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The First Faith-Based Movement: The Religious Roots of Social Progressivism in America (1880-1912) in Historical Perspective

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This re-evaluation of the published writings of Richard T. Ely, Josiah Strong, and Jane Addams during the Progressive era (1880-1912) explores the themes of religious idealism and nationalism that figured prominently in the early formulation of modern liberal reform ideology in the United States. A specific focus will be placed on tracing themes of the America's millennial destiny and how they gradually evolved into prophecies of social transformation through the applied use of social science knowledge. Beyond merely satisfying historical curiosity, this inquiry provides a new perspective from which to consider the fierce clashes over social welfare policy which occurred in the twentieth century.

Key words: Progressive era, religious idealism, Richard T. Ely, Josiah Strong, Jane Addams, nationalism, social welfare policy

At the dawn of the Progressive era, the first generation of modern social reformers in America constructed compelling arguments for activism in the social sphere that were replete with the intertwined symbolism of nationalism and liberal Protestantism. In the closing decades of the 19th century, the boundaries that distinguish disciplines within the social sciences had not yet been established, and there was a remarkable degree of collaboration between academics, Protestant clergy and prominent figures in the settlement movement. Whatever their primary institutional allegiances, reform-minded individuals attended the same conferences, worked together on completing studies and were united by the shared the vision that the so-called scientific study of social problems could bring about a new era, where poverty would be

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gradually eliminated, along with its attendant social pathologies.

The seminal study on the social gospel emanating from the mainline Protestant churches was penned by A. M. Schlesinger, Sr. (1930/1967), who later encouraged one of his students at Harvard, Henry F. May, to pursue a more extensive study of the topic as a doctoral dissertation. May (1949/1967) later published the dissertation as the monograph, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, where he concluded that the progressive clergy of the mainline Protestant denominations provided “intellectual and moral leadership” that “left permanent effects on American social thinking” (p. xvii). Charles Beard (1934) was more emphatic in drawing the connection between the Progressivism of 1912 and the New Deal: “the Christian Soldiers at the Bull Moose convention wrote a platform. If anyone wants a background for the New Deal, let him read that platform from preamble to benediction” (p. 14, see also Morone, 2003). While numerous prominent historians and political scientists, both past and present, have explored the development of the reformist thought that coincided with emergence of the modern social sciences (Carson, 1990; Chamberlain, 1932/1971; Chambers, 1963; Frederick, 1976; Greek, 1992; Smith, 2000), this article revisits forgotten or neglected religious roots of American social progressivism that are foundational to the development of reformist thought among modern liberals.

The paper opens with a brief exposition of the historical, religious and intellectual context from which the social gospel emerged, followed by a textual analysis of the published writings of three prominent leaders of social reform movement during the Progressive era (1880-1912): Josiah Strong (1847-1916), Richard T. Ely (1854-1943), and Jane Addams (1860-1935). A particular emphasis will be placed on examining their discussion on the leadership roles of social experts in American society and their prophecies for the eradication of social problems through the applied use of social science knowledge. In the concluding section, I suggest that certain characteristic modes of thinking and speaking among later generations of modern liberals retained the postmillennialist hopes for social transformation through the applied use of social science knowledge which these representative figures of

the Progressive era first articulated. It is my contention that by re-examining the religious foundations of American progressivism and liberalism, it is possible to obtain a broader historical perspective from which some of the developments associated with the recent period of conservative backlash against welfare state expansion can be better understood.

The Context: Liberal Protestantism and Social Reform in the 19th Century

The religious historian Robert T. Handy (1971/1984) observed that native-born Protestants in late 19th century America “saw themselves as belonging to both a denominational tradition and to the national religion, a religion of civilization—[and] they experienced little or no tension between them” (p. 99). In regard to the “national religion,” the prevailing faith in the inevitability of social progress in America was predicated on strict adherence to classical liberal economic principals, rather than a preference for affirmative government. This “ideological amalgamation between Protestant denominationalism and Americanism” (Mead, 1956, p. 67) continued long after the Civil War era and remained a strong ideological force throughout the period of our interest (see also Schlesinger, 1930/1967; Wuthnow, 1988). Correspondingly, throughout the 19th century, liberal Protestants played a dominant role in American philanthropy and social reform efforts; their justifications for embarking upon various endeavors of social improvement ranging from abolitionism to temperance were closely linked to Christian theology and civil religion (Leiby, 1985).

Given the zeal with which liberal Protestant abolitionists had previously attacked the national sin of slavery, it is not surprising that a subsequent generation of reformers in the post-Civil War period would turn their attention to a new set of social problems which they believed threatened the nation’s progress toward its millennial destiny. In 1894, the prominent social gospel minister Washington Gladden tellingly commented, “now that slavery is out of the way ... the questions that concern the welfare of our free laborers are coming forward ... It is plain that the pulpit must have something to say about them” (as cited in Dorn, 1967, p. 10). But, the turn

of liberal Protestants toward the problems of urbanization, industrialization and immigration was not immediate; instead, a triumphal mood prevailed for nearly two decades after the war's end that was characterized by a renewed sense of the adequacy of the American political system.

May (1949/1967) referred to the period between 1861 and 1875 as the "Summit of Complacency," when the Protestant orthodoxy continued to assure the "churchgoing middle-class" that "America was still being guided by the Unseen Hand" (p. 63). However, by 1875 the political participation of immigrants was beginning to shift the balance of political power, with machine politicians of the Democratic party taking control of many large cities and helping elect the party's candidates in three of four presidential elections after 1876 (Marty, 1970). Nonetheless, the prevailing belief in America's millennial destiny was so strong that it would take a series of violent labor battles (Haymarket, 1886; Homestead, 1892; Pullman, 1894) and severe economic downturns before native-born Protestants recognized ameliorative interventions were necessary to quell the simmering unrest among the immigrant working classes in the nation's burgeoning cities.

Coinciding with the emergence of social consciousness in American Protestantism during this period was an enormous growth in religious participation in general. Wuthnow (1988) estimated that between 1870 and 1918, the total number of churches in the nation grew from slightly over 70,000 to more than 225,000. Although it was an era of proliferating sects, it was also increasingly apparent that the main division within American Protestantism was between what Marty (1970) has labeled as its "private" and "public" parties (see also Fox, 1993). The private party generally held to a premillennial eschatology, where God's kingdom would be established outside of history (typically by virtue of a catastrophe or apocalyptic process), while members of the public party associated with the social gospel subscribed to a postmillennialist perspective where the mundane sphere would gradually be transformed by the efforts of humankind.

Maintaining a fidelity to the post-millennialism and social activism to which they were by nature predisposed, members of the public party constructed arguments employing religious and secular rationales for setting the nation on the right course

after being subject to the vagaries of the historical process. They envisioned a new dispensation where the applied use of social knowledge would hasten progress toward a perfected society. In this study, I will refer to these tendencies of thought among social progressives as the "reformist faith" (Hollinger, 1989; Niebuhr, 1944; Niebuhr, 1957). Perhaps Bruno Lasker (1922), an associate editor of *The Survey*, provides the best summation of the heterogeneous characteristics of these carriers of the reformist faith,

His [sic] aim is not only that of preventing hardship but, more frequently and more important, that of trying to carry into the new era the essential gains of the old. He deepens and strengthens the streams of idealism from one generation to another. ... In short, the social reformer is not only a crusader but also an engineer. His functions permit comparison with those of the artist and the husbandman, the scholar and the priest. (p. 159)

Although academic and public intellectuals with progressive social agendas would gradually abandon the use of Protestant symbolism to legitimize their aims as the twentieth century unfolded, their idea of social progress retained the stamp of their predecessors, who imagined a world undergoing "gradual redemption" through the development of social policy and programmatic interventions based on research. Quandt (1973) coined the apt phrase "the secularization of Postmillennialism" to describe this cast of mind (see also Tiryakian, 1993). In the next sections we will examine the careers and social thought of several of the figures that played central roles in shaping the reformist faith.

Josiah Strong, Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel

While he is not presently recognized as one of the main intellectual leaders of the social gospel movement, Josiah Strong's (1847-1916) published writing provides an opportunity to comprehend the connections between liberal Protestantism and sociological study. Although Strong lacked

the intellectual gravitas of his better-known colleagues within American Protestantism, he played a central role in organizing the conferences and publications where key figures in the social reform movement presented their research and articulated their visions of social change (Towes, 1976).

Strong completed his divinity studies at Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio, where Lyman Beecher served as President until 1850 and whose influence apparently reverberated long after his tenure ended. Beecher was the author of a widely distributed and influential tract entitled *A Plea for the West* (1835), a work that was notable for both its animus toward Catholicism and his prophecies for America's central role in the Protestant evangelization of the world. Strong's most recognized work, *Our Country* (first edition published in 1885), is characterized by the prevailing theme of the danger to "American civilization" posed by the immigrant masses, and as such it is correctly viewed as within the same tradition of thought as Beecher's earlier tractate.

It is worth noting that Strong completed and published *Our Country* with support from wealthy capitalists under the auspices of the American Home Mission Society, whose goal was to convert the nation to Protestant Christianity through the distribution of Bibles, books and the funding of domestic missions (Griffin, 1957). The first edition of *Our Country* was published two months after the labor violence of the Haymarket riot, an event that deeply shocked the native-born middle classes and lent a heightened sense of urgency to Strong's alarmist message (Boyer, 1978, p. 131).

Our Country is significant because it stands as one of the earliest examples of a book targeting a popular audience where descriptive statistics were used to buttress a morally charged call for social reform. Another important feature of the book is the centrality of the war metaphor as a means to draw attention to a social "crisis" and to generate popular support for policies and interventions to eradicate the crisis (see also Addams, 1907; James, 1906/1971; Leuchtenburg, 1995). A conservative theologian who penned the introduction alludes to Strong's use of the military metaphor:

Our whole history is a succession of crises. Our national salvation demands in supreme exercise of

military virtues ... This volume presents ... with a power which can scarcely be exceeded ... the truth that the Christian enterprise the moral conquest of this land needs to be conducted with the self-abandonment which determined men would throw into the critical moment in the critical battle of the critical campaign for a nation's endangered life. What the campaign in Pennsylvania was to the Civil War, what the battle of Gettysburg was to that campaign ... such is the present opportunity to the Christian civilization of this country. (as cited in Strong, 1891/1963, p. 9)

Strong's contemporaries testified to the book's wide influence, with Walter Rauschenbusch (1957) describing *Our Country* as lifting "the entire home mission problem to a higher level" (p. 105). Another colleague recalled the book as "in a way, epoch-making" (Matthews, 1927, p. 378). Elsewhere, Reinhold Niebuhr (n.d.) was less flattering and referred to a later edition of the book as "religio-empirical theology."

At the outset of *Our Country*, Strong emphatically stated, "the progress of civilization meant the increasing centralization of human affairs and a growing interdependence of society's members on statistical data" (Strong 1891/1963, p. xxi; see also Strong, 1910, p. 41). In the book, Strong repeatedly and explicitly linked the importance of social science inquiry with the project of keeping America on its millennial course. For Strong, the task of recording accurate and detailed social data had a metaphysical importance. He referred to statistics as "God's alphabet," which would allow men to prophesize about the future by reading "their tendencies" (as cited in Muller, 1959, p. 189). In his peculiarly reverent attitude for statistics, it is possible to augur the origins of the belief in the transformative potential of social research that would animate the efforts of more secularly-oriented social progressives throughout most of the 20th century.

In a later tract entitled *The New Era; or, The Coming Kingdom* (1893), Strong reiterated the view that social knowledge was an indispensable aid for the reorganization of society and that educated, native-born, Protestants should lead the effort.

Our close relations with the ignorant, the degraded, the vicious, which it is impossible to escape, are forcing us

to do them good in self-defence [*sic*]. The very progress of civilization will yet make it impossible for good and respectable men to live in peace and comfort unless other men are good and respectable and comfortable. ... *It has been shown that we have come upon a sociological age of the world; that we shall not have social peace ... until we have social righteousness ... a higher and more complete organization of society would be in harmony with the laws of historical development* [*italics added*] [the church] must adapt new methods to new conditions and enter on the work with a burning enthusiasm for humanity. (Strong, 1893, pp. 345-348)

The implicit notions of race superiority found in Strong's call for management of the immigrant working classes were all too common among leaders of the Social Gospel movement; even Walter Rauschenbusch, the most eloquent theologian of the Social Gospel, believed the new professional class of social experts should be led by the "sure-footed Anglo-Saxon" and that ceding political power to the indigenous leadership of the immigrant working classes was a risk to be avoided (Rauschenbusch, 1896; see also Rauschenbusch, 1907/1910, p. 410). Elsewhere, a colleague of Rauschenbusch wrote more explicitly on the social control function of this new type of ethical reformer, "a democracy without expert guides presents an open field to demagogues ... there is a grave danger to the State when government is exposed to the caprice and contagion of the least intelligent but most numerous portion of the community" (Batten, 1909, pp. 191, 208).

Although brief, the preceding discussion of Strong's views provides a window from which to understand the religious basis for the belief in the providential potential of social science inquiry. The reader may rightly wonder to what degree these views prevailed among social reformers during the Progressive era; one need only review issues of a periodical edited by Strong, *Studies in the Gospel of the Kingdom* (published by the American Institute of Social Service), or *The Survey* to recognize that the reformist faith was also a commonly shared characteristic among a large number of mainstream academic social scientists and prominent leaders of the settlement movement.

Morality, Economics and Social Service: Richard T. Ely

Until the mid-19th century, colleges in the United States were established by Protestant denominations and were primarily concerned with preparing men for the ministry. For those without a plan to enter the ministry, these colleges provided an education that was predicated “on the assumption that nature and society could best be understood through the prism of Christian theology” (Roberts & Turner, 2000, pp., 20, 33; see also Jencks & Riesman, 1968; Veysey, 1963). As the century came to a close, the trend toward secularization within American higher education was gaining momentum and truth claims arising out of the academe were increasingly based on the ethic of scientific inquiry. However, during this transitional period it was not uncommon for professors and public intellectuals to voice an expectation that social science research would invariably confirm biblical truths. The experience and writings of economist Richard T. Ely (1864-1943) will provide an exemplary opportunity to understand the early development of the reformist faith and how it was associated with the idea of using social research in the development of social policy.

While Ely’s social thought hasn’t been subjected to the same degree of scrutiny as his better known and more eloquent contemporaries who authored books that are now recognized as the seminal texts of modern liberalism (such as Walter Lippman, *Drift and Mastery*; Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life*; or Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*), it would be a mistake to discount his influence on reformist thought. Among his students were a considerable number Progressive era luminaries, including future president Woodrow Wilson; Albion Small, appointed department head of Sociology at the University of Chicago in 1893; and the renowned labor economist John R. Commons.

At Johns Hopkins, Ely developed strong connections within the Social Gospel movement, in particular with Walter Rauschenbusch, who described the young lecturer as “a simple and serious man, a convinced Christian and one of the top experts on national economy” (as cited in Minus, 1988, p. 64; see also Frederick, 1976, p. 150). And while it cannot be proven, it seems very likely Jane Addams became acquainted with Ely during the two winters she spent in Baltimore in the late 1880’s and attended lectures at Hopkins.

The young Ely was one of a growing number of Americans who traveled to Germany to complete a doctoral education, an experience which left an indelible imprint on his social and economic views. Under the tutelage of German professors, Ely was introduced to a historicist approach to economic analysis, which would become the hallmark of his academic research and popular writings. Ely was also highly impressed by the power wielded by the German professorate, who in addition to their academic responsibilities served as experts within government bureaucracies and on investigative committees (Ely, 1938; Rodgers, 1998). Perhaps not surprisingly, throughout his career Ely strove to establish spaces for social and economic experts in American government, where public administration remained the province of political appointees under the patronage system.

Two years after earning his doctorate degree, Ely was hired as a lecturer at the recently established Johns Hopkins University. There he taught courses in political economy in the Department of History and Politics, chaired by Herbert Baxter Adams, which was an environment that undoubtedly reinforced the young professor's tendency toward a historicist approach to the study of economics (Cunningham, 1981). Early on it was clear that Ely was intent on exerting his influence as both an academic and a public intellectual. The ambitious young lecturer was a tireless researcher and a prolific writer, whose works were published in both academic journals and popular magazines.

Ely wrote two types of articles for popular audiences, the first being abbreviated versions of his academic pieces, and the second concerned with generating enthusiasm among reform-minded audiences. In these he made frequent use of biblical themes and Christian symbolism to justify and emphasize his positions, features that were noticeably absent from his academic publications. While Ely's inspiring popular writings attracted enthusiastic supporters, they rankled many of his peers who found his rhetoric and policy activism inconsistent with the rising ethic of detached scientific inquiry in the academe.

In an early popular article, "The Past and Present of Political Economy" (1883), Ely took aim at *laissez-faire* capitalism and the abysmal conditions of industrial laborers that he associated with its practice. Written as a polemic against the prevailing

orthodox views of American economics, the piece catapulted him toward notoriety and controversy. Present in the essay are themes that would consistently recur in his writing: the need for a revitalized Christian ethic among public servants and academic leaders to resolve class conflict; the development of a social science knowledge base by a professional class of investigators; and the argument for an activist role of the state in the social and economic realms, based on the findings of social science research.

In a later monograph, *The Social Law of Service* (1896), Ely more pointedly argued that the social teachings of Christianity should serve as a guide to social and business ethics. The publication consisted of several lectures Ely gave to audiences of religious reformers where he defined "social solidarity," a construct based on biblical teachings, where the interests of the community prevailed over those of the individual. The idea of creating social solidarity was a central theme among leaders of the social gospel movement, and it was also found in more secularized form in the social ethics later articulated by Jane Addams (1902) and Edward A. Ross (1907). In the excerpt below, Ely (1896) explained the concept:

Social Solidarity means the oneness of human interests; it signifies the dependence of man upon man, both in good things and evil things. Social solidarity means that our true welfare is not an individual matter purely ... we thrive only in commonwealth ... [it] signifies not only that man needs association with his fellow-men, but that he shares with them their sins and sufferings ... There is no such thing as purely individual sin, or purely individual righteousness. (pp. 127-128)

In *The Social Law of Service*, as elsewhere in his early writings, Ely's rhetorical style is not unlike the exhortations of an evangelist, appropriating phrases from the "Lord's prayer" and the "Sermon on the Mount." He rebuked the Protestant churches for their failure to provide instruction for ethical conduct in "worldly matters" and lamented the prevalence of unethical behavior in business dealings, especially among "professed Christians" (as cited in Everett, 1946, p. 82).

In Ely's Christian-oriented model of political economy, the profit motive was to be replaced by the "law of service." Ely

argued that when the members of society grasped the social component of Christ's message to love one's neighbor as oneself (as informed by the findings of the social sciences and sociology) and acted accordingly, the nation would "be regenerated" and "exalted by righteousness" (Ely, 1896, p. 276). Ely envisioned a central role for the academically trained expert in effecting this social transformation. This new type of expert would pursue the rigorous study of social and economic phenomena out of a deep commitment to the social teachings of Christianity. Ely (1896) believed this type of leadership would eventually prevail over the partisan politics that impeded social progress.

If we encourage those who have the opportunities and the brains to carry on studies designed to show what the Gospel means in all the details of modern life, if we take pains to keep in touch with them ... feeling our way cautiously, but advancing at the same time fearlessly, we shall find our vision growing continually larger. (pp. 272-273)

Ely pursued his reformist vision with relentless energy and enthusiasm; although only a lecturer at the time, he played a central role in establishing the American Economics Association (AEA) in 1885. Ely envisioned the AEA as a body of progressive economists that would "accomplish in America what the Verein für Socialpolitik has done in Germany" (as cited in Rodgers, 1998, p. 102) by establishing a system of governance based on social and economic research that would inform an activist role of the state (Ely, 1936, 1938).

At the inaugural meetings of the AEA, Ely pushed hard to establish the association according to his activist vision, which provoked opposition from members who sought a professional body to air and debate economic viewpoints. While many members within the fledgling association were sympathetic to the Ely's reformist views, they opposed his plan to make the AEA the vehicle to achieve them. In contrast, Ely's conservative enemies were unabashedly derisive of Ely and his agenda. Simon Newcomb, a member of the Hopkins faculty and bitter opponent of Ely, characterized the initial incarnation of the AEA as a "sort of a church, requiring for admission to its full communion a renunciation of ancient errors,

and an adhesion to a new creed" (as cited in Coats, 1959, p. 558; see also Newcomb, 1884).

Despite having published prodigiously, having supervised a large cadre of graduate students, and playing a central role in establishing the AEA, Ely failed to secure a tenured position at Johns Hopkins. Although Ely was stunned by the rejection, it set in motion a chain of events that would position him to become a key figure of the reform movement in the Midwest. Largely due to the efforts of a former student, Frederick Jackson Turner, Ely was hired as the Department head of the School of Economics, Political Science and History at the University of Wisconsin, a position created specifically for him. At Wisconsin, Ely found what were perhaps the most ideal conditions from which to pursue his reformist vision.

During the late 19th century, it was still common for the settlers of the territories west of the thirteen original states to view the region as a second opportunity to establish a perfected social order within the republic that corresponded more closely with the founder's vision of a roughly egalitarian American society (Jencks & Riesman, 1968; see also Greek, 1992, p. vii; Tiryakian, 1993). Similarly, the discourse of Midwestern professors tended to focus on themes which also figured prominently in Ely's thought and experiences, such as the corrupting influence of entrenched wealth on the production of research at the nation's elite universities and the importance of producing usable knowledge, which for many was tantamount to a religious calling (Jencks & Riesman, 1968; Richardson & Fisher, 1998; Veysey, 1963; Vidich & Lyman, 1982).

Thus, in comparison to the entrenched social and economic orders of the Eastern seaboard, Ely no doubt considered Wisconsin an open field for his state-centered vision of social and economic management. Ely also happily found himself in a state where the citizenry was composed almost entirely of German immigrants, who were perhaps more inclined to accept the idea of establishing a central role for experts in government (Rader, 1966; Rodgers, 1998; Schlesinger, 1921).

On a personal level, Ely's move to Wisconsin represented a second chance to achieve prominence in the academic social sciences, and under his direction his department effectively became the first modern school of public policy in the United States, establishing the university as the main center for

progressive social reform (Furner, 1975). It was under these ideal conditions that Ely (1894) elaborated upon his heady vision for the expert management of society by "agents" with strong commitments to liberal Protestantism.

Looking into the future we may contemplate a society with real, not merely nominal freedom, to pursue the best; a society in which men shall work together for common purposes and in which this wholesome co-operation shall take place largely through government ... *managed by the nation, through agents who appreciate the true glory of public service, and feel that it is God's work which they are doing, because Church and State are one* [italics added]. (p. 352)

Despite the highly favorable circumstances at Wisconsin, in 1894 Ely came under attack there because of his ties to George Herron, a radical Congregationalist minister and professor at Grinnell College. Ely's association with Herron prompted an investigation by the University of Wisconsin after one of the regents published a letter in *The Nation* magazine under the title, "The College Anarchist" (Rader, 1966). While an investigative committee cleared Ely of radicalism, his survival exacted a high cost, as he disavowed any connection to, or sympathy with the grievances of the labor movement (Furner, 1975).

Although he proclaimed his exoneration a victory for academic freedom, from this period forward Ely and his reform-minded academic colleagues adopted the role of "relatively conservative experts capable of advising legislators about the efficacy of social and labor reforms ... not as leaders of a crusade for social justice" (Sklar, 1993, p. 58; see also Ross, 1991, p. 117; Rodgers, 1998, p. 109). Notably, this episode also coincided with Ely's move away from the use of religious rhetoric in his popular writings. Therefore, at least in regard to Ely, the turn toward becoming a secularly-oriented public policy analyst was largely a defensive reaction to conservative political pressure.

Jane Addams and the Settlements: The First Faith-Based Agencies?

As it was for many woman who gravitated toward the settlement movement, strong currents of religious idealism stirred a young Jane Addams to establish Hull House in Chicago. While Addams was at the vanguard of a broader movement with deep religious roots, the focus on Addams's religiosity in this section should not be mistaken for an argument that religious idealism provided the sole impetus for her efforts at Hull House (Carson, 1990; Crocker, 1992; Gordon, 1992; McClymer, 1991). While early portrayals of Jane Addams tended toward sentimental and hagiographic portraits that deified her as a sort of secular saint, more recent scholarship on the life and work of Jane Addams has focused on her pivotal role in the development of the social sciences, feminism, and a respect for cultural pluralism in America (Deegan, 1988/2000; Ross, 1998; Sklar, 1985, 1998). While a broadened perspective on her career and social thought is a welcome development, there is a general tendency in these later studies to ignore or de-emphasize the religious roots of her social idealism and lifelong associations with liberal Protestant reformers. While in comparison to Ely, the religious symbolism was noticeably absent in Addams social thought, she did share her sociological grandfather's (as she had once referred to Ely) reverence for the transformational potential of rigorous research.

Even at an early point in her public career, it is clear Addams envisioned that Hull House would become an important center for social research. In "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements" she pointed to the institutional limitations on research faced by social scientists based in academe, and proposed the settlements as an alternative setting where a "reconstruction and reorganization of ... knowledge" (Addams, 1893/2002, p. 19) could be pursued. When placed in its historical context, this was truly a bold proposal, since until that time, gender discrimination had limited the participation of women in the research enterprise to the collection of data, which male sociologists considered a lower form of labor than analysis and theory development (Deegan, 1988/2000; Joyce, 2003; Ross, 1979).

Thus, it is all the more remarkable that a year after writing the essay, Addams and Florence Kelley conceptualized a project and coordinated a team of researchers (including University of Chicago sociologist, Charles Zeublin) that resulted in the completion of the ground-breaking study *Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895). Although the study was not widely circulated at the time of its publication, the maps included in the monograph were modeled after those in Charles Booth's *Inquiry into Life and Labour in London* and were based on Kelley's research funded by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (O'Connor, 2001). Curiously, the maps were nearly excised by the editor, none other than Richard T. Ely, who was irritated over delays and costs associated with their inclusion in the volume.

Even though the use of empirical data to determine policy priorities was gradually replacing religious arguments among progressive social reformers, within Addams' writing there is ample evidence that a quasi-religious orientation remained associated with the research enterprise. In a later essay, "A Function of a Social Settlement," Addams (1899) echoed Ely and Strong, arguing that the development of accurate social knowledge was a prerequisite to the optimal functioning of a democratic society. Keeping in mind that Addams was no doubt aware of the persecution that Ely and his academic colleagues had recently faced, she was adamant that settlement-based research should remain free of any funding constraints that would compromise the goal of establishing laws and regulation to tame what she referred to as "the ungodly industrial relation" (Addams, 1899, p. 40). Since the essay was written at a time when women remained excluded from "political, professional, academic, religious careers ... by reason of their gender" (Sklar, 1993, p. 67), Addams' argument should also be interpreted as a proxy argument against male dominance in the academic social sciences. Implicit in her argument is that settlement-based researchers produced a superior product because they were engaged with the communities they studied and free of the taint of self-interest (Addams, 1899).

It is inarguable that a survey of Addams's published writing demonstrates her adoption of a humanist perspective over the course of her long public career; however, it would be incorrect to conclude that she had become entirely secular in her outlook or had dismissed the importance of religious

idealism as an important force driving the social reform movement. Seventeen years after the publication of *Hull House Maps and Papers*, Addams' involvement with *The Men and Religion Forward Movement* (MRFM) was in many respects emblematic of how she continued to collaborate with liberal Protestants.

While the MRFM was originally conceived as a means to recruit men back into religious participation, the influence of a large contingent of reform-minded luminaries (such as Washington Gladden, Walter Rauschenbusch, Graham Taylor, Charles Stelze and Addams herself) generated an unanticipated enthusiasm among participants to pursue social reform as a form of Christian service. The instructions in the MRFM *Program of Work* recommended that attendees read *The Survey* (a publication containing the views of prominent spokesmen in the emerging social work profession) and gather data in order to complete a social survey of the cities where rallies were held (Bateman, 2001; Robins, 1912).

In *The Second Twenty Years at Hull House*, in the same breath Addams (1930) gave credit to the MRFM, social workers and the leadership of the Social Gospel movement assembled within the Federal Council of Churches for stoking the popular enthusiasm that brought the Progressive Party to prominence in 1912. Although its candidate, Theodore Roosevelt, was defeated in his bid for the presidency, Addams remained hopeful the party would continue to grow in political significance through efforts coordinated within the fledgling Progressive Service Department.

Addams (1930) described the department as a “scientific party organization” where experts were charged with completing studies and presenting findings to a legislative department headed by Addams along with Walter Weyl, an editor at the *New Republic*. Subsequently, the research-based findings would be crafted into legislation by a coalition of progressive congressmen; simultaneously, a speakers' division within the department would deploy a group of “lecturers” to specific regions of the country to rally public support for the initiatives.

While the fortunes of the Progressive Service Department waned along with those of its sponsoring party, the impetus for its formation and the hopes for its success were clearly based on the reformist faith. It would be nearly two decades before the idea of the next iteration of the reformist faith

would re-emerge during the watershed period of the New Deal era (Leuchtenburg, 1995; Rodgers, 1998). By this time, Ely's popular influence was negligible and Addams's interests had turned elsewhere. However, the reformist faith which they had a central role in establishing was firmly imbedded in the American progressive tradition, albeit clothed in a more secularized and nationalistic form.

The Reformist Faith in Historical Perspective

The individuals who have been the focus of the foregoing investigation played central roles in establishing the intellectual foundation of social progressivism in America. As the preceding analysis has demonstrated, a central characteristic of their thought was a deep faith that the applied use of social knowledge would hasten social progress. Their faith in the transformational potential for projects of social engineering is all the more remarkable when one considers the crude state of social science research methodology at the dawn of the 20th century. These first generation carriers of the reformist faith were prone to two conceits traceable to the post-millennialism of liberal Protestantism: first, the fervent belief that social science research would confirm the effectiveness of their policies and interventions; and second, a broad political consensus in support of their progressive aims would result. Through further consideration of these two conceits associated with the reformist faith, a valuable perspective from which to consider the recent period of disillusionment with progressive social welfare policy initiatives can be gained.

While it is beyond the scope of this inquiry to provide a detailed examination of how the reformist faith evolved during the twentieth century, it is argued here that not only did the central aspects of the reformist faith survive into the New Deal era, but they also re-emerged with particular force when the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (EOA) was enacted and the Johnson Administration declared what became known as the "War on Poverty" (Beard, 1934; Morone, 1993). Despite the passage of over half a century, it is possible to hear the echoes of the first generation carriers of the reformist faith in the rallying cry of President Johnson's "poverty warriors."

The public discourse of the Johnson administration officials responsible for prosecuting the *War on Poverty* reveals they promoted a vision of social change based on the promises of social science knowledge. Their rhetoric gave rise to expectations for the creation of a virtuous cycle of successes that would generate popular and political support for the expansion of progressive policy initiatives (Aaron, 1978; Glazer, 1988; Nathan, 1986). This tendency of thought among the Johnson Administration "poverty warriors" was strikingly similar to Ely's (1894) vision of what he referred to as an "all classes socialism" (p. 179), where all strata of society recognized the desirability of pursuing pragmatic policies of social amelioration after a track record of success for social intervention was established.

While one would expect no less of any proponent of a policy agenda than to strenuously advocate their recommended course of action in the public sphere, it has been widely observed that the rhetoric used to rally popular support for the EOA legislation fostered unattainable expectations. After all, President Lyndon Johnson had declared a war, and his top lieutenant in the effort, Sargent Shriver, delivered the heady promise "to end poverty in the United States, as we know it today, within a generation" (as cited in Califano, 1991, p. 79; Zarefsky, 1986). Tellingly, Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz alluded to the social gospel reformers in the following comments:

This war on poverty is not going to be fought in the tradition of emotional crusades. H.R. 10440 [the EOA of 1964] is a carefully worked out battle plan based less on praising the Lord than on passing the ammunition. (as cited in Zarefsky, 1986, pp. 26-27)

Although Wirtz's quote gave the impression that the EOA programs would be generously funded and based firmly on the foundations of social science, in fact they were neither. During the time that the EOA legislation was being rapidly shepherded through Congress, Nathan Glazer observed the bill lacked "the powerful political pressure and long-sustained intellectual support that produced the great welfare measures of the New Deal" (as cited in Moynihan, 1969, pp. 23-24; see also Rodgers, 1998).

In retrospect, the gap between rhetoric and the actual scale of the effort was probably enough to insure that conservative critics would have ample opportunity to portray certain programs and policies as “failures.” However, beyond the problem of fostering unachievable expectations for policy success through the use of heightened rhetoric, this subsequent generation of the reformist faith encountered a problem neither they nor their predecessors could have anticipated—the outcome data measuring their efforts was less than compelling.

The passage of EOA occurred at the same time as the advent of computerized statistical analysis and methods of program evaluation to measure the effects of government policies and interventions. This was a development that individuals such as Strong, Rauschenbusch, Ely and Addams could only have dreamed of when envisioning the potential for benevolent and activist role for the state a half century earlier. Not surprisingly, the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) which was conceived to be “a kind of academic Rand Corporation” (O’Connor, 2001, p. 217) for the development of anti-poverty measures, was initially located at the economics department at the University of Wisconsin.

Similar to the first generation carriers of the reformist faith, the poverty warriors in the Johnson Administration expected that program evaluations and outcome data would generate popular and political support for their ongoing efforts. However, the lackluster results of certain programs would instead become a source of systematic doubt about the enterprise of progressive policy activism. The reflections of two prominent members of the era’s social science establishment shed light on the development of this unexpected state of affairs.

Peter Rossi formulated what he sardonically called the “Iron Law of Social Program Evaluation” to describe the tendency of programmatic social interventions to have weak effects, and concluded, “in short, most programs when properly evaluated turn out to be ineffective or at best marginally (able?) to achieve their aims”(as cited in Cohen, 1986, p. 22). Bruce K. MacLaury, a former Brookings Institution president, explained that “research tends to become a conservative force

because it fosters skepticism and caution by shifting attention from moral commitment to analytical problems that rarely have clear-cut or simple solutions" (as cited in Nathan, 1986, p. 164).

The general problem of demonstrating effectiveness was further complicated by the design and administration of the Community Action Programs (CAP) which were arguably the most prominent component of the anti-poverty effort. While there was a great deal of heterogeneity among CAPs, they were primarily settings where various efforts aimed at improving the opportunities for education and employment (Headstart, Legal Aid, community organizing) in low income neighborhoods were coordinated. While the interventions and services coordinated within the CAPs provided tangible benefits to their communities, demonstrating direct effects on reducing poverty was also highly problematic because of the varied nature of their efforts (O'Connor, 2001).

These conditions, in all likelihood, left CAPs increasingly more vulnerable to criticism, as they became perceived as hotbeds of African-American radicalism. Furthermore, despite the fact they presented fewer methodological problems, the less controversial flank of the War on Poverty, which aimed at changing the characteristics of impoverished people through rehabilitation, job training, and education programs produced outcome data that did not demonstrate them to be particularly effective in reducing welfare dependency (Berkowitz, 1991; Gilbert, 2002).

Albeit briefly, the preceding paragraphs identify the central weaknesses associated with the reformist faith which contained the seeds of demise for liberal policy activism from the late 1960s to the present. Perhaps Smith (1991) best explains the reason for the magnitude for the backlash against the reformist faith in the War on Poverty's aftermath and its ramifications:

The failures of social science went far beyond mere disappointment over specific programs ... Knowledge itself seemed to have failed. And the political consequences proved to be as profound as conservatives, holding different ideas about knowledge and its uses, ascended to power. (p. 18)

Just as the first generation of the reformist faith could not have countenanced that the wide availability of outcome data could undermine the prospects for the continued effort of using social science to develop policy, their more recent heirs came late to the realization of the profound consequences of conservative intellectuals adopting the "conventions" of social science "to subvert liberal ends" (O'Connor, 2001, p. 247). This new generation of conservative intellectuals found their homes at well-funded think tank organizations, such as the Heritage Foundation (established in 1973), where they began to develop their critiques of the contemporary welfare state (Brown, 2002).

Whereas traditional foundations, such as Ford, Carnegie and Russell Sage, fund academically-based social research focused on the analysis of program outcomes and the development of interventions and policies grounded in empirical findings, conservative intellectuals sought a more direct impact on policymaking through mining extant data and studies in search of ineffective programs and perverse outcomes of liberal policy interventions.

The seminal example of this new type of conservative intellectual effort was Charles Murray's *Losing Ground* (1984/1994), which was underwritten by the Olin Foundation and the Manhattan Institute. More recently, the best example of this effort is work of Robert Rector at the Heritage Foundation, who, along with a colleague, published *America's Failed \$5.4 Trillion War on Poverty* (Rector & Lauber, 1995). In the year and a half leading up to the passage of the landmark 1996 welfare reforms, Rector described his role: "the congressional Republicans still aren't staffed up to address their legislative goals. So they lean on conservative think tanks [*sic*] like Heritage for ideas and assistance" (Stout, 1995, p. 1). A review of the bill's text reveals that its language bears a striking resemblance to fact sheets and other publications on welfare reform published by the Heritage Foundation.

One cannot deny the irony of the idea that conservative policy intellectuals housed in activist think tanks are pursuing a strategy which bears a remarkable resemblance to the one envisioned by Jane Addams and Walter Weyl for the short-lived Progressive Service Department. Since the 1970's, conservative intellectuals have found much success by taking aim at many of the fundamental assumptions of the reformist

faith. The consequences of their success cannot be understated, since not only have they succeeded in thwarting the efforts of liberal and progressive policy activists, but more importantly they have created a profound sense of doubt that social science knowledge can be used to shape policy.

Conclusion

Comprehending the connection between liberal Protestantism and the subsequent development of the reformist faith provides an important perspective from which recent clashes over social welfare policy can be understood. While most present-day liberals and progressives involved in the enterprise of social science research and policy advocacy do not pursue social reform as an explicit expression of their religious faith, it has been argued in this paper there are certain qualities of mind that identify them as inheritors of the same reformist faith held by Josiah Strong, Richard T. Ely and Jane Addams.

However, unlike their predecessors, the more recent adherents of the reformist faith have tended to pursue research without paying full heed to the political uses of their production of knowledge. In contrast, as discussed in the preceding section, conservative policy intellectuals working in think-tank settings have not been at all reluctant to package their ideas and engage in the political process.

While the decline of the reformist faith has many sources, in the preceding section I have outlined what appear to be the central reasons for its demise in the closing decades of the 20th century. There is no small irony in the fact that instead of the triumph prophesized by the initial carriers of the reformist faith, for many the War on Poverty era has come to be viewed as a repudiation of the project of policy activism based on social science knowledge that arose in the Progressive era. While conservative intellectuals have effectively undermined the reformist faith, their victory has come at the cost of engendering a widespread sense of futility regarding the success of policy initiatives aimed at improving economic and social conditions.

When it is recognized that there is a sort of quasi-religious faith associated with the impulse to pursue progressive social reform, we can better understand the countervailing force of political conservatism that arose after the War on Poverty

period, which, not coincidentally, was strengthened by a resurgent conservative Protestantism. Furthermore, if Martin Marty's binary categories of Protestantism are revised to distinguish the chasm between those adhering to more traditional views of all faiths as members of America's "private party" and secularly-oriented liberals whose faith rests on managing society through the application of social knowledge as the members of the "public party," we can more fully appreciate the depths of the fierce clash between the parties over issues of social welfare policy that has continued until the present.

Renowned historian Michael Katz (2001) has observed that decisions on matters of social welfare policy have always been questions of "political and moral philosophy" and thus cannot be determined by "objective" or "empirical means" alone. He has argued the results of social science research "must be filtered through interpretive screens that determine its meaning" (p. 341). Looking toward the future, it would be highly beneficial if "interpretative screens" could be developed from which conservatives and liberals could view matters of social welfare policy with some level of consensus on approaching both the means and ends of social policy.

Although widening economic inequality and the prevailing politics of confrontation and obstruction do not bode well for prospects of policy initiatives aimed at improving society, a historicist perspective does provide some indications of how these divides might be bridged. In 1933, Jane Addams served as honorary President of the World Fellowship of Faiths at Chicago's Century of Progress celebration, the purpose of which was to "unite the inspiration of all faiths—upon the solutions of man's present problems" (World Conference of Faiths, 1933, p. 2). In an increasingly diverse and multicultural American society, the ecumenical spirit of common cause which permeated the World Fellowship of Faiths might serve as a model for a contemporary effort aimed at building a broad consensus to address poverty and social problems in the 21st century.

While it is acknowledged that finding common ground on social welfare policy between the public and private parties will prove a formidable task, it may be that assembling conferences of contemporary public intellectuals, theologians

and cultural representatives might provide the best hope of overcoming the formidable ideological and political barriers blocking the development and implementation of effective policies which exist at present. Clearly the project of fostering a collective sense of purpose toward achieving what Herbert Croly once referred to as the “Promise of American Life” is, at present, sorely needed.

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