TRANSATLANTIC TOURISM: AMERICAN VISITORS TO EUROPE IN THE LONG TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Transatlantic Tourism explores the meaning of Europe for American travelers. Focusing primarily on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the project investigates how Europe became a commodity ready for purchase at local travel agencies and how this product materialized in the mobilities and modes of transportation on which travel critically depends. It therefore targets travel that is doubly transnational in character: transatlantic and cross-border within Europe.

There are a number of reasons to deem this research worthwhile. First, tourism became a major business in the course of the twentieth century. Second, Europe has long been the world’s leading tourist destination. In 2002, the Mediterranean alone attracted 228 million visitors, making it the single most popular region with travelers. Tourism also became the ultimate symbol of what it means to be an affluent, twentieth-century citizen throughout the industrialized world and “a quintessential feature of the twentieth century’s globalizing world.”

To understand the global ramifications of modern tourism, it is imperative to take transcontinental flows into consideration. This provides a third reason, namely that by 1885 the number of Americans crossing the Atlantic annually for the purpose of tourism reached over 100,000.

A fourth and final reason for this project is that doubly transnational tourism has received scant attention. Tourism history remains predominantly national in character, and studies that do integrate a transnational dimension most often adopt merely a bilateral framework. The available literature includes excellent bilateral studies, such as Neill Rosendorf’s work on American tourism to Franco Spain and Christopher Endy’s Cold War Holidays. That approach does little, however, to enlighten us on how Europe the product acquired meaning through travel.

Transatlantic Tourism pays careful attention to the role of the “transnational travel constituency” along with that of the travelers themselves. Endy has defined the former as “a loose alliance of business groups, media elites, and government officials operating within and


across national borders.”5 We may think of travel agencies, transportation companies, or specialized travel magazines. The decision whether to travel remained individual, but a whole tourist industry emerged to try to steer that decision in certain directions rather than others.

One could even more forcefully argue that the structures on which tourism depended maintained and reinforced the shape of Europe as a tourist product in patterned, enduring flows. Despite frequent acknowledgment of the importance of this aspect, the material side of tourism has not received much attention. Orvar Löfgren’s, *On Holiday*, one of the best studies in the field, stands as a typical example. In discussing what he calls “tourist technologies,” he keenly observes that “[m]aybe it is the lightweight airiness of a few days at a beach or a hike in the wilderness that makes us forget the massive infrastructures needed to provide such moments on a large scale.” But although he directs attention to the role of the bus and the airplane as “charter tour pioneers” after World War II, he falls victim to the same forgetfulness he laments in other scholars.6

*Transatlantic Tourism* makes materiality and the mobility it supports an integral part of tourism history. It investigates the representation and experience of the transatlantic crossing and the impact of the changeover from collective to more individual means of transportation. The steamship companies, for example, equipped their ships with garages to allow customers to bring along their own automobiles. Building on earlier patterns established in connection with the bike, cars supposedly allowed travelers to avoid the usual nodes in tourist routes where one would chiefly bump into fellow Americans and to travel instead to European rural heartlands, where one could still encounter true Europeans untouched by the homogenizing forces of globalization. In short, changes in travelers’ mobility would bring along changes in the Europe they visited.

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