time, he concludes that in the end, both did not last, they failed to institute long-range reforms, they caved to industrial agriculture, and never instated the kind of land reform needed in either the American South or Mexico. In all of this analysis, he displays a terrific knowledge and understanding of the extant secondary literature of these two regional disciplines, and knows how to put them into conversation with each other in the book. It is sad, however, that Princeton University Press could not bring itself to adding a bibliography to showcase the secondary literature cited. Readers have to wade through the endnotes in search of citations. What a bad trend that this publishing house and other well-respected presses are falling into these days.

But even more important are the multinational and regional primary archival sources that Olsson scoured to research this monograph. It is a model of that newer generation of multi-national, multi-archival historical craft, and I take this space to congratulate Olsson for his fine work and time spend on that. From those he also found a wealth of photographs that he used well to illustrate the book. I'm sure there were many, many more that were left on the cutting room floor for the sake of space, but the ones he did include were great additions to the text. And what a text we have. *Agrarian Crossings* displays Olsson's fine talent as a writer, using keen diction, beautiful paragraph and chapter transitions, all in a way that makes this book flow so nicely and evenly across the chapters. I hope that graduate students and other scholars everywhere will pick up on this style and model their own research methodologies and writing after what Olsson has provided with us here. If so, we will have other great studies over "land, food, water, and population [that] will not be segregated by the artificial dichotomies of Global North and Global South, of First World and Third World" (199).

⁵ Diana Schwartz, "Transforming the Tropics: Development, Displacement, and Anthropology in the Papaloapan, Mexico, 1940s-1970s," PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2015.

Review by Jody Pavilack, University of Montana

In late November 1940, shortly after winning the U.S. vice-presidency on the ticket with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Iowa farmer Henry Agard Wallace and his wife Ilo packed up their Chrysler Plymouth and set off from Washington, D.C. to attend the inauguration of President Manuel Avila Camacho in Mexico City. Both before and after the official ceremony, Wallace toured myriad factories and farms, with a passionate desire to understand Mexican culture, the plight of its workers, and the state of its agriculture. In the 1930s and 1940s, as Tore Olsson conveys with rich archival detail, Henry Wallace was but one of many U.S. actors who crossed the border into Mexico, by car, rail, and plane, seeking to understand revolutionary developments in the Mexican countryside and to share knowledge and practices from New Deal programs in the U.S. Cotton Belt. During these same years, Mexican policy makers, administrators, agronomists, and engineers travelled north to learn about New Deal programs, especially in the rural South.

Also crossing the U.S.-Mexican border in these decades were reams of printed material, including propaganda brochures, policy documents, news clippings, and personal letters, through which key actors in U.S. and Mexican agricultural transformation projects kept abreast of developments among their cross-border counterparts. Recognizing the importance of this mode of transnational education and communication, while still in Mexico in December 1940, Henry Wallace sent a series of impassioned letters to key officials in the U.S., including the Secretary of State, the Postmaster General, and the Librarian of Congress, urging them to lower postage rates for books and printed matter sent to Latin America.¹

These personal visits and exchange of materials were part of a decade coming out of the Great Depression when New Deal liberals in the U.S., looking to alleviate poverty and stagnation in the rural South, and agrarian reformers in the Mexican administrations of Lázaro Cardenas (1934-1940) and Avila Camacho (1940-1946), looking to address the plight of their own landless and exploited rural sectors, found such shared conditions that they engaged in a period of intense dialogue and cooperation. In official meetings and cocktail parties in Washington D.C., Raleigh, North Carolina, and Knoxville, Tennessee, New Deal policymakers continually referenced developments in the Mexican countryside, and likewise, their counterparts in Mexico City, La Laguna, and the Papaloapan and Tepalcatepec river valleys continually looked toward transformations in the rural U.S. South for symbolic and practical inspiration.

Olsson's *Agrarian Crossings* makes vital contributions to current trends in transnational history, and it is an absolute pleasure to read. His central argument is that neither New Deal projects to transform agriculture in the U.S. South nor agrarian reform and agricultural development projects in México during the presidencies of Cárdenas and Avila Camacho can be accurately understood in isolation from each other, as most histories have attempted to do. Rather, these two ostensibly distinct national, even nationalistic, projects were, in fact, conceived and implemented through continual, close cross-border interconnection. From this premise, Olsson is further able to show that the Mexican Agricultural Program (MAP), which gave rise to the global Green Revolution, did not begin as "a campaign driven by Cold War geopolitics," a top-down imposition of the First World onto the Third, as it is commonly understood. (7). "Rather than a high modernist imposition ignorant of local particularities," Olsson argues, "the green revolution started with a distinctly 'low modernist' sheen in its coupling of expert-led rural planning with a sensitivity toward agrarian class divisions, subsistence

¹ Henry A. Wallace Papers, microfilm reel Iowa 22, Correspondence July 1940-October 1941, 44-47, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York.

economics, and revolutionary politics. Midwife to such peasant-friendly planning was the lived experience of agrarian inequality in the US Cotton Belt” (130). The move away from *ejido* (or collective) peasant corn farming toward largescale capitalist wheat production did not occur until the end of the 1940s, and, as Olsson shows, it was not inevitable: “[T]he destruction of peasant agricultures was the product of political choices, not free market economics or technological determinism” (199).

These choices were made by real people, with all their personal conditioning, biases, and fallibilities. Though not a prosopography in a strict sense, Olsson’s book beautifully weaves myriad biographical vignettes conveying both the determinative and adaptive agency of the protagonists, as well as their intellectual and ideological roots and their transformations over time. The cast of individuals discussed by Olsson is diverse—from powerful heads of state and their top advisors (Cárdenas; Wallace; Marte R. Gómez), to international diplomats (Josephus Daniels; Francisco Castillo Nájera), to academics, administrators, engineers, and scientists (Frank Tannenbaum, Albert Mann, Paul Mangelsdorf). Understanding these actors in terms of both their individual biographies and their collective settings (government departments, philanthropic organizations, etc.), with constant reference to their geographic locations, allows us to see the shifting lines of affiliation and conflict that comprised the U.S.-Mexican agrarian reform/agricultural development *network* of the 1930s and 1940s.²

Notwithstanding his emphasis on ‘political choices,’ however, Olsson pays scant attention to the politics of the era. He conveys the idea that concerns over Marxist inroads among workers and peasants did not come to the fore until the late 1940s, whereas I think many of his protagonists developed their ideological and policy convictions in the 1933-45 period largely around their embrace or rejection of Marxist ideas of socioeconomic democracy. During the heyday of popular-front politics in the U.S. and Latin America, when even President Franklin Roosevelt lauded the contributions of Russian leader ‘Uncle Joe’ Stalin to the triumph of democracy over fascism, many liberals captivated by utopian ideals of redistribution and collectivism became fellow travelers of Soviet Communism, to some degree or another. So-called left-wing New Dealers, including Wallace, and left-wing Cardenistas, including President Cárdenas, indeed embraced the idea of a postwar alliance between progressive capitalism and democratic communism. This political position caused division throughout the years Olsson covers, and I would love to have heard more about the political perspectives and affiliations (or lack thereof) of his key players.

Olsson does such a wonderful job showing the work of these actors on the ground that they seem to epitomize the kind of “grassroots Good Neighbors” discussed by Gigi Peterson.³ But Peterson was referring

² Olsson’s discussions of people travelling across borders and meeting up in key geographic locations to develop shared ideological projects remind me of Barry Carr’s work on certain cities as “hubs in transnational networks that linked radicals and revolutionaries of all kinds.” See his “Pioneering Transnational Solidarity in the Americas: The Movement in Support of Augusto C. Sandino 1927-1934,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20: 2 (2014), 141-152; and, “Mexico City: Emporium of Latin American Exiles and Revolutionaries in the 1920s,” in Charles B. Faulhaber, ed., *Mexico’s Unfinished Revolutions* (Berkeley: Bancroft Library, 2011), 25-40.

³ Gigi Peterson, “‘A Dangerous Demagogue’: Containing the Influence of the Mexican Labor-Left and Its United States Allies,” in R.W. Cherny, W. Issel, and K.W. Taylor, eds., *American Labor and the Cold War: Grassroots Politics and Postwar Political Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 245-276; and, Gigi Peterson, “Grassroots

principally to Mexican labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano (another Marxist ‘fellow traveler’ of sorts), and this raises one of the central questions left unanswered for me in Olsson’s book: What role did U.S. and Mexican labor organizations and their members play in shaping these histories of agrarian transformation? As I understand his history, Lombardo Toledano was one of the voices in Latin American labor circles who strongly promoted an alliance between urban industrial workers and rural workers and peasants. In 1933, he co-founded the General Union of Workers and Peasants of Mexico (UGOCM), and through this, as well as the subsequent organizations he led, Lombardo sought to strengthen the tripartite alliance among workers, peasants, and the Cárdenas administration. Though Cárdenas would soon create a separate organization, the National Peasant Confederation (CNC), to represent the beneficiaries of his agrarian reform, Lombardo remained a steadfast supporter.⁴ Lombardo Toledano was also a prominent proponent of Pan-American leftism: he founded and led the Confederation of Latin American Workers (CTAL); he maintained close ties with the U.S. CIO; and he was a vocal supporter of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and especially, of his more left-leaning vice-president, Wallace, whom he staunchly supported in the 1948 U.S. presidential elections. Lombardo was an inexhaustible crosser of national borders, as he traversed all of the Americas many times, and while he did advocate industrialization, he also fervently supported peasant-led models of agrarian reform. At times, Olsson tends toward a dichotomization of rural radicalism, especially in terms of land redistribution, versus the push for industrialization. But not all (or most) labor organizations of the 1930s and 1940s operated on the basis of such a radical either/or choice. Olsson’s discussions of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union (STFU) are rich and fascinating, and I would have appreciated more exploration of the roles played by comparable labor and peasant organizations in Mexico.

Olsson might have effectively introduced more nuanced interconnections between rural farmers who had been forced off their land during the rule of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) and growing sectors of urban workers in his early chapter about U.S. populist Tom Watson and Mexican agrarista Emiliano Zapata by introducing the story of Ricardo Flores Magón and the Mexican Liberal Party. Not only was Flores Magón another peripatetic border crosser (when he was not in prison), but his early promulgation of the “land and liberty” slogan meant to draw not only miners, railroad workers, and urban workers into the fold, but also tenant farmers and hacienda workers. And, with his Zapotec roots in Oaxaca, Flores Magón promoted communal modes of working the land based on an anarchist reinvention of the *ejido* as a form of primitive communism, quite akin to the way Olsson describes the reinvention of the *ejido* by the *agraristas* writing Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution.

Most of my other comments about this book also relate (rather unfairly) to things it does not do, rather than to how well it does do what it does (on the latter, I could go on for pages). Olsson’s focus on the U.S. South (meaning Southeast) and certain—though much less clearly articulated—regions within the Mexican nation

Good Neighbors: Connections between Mexican and U.S. Labor and Civil Rights Activists, 1936-1945,” PhD dissertation, Department of History, University of Washington (2004).

⁴ Among other works addressing Lombardo Toledano’s significant role in the Mexican, U.S.-Mexican transnational, and pan-American transformations of the 1930s, see Luis Bernal Tavares, *Vicente Lombardo Toledano y Miguel Alemán: una bifurcación de la Revolución Mexicana* (Centro de Estudios e Investigación para el Desarrollo Social, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México—Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 1994), chapter IV; and, Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, *Anthropological Perspectives on Rural México* (New York: Routledge, 2017 [1984]).

offers both strengths and limitations.⁵ Within the U.S., Midwestern agriculture clearly played a role in contestation over models for reform and progress, though Olsson introduces it to his story more as a foil to the progressive visions from the South, rather than as a regional point of policy interlocation in its own right. Also, agriculture in California and the U.S. Southwest is entirely left out of the story, with the *Bracero* program mentioned only once toward the end of the book. In some ways, of course, this is a different story than the one Olsson tells, but at the very least, some mention of it would give broader context and/or comparison for the U.S. Southeast-Mexico connection. Rural Mexican migrants were engaged in ‘agrarian crossings’ on quite a large scale, and surely they contributed to the transnational cultural and practical exchanges that took place in these years.

The larger context for Olsson’s story also involves the rest of Latin America, which is scarcely mentioned in this book. In 1930, years before the ascent of Roosevelt or Cárdenas to the presidency, the Pan-American Union held the First Inter-American Conference on Agriculture, in Washington, D.C., where discussions centered around the value of creating an inter-American institute on tropical agriculture. At the Eighth Scientific Congress, held in Washington, D.C. in 1940, Wallace, who was U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, renewed the call for such an institute. The second Inter-American Conference on Agriculture—held in Mexico City in July 1942—was attended by many of the central characters in Olsson’s story (Marte R. González; Ramón Fernández y Fernández; Claude Wickard, etc.), not to mention Lombardo Toledano and several other representatives from the CTAL and from the National Peasant Confederation (CNC). By October 1942, just months before the inauguration of the MAP, the efforts of Wallace and many other policy activists across the Americas culminated in the foundation of the Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Sciences (IICA) at Turrialba, Costa Rica (later CATIE). The relationship between this Pan-American movement for progressive dialogue about agrarian/agricultural development and the U.S.-Mexican movement, embodied centrally in the GEB and the MAP would be fascinating to read about. Perhaps I am totally misguided in my sense of its relevance to Olsson’s story, but, if so, I wish the book had clarified any reasons for this.

Finally, a quite minor quibble—with a book I absolutely love—is Olsson’s repeated use of the terms ‘pilgrim’ and ‘pilgrimage’ to describe the key transnational actors and sojourns described in his story. As I understand the term pilgrimage, it refers to a journey of spiritual significance to a sacred place. I have been to the Tennessee River Valley and it is not that. In all seriousness, I do appreciate Olsson’s occasional description of these passionately engaged actors as pilgrims, in the sense that La Laguna seemed ideologically ‘sacred’ to left-wing New Dealers at a certain moment in history, just as the Fort Loudon Dam in Lenoir City, Tennessee, must have struck visiting Mexican engineers as manna from the heavens. Yet, in all reality, these were socially-minded government officials and scientists engaged in transnational interlocation, not pilgrims.

Let me conclude by paying this book the highest compliment I can think of: I really wish I had written it. Olsson’s writing style is beautiful, with clear, concise prose and consistently clever turns of phrase; his research

⁵ The idea of regional culture within a national project seems to me more effectively developed in Olsson’s discussion of the U.S. South than in the varied regions of Mexico which come to the fore in this book (Morelos in the chapter on Zapata; Coahuila and Durango in the chapter on La Laguna; Chapingo in the chapter on the early years of the MAP; etc.). Regional difference in México might be fleshed out with reference to a work like Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in Mexican National Space* (University of California Press, 1992), which focuses on the state of Morelos and the Huasteca Potonsina.

is creative, deep, and thorough. I admire the tenacity and confidence with which he followed threads from personal papers in México City and Michoacán to Record Groups in the U.S. National Archives that it has never occurred to me to think about consulting, not to mention the myriad other libraries and archives across the U.S. that he visited ... and then, back to México again. Olsson—clearly a pilgrim in his own right—undertook years of precisely the kind of intensive archival crossings that are necessary to produce a clear, passionate, and significant contribution to the current transnational turn in historical studies. *Agrarian Crossings* is a book I look forward to rereading many times in the coming years, both alone and with my graduate and undergraduate students.

Review by Jeffrey M. Pilcher, University of Toronto

Herbert Eugene Bolton delivered his presidential address to the American Historical Association on a sunny Toronto day in December 1932. Appropriately, for the first meeting of the AHA held outside the United States, Bolton's lecture, "The Epic of Greater America," exhorted his colleagues to look beyond national borders and write hemispheric histories.¹ Although the field of Borderlands history that Bolton pioneered has flourished, his call was otherwise largely ignored by U.S. historians for another seventy years. In this beautifully written book, Tore Olsson demonstrates the enormous value of international history by examining exchanges between the Southern agrarian New Deal of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Mexican *agrarista* reforms of President Lázaro Cárdenas. Olsson offers a compelling reinterpretation of the origins of the Green Revolution and of Third World development schemes more broadly as a product not of Cold War politics but rather of earlier attempts to modernize agriculture and society in the U.S. South.

The standard historical narrative of the Green Revolution begins during World War II, when a team of agronomists funded by the Rockefeller Foundation toured Mexico with the goal of supporting the Allied war effort by raising agricultural productivity. Although early extension work achieved modest improvements to the peasant staples maize and beans, the social and physical geography of Mexican smallholdings stymied Rockefeller efforts to transfer Midwestern agricultural technology to southern and central Mexico. The spectacular gains of the Green Revolution were achieved later by northern Mexican commercial farms using improved strains of wheat developed by Norman Borlaug. Although it exacerbated social inequalities in Mexico, the Green Revolution package of hybrid seeds and mechanized production was then transferred to Asian peasant societies to guard against the threat of Communist revolution, while Borlaug went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize for his campaigns against world hunger.² Olsson revises critical elements of this narrative by focusing on the plantation South rather than the prairie Midwest.

The first half of the book surveys parallels between the U.S. Populist revolt of the 1890s and the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and describes connections between agrarian reformers in the two countries. Olsson traces how sympathetic U.S. observers of Mexican reforms, including Frank Tannenbaum, Will Alexander, and M. L. Wilson, worked to create a more progressive agrarian dimension to the New Deal in the Farm Security Administration (FSA), despite the opposition of conservative Southern Democrats. Olsson also describes how noted Mexican agronomists Ramón Fernández y Fernández and Eduardo Limón García carried lessons from the U.S. South back to Mexico and how Cardenista land reforms gained an unlikely but critical ally in

¹ Herbert E. Bolton, "The Epic of Greater America," *The American Historical Review* 38:3 (April 1933): 448-474. The keynote was actually given in the evening, and the (unusual) "bright sunshine" was noted in a summary essay by H. E. B., "Toronto Meeting -- American Historical Association," *The American Historical Review* 38:3 (April 1933): 431.

² This basic periodization guided such critical works as Deborah Fitzgerald, "Exporting American Agriculture: The Rockefeller Foundation in Mexico, 1943-1953," in *Missionaries of Science: The Rockefeller Foundation in Latin America*, ed. Marcos Cueto (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 72-96; and Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); as well as my own book, Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *¡Que vivan los tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

Ambassador Josephus Daniels, a North Carolina journalist who had overseen the occupation of the port of Veracruz in 1914 as Secretary of the Navy under Woodrow Wilson.

In the second half of the book Olsson advances a more progressive, Southern genealogy for the Rockefeller agricultural program in Mexico, at least in its early years. The Foundation's General Education Board had pursued racially conscious social reform in the U.S. South already at the turn of the century although with disappointing results. Its Mexican agricultural reforms were first proposed by the North Carolinians Daniels and John A. Ferrell, who sympathetically perceived the plight of Mexican small farmers through the lens of Southern white tenant sharecroppers. Moreover, the corn-breeding program in Mexico began not with Midwestern double-cross hybrids, which were carefully designed so that improved yields dropped off when replanted in future years, thus ensuring steady profits for seed companies at the expense of farmers. Instead, corn breeder Paul Mangelsdorf, who had formerly worked with poor farmers in East Texas, selected so-called 'synthetic' varieties that retained the productivity benefits from one season to the next without requiring farmers to purchase new seeds each year. Olsson also questions the self-aggrandizing account of Borlaug, who far from being central to the Foundation program, was reprimanded by his superiors for preferring to work with large commercial wheat farmers instead of the intended beneficiaries among smallholders. Only with the increasingly conservative administration of President Miguel Alemán (1946-1952) did Borlaug's elitist commercial wheat program gain ascendance. Olsson concludes the book by examining the influence of the Tennessee Valley Authority on two Mexican rural development programs, the Papaloapán River dam, a monumental but vain attempt to foment agribusiness in Alemán's home state of Veracruz, and the Tecalcatepec River project, which sought more modestly and successfully to improve economic integration and public health among land reform beneficiaries in the Cardenista heartland of Michoacán.

The great difficulty of writing international history, especially as a first book, is the need to acquire expertise in two separate historiographies, and the U.S. Southern historian Olsson paints a convincing image of the complex landscape of revolutionary and post-revolutionary Mexico. Scholars have debated in particular the enigma of Cárdenas, who carried about sweeping agrarian reform in the service of consolidating an authoritarian, one-party state.³ Olsson leans toward the populist historiography in describing Cardenista support for smallholder production but may not give enough attention to national agricultural marketing system, which already in the late 1930s had begun to give preferential treatment to northern commercial farmers.⁴ Olsson also makes a suggestive case that the Alemán administration began distributing hybrid seeds to strengthen farmers' dependency on state patronage (149). It would be no surprise to learn that the post-revolutionary state adopted such a Machiavellian ploy, but as a practical matter, the expense of subsidizing annual seed allotments to small farmers fit poorly with the larger developmentalist goal of squeezing agriculture to finance urban industrialization, and the hybrid seed distribution never went far.

³ For progressive views of Cardenista reforms, see Luis González y González, *Los días del Presidente Cárdenas* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1981); Adolfo Gilly, *El cardenismo: Una utopía mexicana* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 1994). Revisionist political accounts include Alicia Hernández Chávez, *La mecánica cardenista* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1979); Ben Fallow, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁴ See Enrique C. Ochoa, *Feeding Mexico: The Political Uses of Food since 1910* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000).

Agrarian Crossings will become essential reading for specialists in U.S. and Latin American history alike, as valuable for its border-crossing methodological advances as for the details of its interpretation. Even while tearing down artificial academic boundaries between Mexico and the United States, Olsson reveals the importance of considering regionalism as a factor within international history. Never again can scholars use the term ‘Americanization’ as a blanket term for U.S. economic and cultural influence without considering the diversity of regional models within the United States.

Review by Christy Thornton, Johns Hopkins University

Even as the transnational turn swept the historiography of the United States beginning in the 1990s, the U.S. south remained, in some sense, a world apart. While historians of slavery and the trade that sustained it had long examined connections across the region's borders, and scholars of migration and migrant labor examined flows of nominally free people through the South, the cosmopolitanism that seemed to be required of transnational analysis confronted assumptions of the South as parochial, particular, and still peculiar. In recent years, however, this has changed, and works like Andrew Zimmerman's *Alabama in Africa*, Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton*, and Matthew Karp's *This Vast Southern Empire* have firmly announced the arrival of the transnational—and indeed, even the global—turn in the historiography of the region.¹ Tore Olsson's *Agrarian Crossings* now joins these works by uncovering the links between the agrarian reform efforts of the New Deal state and the massive rural transformations underway just south of the border, in post-revolutionary Mexico.

At first blush, these links seem surprising. The border between the United States and Mexico is not merely, as Olsson points out, a national one: it is where the developed world meets the underdeveloped, the First World meets the Third, or the Global North meets the Global South. As such, our received models of diffusionist modernization tell us that poor, indebted, post-revolutionary Mexico could have little influence on the ascendant hegemon of the Western Hemisphere. But Olsson convincingly demonstrates that, in fact, New Deal reformers seeking to solve the problems of persistent poverty and deprivation in the U.S. south looked repeatedly to Mexican reformers for inspiration—and vice versa. As such, Olsson's book provides “not a comparative history, but rather a history of comparisons” (4); that is, it traces how academics, technocrats, political figures, and philanthropists repeatedly invoked cross-border similarities in devising their programs of reform. After all, the plantation nexus held peasants, tenants, and sharecroppers in remarkably similar conditions of poverty in Michoacán as much as Mississippi—a fact continuously invoked by reformers on both sides of the border.

Agrarian Crossings, then, looks to these comparisons to reveal the entangled histories of 1930s rural reform efforts. The book first makes a case for the similarities between Mexico and the U.S. South that marked the period from the 1870s to the 1920s. Both experienced what Olsson characterizes an “all-out war on the commons” (17), as formerly communal or public property was privatized and enclosed. Both received influxes of capital from the Northern U.S. and Europe, and both saw massive expansions of railway networks link rural agriculture to the capitalist world system. Systems of tenant farming and debt peonage became the norm, entrenching poverty and inequality. Then, in both places, resistance emerged: in the South's Populist movement of the 1890s and in the agrarian revolt of Emiliano Zapata in the 1910s, which pushed rural questions to the forefront of the complicated Mexican revolutionary process. And while Mexico's revolution was undoubtedly more sweeping and consequential, both revolts left unresolved many of the underlying agrarian problems, thereby fostering a simmering discontent that would be fodder for the populist presidential campaigns of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lázaro Cárdenas. In the 1930s, both presidents launched

¹ Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2014); Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

ambitious rural reform programs that would cause what Olsson considers parallel histories to begin to intersect.

The chapters that follow detail the nature of these exchanges, establishing a pattern of interactions that shaped agrarian reform efforts in both countries. The crossings he details are mostly the stuff of technocrats and politicians; though radical activists and reform-minded academics play important if occasional roles, the main focus of *Agrarian Crossings* is a range of government-sponsored efforts to reform labor conditions, land distribution, and technological know-how in the countryside. But while it is a history that “sees like a state,”² Olsson is careful to tease out the more social and redistributive efforts from high-modernist technocratic ones, and to demonstrate the processes by which more radical reform efforts were foreclosed. For instance, he highlights the work of Frank Tannenbaum, the left writer and intellectual who completed a doctoral dissertation on the agrarian aspects of the Mexican revolution. Tannenbaum was contracted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 1934 to examine the U.S. South as he had the Mexican countryside, culminating in a proposal for a wide-reaching redistribution program of underutilized land in the South. Tannenbaum’s ideas were based largely on the provision that undergirded Mexican redistribution of land, Article 27 of Mexico’s revolutionary constitution, though he downplayed those comparisons when his proposal was crafted into legislation taken up by Congress. Olsson details the process in which, by the time the legislation passed in 1937 creating the Farm Security Administration, it had lost much of Tannenbaum’s original redistributionist vision, but he highlights the radical roots from which it grew.

As the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas accelerated the distribution of land—allocating nearly fifty million acres to the communal peasant farm system known as the *ejido*—more activists and New Deal reformers made the pilgrimage to Mexico, studying conditions on newly created communal farms and creating what Olsson calls a “south-north traffic in agrarian political strategies” (71). Activists from the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union and technocrats from the USDA, for instance, traveled to Mexico to study La Laguna, the northern Mexican cotton-growing region whose valuable and well-irrigated lands had been expropriated by Cárdenas and turned over to the collective ownership of the militant agrarian laborers who picked its crop. Like Tannenbaum, these reformers drew on their experiences in Mexico to advocate a deeper commitment to rural social justice in the United States.

The traffic of agrarian reform traveled a two-way street, of course, and Olsson also outlines how Mexican actors, from radical *campesino* organizations to government bureaucrats, looked to various New Deal programs for guidance on the technical and financial aspects of agrarian reform. Even as Cárdenas expropriated U.S. land holdings and business interests—not just in the agrarian sector, but also in mining and, crucially, petroleum, which was nationalized in 1938—his administration saw real affinities with the New Deal state, something affirmed repeatedly in speeches, government publications, and private meetings with U.S. officials. By demonstrating these affinities, Olsson confounds simple notions of Cardenista nationalism, uncovering an important strain of internationalism in the Mexican post-revolutionary state. This is the part of the book, however, that is thinnest in its connections, relying mainly on the interventions of the U.S. ambassador, the North Carolinian Josephus Daniels. Daniels made constant comparisons between his home region and the country where he found himself pressed into diplomatic service, and lent important support to Mexico’s agrarian reforms—but it is perhaps not surprising that we should find the New Deal state

² James C Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

in Mexico by looking at its own embassy. As with many transnational histories of the United States, Latin Americanist scholars reading this section may find themselves seeking more Mexican perspectives; the final chapter on later Mexican attempts to imitate the hydraulic development of the Tennessee Valley Authority in Veracruz and Michoacán is more satisfying in this regard.

In that final chapter, Olsson deftly narrates the sea change in Mexican politics that occurred from the populist agrarianism of the Cárdenas years to the modernizing technocracy of soft-authoritarian Mexico in the 1950s and 1960s. He also demonstrates that even within the most recognizably high-modernist development projects—hydraulic dams—there was political and social contention, as advocates of redistributive social justice struggled against ‘anti-political’ technocrats in both the Tennessee Valley and Mexico. In a similar way, two other chapters also complicate the history of another prototypical U.S.-driven development project: the Rockefeller Foundation’s agricultural programs that came to be known under the rubric of the ‘Green revolution.’ Here, Olsson’s crossings double back, as he argues that the conventional narrative of the Green Revolution’s origins in Mexico actually miss its true roots in the U.S. South, with Rockefeller’s General Education Board (GEB) program decades earlier. Looking to the GEB, a group of southerners, including the ubiquitous Josephus Daniels, again made the case for the basic congruence between the problems of the South and Mexico—and for their possible solutions. This is a crucial intervention for those interested in the history of development, as Olsson argues convincingly for writing the U.S. South into the Global South (and here he echoes Zimmerman). What if our histories of development as an international project started not in Latin America or Asia but in early twentieth century Alabama?

When the Rockefeller Foundation finally began its Mexican Agricultural Program in the early 1940s, it therefore drew heavily on previous experience in the cotton South. In recovering the detailed history of the program’s implementation in Mexico, Olsson once again shows how a more locally responsive, socially inflected initiative was overtaken by a more totalizing industrial vision. Particularly perceptive in this fascinating chapter is his argument for the role played by the administration of Mexican president Miguel Alemán. Rockefeller agronomists presented Alemán’s Corn Commission a choice between two corn varieties they had developed: an open-pollinated one, appropriate for small, poor farmers who could save and replant seed each year, or a hybrid that required farmers to buy new seed from government suppliers for each crop. Alemán favored the latter, thereby consolidating control of a peasantry that might otherwise seek to challenge a burgeoning one-party state. The decline of “peasant-friendly plant breeding” (146), then, was not the totalizing imperial vision of the foreign philanthropist, but rather the result of a controlling clientelism in the service of a consolidating corporatist state. Here, as it does so often, the book provides an important corrective to a too-simple conventional wisdom.

As a whole, *Agrarian Crossings* is not only a crucial rethinking of the place of Mexico in some of the most iconic U.S. agrarian projects of the twentieth century, but it is also a fascinating provocation for how scholars should understand rural histories beyond the methodological straitjacket of the nation-state—and therefore how rural histories should be incorporated into the study of the U.S. in the world. As Olsson asks, “is it perhaps appropriate to consider the U.S. South as the northernmost reach of the Latin American and Caribbean world?” (5). It is a question this brilliant book will no doubt spur future scholars to take up.

Review by Julie M. Weise, University of Oregon

In *Remaking the Rural World*, Tore Olsson illuminates a two-decade conversation between Mexican and U.S. reformers about the relative importance of land redistribution versus technical assistance in solving the problems of rural poverty. In so doing, he charts the twists and turns that led both countries to definitively choose the latter by the start of the Cold War—an outcome that had stunning consequences for the shape of U.S. development strategies abroad in subsequent decades.

The book makes two key contributions. First, Olsson intervenes in the historiographies of New Deal rural reform and Mexico's land redistributions of the 1930s, depicting that decade as a moment of real possibility when engagement with Mexico pulled some New Dealers to the left in their willingness to entertain more sweeping strategies for land reform in the U.S. South. Second and even more exciting, by taking the Cold War as the endpoint rather than the start of a history of U.S.-led international rural development, Olsson offers a surprising pre-history to the Green Revolution, a technical assistance program that ultimately drove millions of the world's small-scale farmers to abandon their lands. In Olsson's convincing telling, the eventually disastrous "high modernist" Green Revolution of the 1950s and 1960s actually began "with a distinctively 'low modernist' sheen" in the previous decade in the rural U.S. South and Mexico (130). There, the first wave of largely Southern agronomist reformers were much more sensitive to the particularities of local conditions and the needs of smaller farmers. Ultimately, the exigencies of the Cold War shifted the balance of power in favor of Midwestern agronomists, whose solutions proved a poor fit not only for Mexico but also for the many countries to which they were exported in subsequent years.

The book begins with an introductory chapter based on secondary literature that draws smart parallels between the histories of the rural U.S. South and Mexico in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Olsson convincingly compares the demands of U.S. Southern Populists with those of Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata's Plan de Ayala, tracing the demise of each into a "conservative interregnum of the 1920s," followed by the 1929 market crash that "abruptly awakened the political elite from this contented reverie" (37). Chapters Two and Three explore the 1930s traffic in ideas about rural reform from Mexico to the U.S. South and then vice versa. Olsson depicts the former, northbound flow of ideas as more significant because it opened up unexpectedly radical possibilities for reform in certain New Deal agencies such as the Farm Security Administration (71).

The book's following two chapters advance Olsson's most powerful argument, in which he breaks us out of our Cold War framework for understanding the Green Revolution. This argument has several intriguing components. First, Olsson finds that the technological turn in rural reform ideologies began in the U.S. South in the 1940s, and from there was exported to Mexico. Second, Olsson argues for a more nuanced understanding of 'Americanization' in the historiography of the United States and the World. He suggests that historians must nuance this concept considerably by asking which U.S. region's version of 'America' becomes exported in any given instance. In this case, he shows that Southern agronomists dominated the ranks of the Rockefeller Foundation's General Education Board, whose model of development in the rural U.S. South had surprising sensitivity to local concerns. The insights from this program were transferred, largely by white Southerners, to the foundation's Mexican Agricultural Program (MAP) and its efforts to improve corn production on Mexico's *ejidos*, shared agricultural plots that had resulted from post-revolutionary land redistribution. Meanwhile, Midwestern agronomists who favored wheat production and top-down development models vied for control of the MAP. Olsson demonstrates this dynamic through an unexpectedly fascinating discussion of competitor corn breeds, one more suited to large producers and the

other to small farmers. By the late 1940s, the foundation's desire for a more universally exportable model of agricultural development gave the Midwesterners control of the agenda. Thus, the 'Americanization' of the world's agricultural landscapes was really its Midwesternization; had it been a Southernization instead, things might have turned out differently for millions of peasants the world over.

Moving from rural agriculture to rural infrastructure, Chapter Six documents Mexican leaders' admiration for the Tennessee Valley Authority's large-scale dam and infrastructure development projects in the 1940s. Interestingly, this enthusiasm was shared even by the left wing of Mexico's mid-century political spectrum. Unlike Chapters Two and Three, which cover south-north and north-south flows of development ideas in the 1930s, Chapter Six has no companion. "The one-sidedness of the river valley dialogue," with influence flowing from the United States to Mexico but not in the other direction, represented a durable shift rightward in the politics of rural development in both countries (190).

At its heart, *Remaking the Rural World* is a transnational intellectual history of policymakers, agricultural scientists, engineers, and government- and foundation-based reformers. Its main sources, drawn from both Mexico and the United States, are the records of government bureaucracies and the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as the personal papers of the reformers whose work he tracks. As such, the book's characters are almost exclusively professional men—white men in the United States, and elite men in Mexico. At times, readers absolutely do catch glimpses of more grassroots actors, such as an interracial team of Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU) officials who traveled to Mexico for inspiration during the 1930s. The focus on middling and powerful men is understandable for a policy study of the mid-twentieth century. Still, I wish Olsson had directly addressed the matter of his text's silences, unavoidable though they may have been.

Olsson's transnational research strategy allows him to follow these fascinating policy conversations back and forth across the border, and in turn, to successfully prove his two major arguments. Given this significant accomplishment, it is unfortunate that Olsson makes other claims that rest on shakier grounds. The book begins by lamenting the ways that historians have been bound by the same borders as nation-states (1). Olsson's passionate case against these intellectual borders is well taken, but it is also shared by the authors of countless transnational historical works that fill his footnotes. Later, at the start of Chapter Four, Olsson claims that that the transnational turn in historical method has left the U.S. South between Reconstruction and the end of World War Two "largely untouched" (101). Yet just a few pages later, he cites a group of prominent historians (Andrew Zimmerman, Mary Renda, and Paul Kramer) who have in fact touched the period, showing how Southern Jim Crow practices were exported abroad with U.S. empire. Olsson's footnotes and acknowledgments demonstrate that he is steeped in the literature and scholarly community of transnational history, making the book's overly grandiose claims about the novelty of his approach all the more inexplicable. The language of 'building upon,' though less dramatic, would have been far more appropriate.

This overreach certainly does not negate the book's substantial accomplishments. While Olsson's transnational approach is not as unique as claimed, the book's particular use of that approach generates a profound historiographical contribution. After proving his main arguments through meticulous historical analysis, Olsson's moving epilogue makes a compelling case for the almost unimaginably significant consequences of the Midwesterners' triumph in setting the terms of the Green Revolution in Mexico and beyond. He briefly surveys these consequences, from mass urbanization in Mexico and throughout the developing world to migration to the United States, from the black migration out of the rural U.S. South to the 'urban crisis' of the 1960s. In so doing, Olsson reminds readers that "the destruction of peasant

agricultures was the product of political choices, not free market economics or technological determinism” (199). I am convinced. Olsson’s findings will stick with me, changing my understanding of the late twentieth century writ large.

Author's Response by Tore C. Olsson, University of Tennessee

It is a tremendous honor to see my work discussed and debated in an H-Diplo roundtable, and I am deeply thankful to Tom Maddux for organizing this forum and commissioning work from such fantastic reviewers. Indeed, without the prior scholarship of those reviewers, this book would never have existed—and that is no exaggeration. Jeffrey Pilcher's work in food history provided my original entry point into Mexican history as a whole.¹ Julie Weise's groundbreaking study of migration made it possible for me to conceive of the U.S. South and Mexico as entangled places.² Sterling Evans's terrific book *Bound in Twine* was, without doubt, the model of transnational agricultural history that I hoped to emulate from this project's very beginning.³ Christy Thornton, my compatriot in midcentury studies of Mexico in the world, has been an endless source of inspiration and encouragement.⁴ Nicole Sackley's scholarship on the intellectual history of development did much to help me wrap my head around the ironies and complexities of that multifaceted campaign.⁵ And I only wish I could have had the benefit of reading Jody Pavilack's forthcoming book on Latin America's engagement with the New Deal while I wrote my own; I know that mine would be far better contextualized and balanced if I had.⁶ Considering how my scholarship truly stands on the shoulders of each reviewer, I am so thankful to them for reading my book closely and taking the time to write up these thoughtful and probing essays.

Reading any review of your work is exciting; reading words of praise and commendation, especially as an anxious first-time author, is indescribably thrilling. I take all the reviewers' compliments to heart, but two things are particularly meaningful. First, several highlighted the rich archival grounding of the book. This happens to be rather unlikely praise, because I in fact came to archival research quite late in my graduate

¹ See especially Jeffrey Pilcher, *Que Vivan Los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998) and Jeffrey Pilcher, *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

² Julie Weise, *Corazón de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South Since 1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

³ Sterling Evans, *Bound in Twine: The History and Ecology of the Henequen-Wheat Complex for Mexico and the American and Canadian Plains, 1880-1950* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007).

⁴ See Thornton's forthcoming book *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming), and her recent article, "A Mexican International Economic Order? Tracing the Hidden Roots of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 9:3 (Winter 2018).

⁵ Nicole Sackley, "The Road from Serfdom: Economic Storytelling and Narratives of India in the Rise of Neoliberalism," *History and Technology* 31:4 (December 2015); Nicole Sackley, "Village Models: Etawah, India and the Making and Remaking of Development in the Early Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 37:4 (September 2013); Nicole Sackley, "The Village as Cold War Site: Experts, Development, and the History of Rural Reconstruction," *Journal of Global History* 6:3 (2011).

⁶ Jody Pavilack, *Globalizing the New Deal: Transnational Links Among U.S. and Latin American Progressives, 1932-1954* (forthcoming).

training, having worked on the 1980s and '90s for years and relying only upon newspapers and oral history interviews as primary sources. Rather embarrassingly, it was only in 2010 that I first stepped – uneasily – into an archive to begin work on the dissertation that provided the basis for *Agrarian Crossings*. I think it is certain that this anxiety about my inexperience with archival research led to an over-researched book, as in later years I planned additional archival trips primarily to prove to imagined critics that I, too, could work among boxes and folders and finding aids.

Secondly, I find particularly cheering the opinions that the book is “an absolute pleasure to read” (Pavilack) and “beautifully written” (Pilcher), for if my dissertation was many things, it would never be described as such. The transition from dissertation to book, like that countless other scholars, involved a great deal of additional research and structural reframing, but I devoted the greatest share of my time to rewriting its story as a narrative with characters and action. That was no easy task, and made for countless hundreds of hours of wrestling with bulky and jargon-laden paragraphs. Though no reader would confuse *Agrarian Crossings* for anything but a scholarly monograph, I had always hoped to reach an audience beyond the specialists in my various fields. Whether or not the book will do so remains uncertain, but the encouragement of my roundtable reviewers fosters at least some optimism on my behalf.

The reviewers also pose a number of pointed questions about the book and its historiographical significance, and I would like to address a few of those here. A frequent concern is: What kind of a study is this? Is it a work of transnational history? Comparative history? Or is it a history of comparisons? Are there ultimately distinctions between those, or merely “thin semantic difference[s]” (Evans)? I believe the differences are great, and worth explicating. I understand my book first and foremost as a work of transnational history, a methodology defined (to me, at least) by multinational and multilingual archival research and contextualization in multiple national historiographies. (And here I build on the work of many, many scholars of the last two decades; I am deeply regretful that Weise states that I do not sufficiently address my debts to those who came before. In hoping to speak to a broader readership, I was likely guilty of exaggerating the novelty of my work, although I do believe the thorough endnotes balance out some of the flamboyance of the text.) But if the book is primarily a transnational history, the word ‘transnational’ does not appear in the introduction, nor particularly frequently in the text, as Evans notes. That was not an accident. I chose to avoid it largely for stylistic reasons, believing it to be a rather faddish term often abused, and a word with the power to nauseate and dissuade those who have grown weary of the transnational turn. (I have enough colleagues in that camp to recognize that this is a significant number of people.) Ultimately, I hoped to *show* rather than *tell*. I had little suspected that academic readers would not recognize it for what it is, considering the book’s title, subject matter, and its appearance in Princeton University Press’s “America in the World” series, with its trademark rainbow cover text linking it to such stellar methodological predecessors as David Ekbladh’s *The Great American Mission*, Andrew Zimmerman’s *Alabama in Africa*, and Adam Ewing’s *The Age of Garvey*, among others.⁷

⁷ David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Adam Ewing, *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

Though I am grateful that Evans regards the book as a “great work of comparative history,” I do not really see it as such. Although I employ comparative methodology in chapter one in order to set the stage for the following five chapters, I find comparative history to be a deeply problematic approach that ultimately reinforces national containers rather than questioning them. As Micol Seigel laid out in her 2005 instructive essay “Beyond Compare,” for decades the approach of comparative historians was to imagine nations as self-contained and isolated units capable of comparison with other such units.⁸ To use Seigel’s example, comparative historians believed it possible to compare racial systems in Brazil and the United States, rarely acknowledging that those systems were fully entangled and forged in relation to the other. Therefore, I do not imagine my book as a comparative history of the New Deal and *Cardenismo*, or the U.S. and Mexican green revolutions. Such comparative studies might be provocative but ultimately meaningless, because any such neat juxtaposition would disguise the impact each had on the other when they took place.

Agrarian Crossings is therefore a work of transnational history, political history, intellectual history, and, at times, environmental history—yet it is admittedly not a work of social history. As Wise points out, “the book’s characters are almost exclusively professional men—white men in the United States, and elite men in Mexico.” While I would argue that many of those professional men came from humble backgrounds and possessed organic knowledge of rural poverty and inequality, we hear few voices of *campesinos* and sharecroppers themselves. And I will confess that such silences caused me great discomfort as I wrote the book. At times the problem was a lack of sources, yet at other times I had trouble integrating the voices I did find with each chapter’s argument and still keeping it under the tight word limit imposed by my editor. Ultimately, I made the decision to tell the story from the high altitude of top policymakers and foundation officers. Whether that decision was justified is uncertain; Wise is very much correct that a brief meditation on silenced voices would greatly benefit the book, and I regret not having included it. My sincere hope is that social historians will grapple with *Agrarian Crossings* and fill in the large blank spaces. I would love to read a study of how Mexican revolutionary influences on the Farm Security Administration shaped the lived experiences of its thousands of clients; I would love to learn about how *braceros* understood the cotton plantations of Arkansas and East Texas in light of the various regions they called home. Such questions find few answers in my book, and await careful study by other scholars.

My primary goal in writing this book lay in overcoming some of the artificial intellectual boundaries that keep historians of the U.S. and Latin America from engaging in conversation about common and connected topics in their respective historiographies. But in doing so, does *Agrarian Crossings* isolate North America from the rest of the hemisphere and ultimately the world, segregating both the U.S. and Mexico from broader currents? Pavilack suggests that this is a possibility, particularly in the book’s lack of engagement with Soviet-inspired (or -directed) international Communism, the Popular Front, and multinational labor organizations, all of which overlap with the key years of action in the book. In Pavilack’s own research on the 1930s as a hemispheric moment, such linkages surely provide vital connective tissue and mediums of exchange. And I do not deny that they played a role in the U.S. and Mexico; Barry Carr’s pioneering work on this topic reveals as much.⁹ Yet many of the key actors that I studied kept a respectful distance from the Communist left. Within

⁸ Micol Seigel, “Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn,” *Radical History Review* 91 (Winter 2005): 62-90.

⁹ Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), those who did not were fired during agriculture secretary Henry Wallace's 1935 'purge' and were not around to witness the revival of agrarian reformism later in the decade. President Lázaro Cárdenas himself was often sympathetic to Mexico's Communist Party but was always certain to contain and co-opt their political power. And undoubtedly international Communism was anathema within the Rockefeller Foundation. Yet Pavilack is entirely correct that the webs of communication and influence that entangled the U.S. and Mexico during the interwar era were at times spun outside the continent (and hemisphere), particularly in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, I found little smoking-gun documentation that those links were the most decisive.

Were agrarian reformers the only activists to cross between and compare the struggles of the US and Mexico during the 1930s? Hardly. As the recent work of Karin Roseblatt, Megan Threlkeld, Ruben Flores, Wilbert Ahlstedt, and others have shown, there was a vigorous dialogue on social matters ranging from feminism to racial science to civil rights.¹⁰ I credit such scholars in the book, acknowledging that my protagonists were but a few within the larger crowd of border-crossers. But I was largely silent as to the role of organized labor in that exchange. As Pavilack notes, workers' organizations were everywhere, from Vicente Lombardo Toledano to John Lewis and beyond. I deeply regret not having discovered Gigi Peterson's dissertation on that topic; it would have helped me make sense of many of the labor unionists I discovered traveling alongside the agrarian reformers.¹¹ And Pavilack is right too that the lines between those groups often blurred, with labor leaders actively engaged in rural issues. It is another key silence of the book that I wish I could go back and fill.

Last, did the rest of Latin America matter? Absolutely. Pavilack makes reference to the 1942 Inter-American Conference on Agriculture in Mexico City. That meeting, which included representatives from the U.S. and most Latin American nations, came at a watershed moment in both agrarian politics and agricultural science. From its name, one might assume that this was a technical meeting of scientific experts, yet because of its timing – in the wake of the agrarian unrest of the 1930s – politics was at the forefront. Mexico's revolutionary agronomists emerged as confident voices for marrying science and redistributive politics; the New Deal's agrarian reformers peddled their own socially-conscious vision of a renewed agriculture. And countless other Latin American representatives debated their own approach to resolving issues of production and fair distribution. In addition to the long list of prominent attendees Pavilack names, I will add the renowned historian Frank Tannenbaum and USDA social scientist M.L. Wilson, who reconnected during the conference—they had not seen one another since collaborating on Tannenbaum's tenancy bill in 1935—and made plans to bring Lázaro Cárdenas to the United States. I spent months of research fleshing out the conference and its significance, yet it is virtually absent from the final manuscript—cut with great regret. That Pavilack will tell this story and many others in her forthcoming book is therefore deeply gratifying.

¹⁰ See Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Megan Threlkeld, *Pan American Women: U.S. Internationalists and Revolutionary Mexico* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), Ruben Flores, *Backroads Pragmatists: Mexico's Melting Pot and Civil Rights in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), Wilbert Terry Ahlstedt, "John Collier and Mexico in the Shaping of U.S. Indian Policy: 1934-1945" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 2015).

¹¹ Gigi Peterson, "Grassroots Good Neighbors: Cross Border Connections between Mexican and U.S. Labor and Civil Rights Activists, 1936-1945" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1998).

Roundtable XX-42

This response, overlong as it already is, cannot possibly cover all of the sharp and insightful questions raised by my five reviewers. I very much hope we can continue this conversation in person and in print in the coming years. And let me once again extend my deepest thanks to Tom Maddux for organizing, Diane Labrosse for editing, and Sackley, Evans, Pavilack, Weise, Pilcher, and Thornton for participating in this exciting and fruitful forum.