

Building a City on a Hill: Evangelical Protestant Men and Moral Reform under the Des Moines Plan, 1907–1916

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ON APRIL 6, 1908, exactly one week after Des Moines held its first municipal election under the commission system popularly dubbed the Des Moines Plan, the *Des Moines Register and Leader* began its editorial section with the heading, “A City on a Hill.” Underneath the heading was an excerpt from the *Chicago Record-Herald*. “To all students of municipal reform, and especially of the commission plan,” the *Record-Herald* proclaimed, “Des Moines will be like a city set upon a hill for the next few years.”¹

For readers today, the “city on a hill” phrase is a well-worn part of the American vocabulary, conjuring up images of Puritans and American exceptionalism. Yet, as historian Richard Gamble has shown, those connotations were not yet in place in the early twentieth century.² When citizens of Des Moines used the metaphor to describe their city, they drew not from the Puritans, but from the same source as John Winthrop had: the Gospel of Matthew. In that book’s account of the Sermon on the Mount,

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1. “A City on a Hill,” *Des Moines Register and Leader* (hereafter cited as *R&L*), 4/6/1908. *R&L* accessed via www.newspapers.com.

2. Richard Gamble, *In Search of the City on a Hill: The Making and Unmaking of an American Myth* (New York, 2012).

Jesus tells his listeners, “Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. . . . Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”³

The biblical reference to a city as a model to bring glory to God fit naturally with Des Moines’s pioneering efforts in municipal reform. Following the logic of white Protestant leaders like Congregationalist minister Josiah Strong, many Americans believed that the nation’s salvation depended in part on the salvation of its cities. The cities, Strong had argued in his popular tract *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (1885), were “where the forces of evil are massed” and where “the need of Christian influence is peculiarly great.”⁴ But despite attempts over the next two decades to eliminate such urban “forces of evil” as ward politics, corruption, and vice—problems usually associated with the growing number of immigrants and Catholics in the cities—by 1905 many white, English-speaking Protestants still considered municipal government to be a failure.⁵ To reform Des Moines’s government carried with it the possibility that Des Moines could point the way forward for the rest of the nation’s cities.

Despite the biblical rhetoric surrounding the Des Moines Plan, its religious dimensions have not been fully explored. This is partly because scholars have focused most of their attention on the mechanics and structure of the commission form of government and on questions of capital and labor and how “progressive” the commission system really was. Partly, too, most studies of the plan do not cover the post-1908 elections.⁶

3. Matt. 5:14–16 (American Standard Version).

4. Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (New York, 1885), 134.

5. Of course, as Paul Boyer highlights in *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), attempts by middle-class Protestants to reform cities had been ongoing since the antebellum era.

6. The most detailed accounts of the Des Moines Plan are John F. O’Connell, “Des Moines Adopts the Commission Form of Municipal Government” (M.A. thesis, Drake University, 1975); Bradley Robert Rice, *Progressive Cities: The Commission Government Movement in America, 1901–1920* (Austin, TX, 1977); and Robert E. Bionaz, “Trickle-Down Democracy: The Commission Government Contest in Des Moines, 1905–1908,” *Annals of Iowa* 58 (1999), 241–71.

Religion first became a central feature of Des Moines's city elections in 1910. Thus, although Des Moines's religious leaders did not lead the charge for the commission system, once it was approved the Des Moines Plan galvanized evangelical Protestants to exert their moral authority. They saw in the excitement of local electoral politics an opportunity for both self-preservation and service—the former because the masculine domain of politics served as an attractive recruiting tool for ministers increasingly distressed about the feminization of their churches; the latter because they believed that they were uniquely equipped to provide the moral impulse for an otherwise materialistic city-boosting movement. From 1908 until 1916 they organized and engaged in local elections as they sought to ensure that Des Moines would not gain the whole world—or at least an efficient government and expanding local economy—while losing its soul.

WHEN AGITATION for the commission system began in 1905, Des Moines was the largest city in Iowa, with a population of 75,628. Yet, as Iowa historian Dorothy Schwieder has observed, Iowa's cities in the early twentieth century had a strong agrarian tint.⁷ Flora Dunlap, who moved from Chicago's famed Hull House to run Des Moines's Roadside Settlement House in 1904, remarked that her new environment "seemed almost like a country village."⁸ Not only did Des Moines's size pale in comparison to other industrial cities in the region, such as Omaha, Chicago, and Kansas City, but Des Moines also had a relatively homogeneous population dominated by native-born, English-speaking Protestants. Even when compared to other Iowa cities, Des Moines was exceptional in this regard: of the state's eight cities with at least 20,000 people in 1905, Des Moines had the second-lowest percentage of foreign-born residents, at 12 percent. Related to this, Des Moines had only 3,658 Catholics; Protestant churches claimed six times as many communicants. The Jewish community, listed at 183 families, was small as well, and with

7. Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames, 1996), 184.

8. Flora Dunlap, "Roadside Settlement of Des Moines," *Annals of Iowa* 21 (1938), 165.

African Americans constituting just 3 percent of the city's population, Des Moines was a bastion of white Protestantism.⁹

The "seven sister" Protestant denominations—the Disciples of Christ, northern Methodists, Presbyterians, Evangelical Lutherans, northern Baptists, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians—stood at the forefront of Des Moines's informal white Protestant establishment. The Disciples of Christ, typically a more rural denomination, had an unusually powerful presence. Thanks in part to the presence of Drake University, a Disciples university founded in 1881, there were more Disciples in proportion to the total population in Des Moines than in any other American city except Lexington, Kentucky. Northern Methodists stood right behind the Disciples in membership count, followed by Presbyterians, northern Baptists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Evangelical Lutherans.¹⁰

To speak of a "white Protestant establishment" in Des Moines is not to suggest a wholly united entity acting in concert and imposing its will. Rather, as historian William Hutchison suggests, it is best to think of the early twentieth-century Protestant establishment as a "group of denominations" and a "network of leaders in general connected with them."¹¹ In the early twentieth century that network identified itself as "evangelical," a descriptive term used at that time for all Protestant denominations that officially accepted the divinity of Jesus; Unitarians, Catholics, and

9. *Census of Iowa for the Year 1905* (Des Moines, 1905), 687; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, Part I (Washington, DC, 1910), 434. The one Iowa city with a lower percentage of foreign-born residents was Waterloo.

10. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, 434. In Des Moines, 6 percent of the population belonged to a Disciples church. For a brief description of the Disciples of Christ/Church of Christ in the early twentieth century, see David Edwin Harrell Jr., *The Church of Christ in the 20th Century: Homer Hailey's Personal Journey of Faith* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2000), 3–9. The non-creedal nature of the Disciples movement helped the denomination earn citywide influence. Drake University did not require students or faculty to agree to any particular religious tenets, and the college reached out to the wider Des Moines community. Its original board of trustees included three prominent Des Moines citizens who were not associated with the Disciples. See Charles J. Ritchey, *Drake University through Seventy-Five Years: 1881–1956* (Des Moines, 1956), 41, 90.

11. William R. Hutchison, "Protestantism as Establishment," in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900–1960*, ed. William R. Hutchison (New York, 1989), 3–4.

Jews could not claim the evangelical label, but Methodists, Presbyterians, Disciples, and even Episcopalians could. So, too, the leaders of the white Protestant establishment tended to assume that they possessed responsibility for the moral and spiritual well-being of their community and nation.¹² In Des Moines special occasions such as Good Friday or Thanksgiving provided opportunities for white Protestants to ritualize their privileged cultural place. On those days the leading pastors from each of the city's "seven sister" denominations gathered at one of the downtown churches for union services, with generous media coverage from the city's leading newspapers.¹³

In 1905 two of Des Moines's best institutional expressions of these establishment traits—of connected evangelical Protestants who felt a shared sense of responsibility for the moral state of their community—were the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Ministerial Association. Both confined their membership to evangelicals. The former, founded in 1868, focused on community uplift and character development but generally did not engage in political agitation. The latter, formed in 1872, provided fellowship and an occasional forum to speak out on such moral issues as prostitution, gambling, unregulated saloons, and immoral amusements.¹⁴

The evangelical ministers were no monolith. Some conservative ministers, such as John A. Wirt of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, resisted the Ministerial Association's attempts to get involved with moral reform. Wirt believed that clergy should eschew any engagement with "secular" topics while acting in their ministerial role.¹⁵ On the other hand, some liberals rejected the narrowness of the association's moral reforms;

12. Edwin S. Gaustad, "The Pulpit and the Pews," in *Between the Times*, 21.

13. "Thanksgiving at Plymouth Church," *R&L*, 11/24/1905; "Seven Excellent Sermons," *R&L*, 3/30/1907. Bill R. Douglas discusses the importance of the Thanksgiving services in "Making Iowa Safe for Differences: Barnstorming Iowa on Behalf of Religious Tolerance, 1936-1943," *Annals of Iowa* 75 (2016), 247-49.

14. Johnson Brigham, *Des Moines: The Pioneer of Municipal Progress and Reform of the Middle West*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1911), 1:585-86, 353; "New Society of City Clergymen," *R&L*, 12/25/1903.

15. "No Pledges Asked from Candidates," *R&L*, 3/3/1908; "Rev. John A. Wirt Dies Suddenly," *R&L*, 5/10/1908.

rather than regulating vaudeville shows, they wanted church leaders to take on issues like the relationship between capital and labor.¹⁶ Controversy also arose from time to time over the association's exclusion of nonevangelicals, in part because the city's Unitarian church, led by the brilliant Mary Safford, had a number of influential and well-to-do members.¹⁷ In 1903 two of Des Moines's leading evangelical ministers—Episcopalian rector J. Everett Cathell and Plymouth Congregational Church pastor Frank Hodgdon—departed the association because of its exclusion of Unitarians, Catholics, and Jews.¹⁸

Yet these divisions, personally rancorous as they may have been, remained relatively minor. Hodgdon and Cathell still participated in union church services, for example, and enjoyed the benefits of their establishment status. As for the Ministerial Association, when challenged for excluding nonevangelicals, its members claimed that they stood in "perfect accord with the great religious movements of the age" like the YMCA. They also claimed to stand for "the uplifting of humanity and the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ in the world," a task at which evangelical organizations had been successful precisely because they stood for "definite religious truth."¹⁹

As its rhetoric suggests, the Ministerial Association did not view its exclusion of nonevangelicals as reason to cede the ground of progressive religion. In its view, evangelical Protestantism stood at the forefront of progress. That was certainly the view of Harvey Breeden, pastor of the city's largest evangelical church, Central Christian, from 1885 until 1906. Breeden modeled a practical progressive evangelicalism that was committed to the superiority of evangelical Protestantism while remaining open to new methods, ideas, and relationships. In 1902 a writer

16. "New Society of City Clergymen," *R&L*, 12/25/1903.

17. Among the influential Unitarian citizens were James Hanna and Johnson Brigham. Safford's leadership of Des Moines's Unitarian community (as well as that of her co-laborer, Eleanor Gordon) is featured in Cynthia Grant Tucker, *Prophetic Sisterhood: Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier, 1880-1930* (Boston, 1990).

18. "Rector Cathell Raises Storm," *R&L*, 12/26/1903. On the push by liberal Protestants for interfaith cooperation and inclusion at the turn of the twentieth century, see David Mislin, *Saving Faith: Making Religious Pluralism an American Value at the Dawn of the Secular Age* (Ithaca, NY, 2015), 63-89.

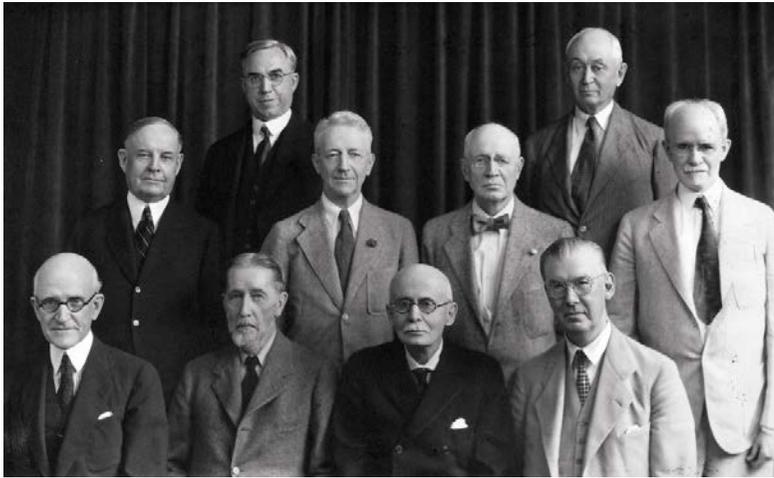
19. "Ministers Rise to Tell the Story," *R&L*, 12/29/1903.

for a leading liberal Protestant journal, *The Outlook*, visited Breeden's church for a series on "Religious Life in America." The author came away impressed. Most of the elements that historians associate with early twentieth-century liberal Protestantism were present: social service activities, commitment to progress, and a pastor who embraced "modern developments of theological thought," including evolution and higher criticism of the Bible. But Breeden did not make his theological views a centerpiece of the church; in matters of theological opinion, congregants had "absolute freedom, except as to the divinity of Christ." Instead, Breeden fostered unity in action and efficiency, keeping church members busy and involved in Christian work in the city.²⁰

Breeden's practical progressivism had influence beyond the bounds of his congregation, pointing to one final trait of the white Protestant establishment in Des Moines: its connection to business and professional elites. In 1890, for example, Breeden founded the Prairie Club. Intended for intellectual discussion and fellowship, its meetings featured paper presentations and discussions on a variety of topics, ranging from literature and art to religion and politics. The club's records show that members were decidedly middle- and upper-class, with occupations including lawyers, physicians, judges, editors, clergymen, professors, and business owners. An impressive array of religious leaders claimed membership, including Jewish, Catholic, Unitarian, Lutheran, Methodist, Congregational, and Disciples of Christ clergymen. Rallying around shared cultural values and socio-economic exclusiveness, the club provided an important way for the city's religious leaders to build stronger relationships with business and political leaders.²¹ In organizations like

20. Ernest Hamlin Abbott, "Religious Life in America IX: The Eastern West," *Outlook*, 6/14/1902, 459; A. T. DeGroot, ed., *Central of Des Moines: The Story of Central Christian Church* (Des Moines, 1945), 63–81. While in Des Moines Breeden mentored Charles Clayton Morrison, who would go on to become the editor and publisher of the *Christian Century*, the most important liberal Protestant journal in the United States. See Elesha Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York, 2013), 15–17.

21. Prairie Club Minutes, 1890–1917, folder 1, box 1, Prairie Club of Greater Des Moines Records, 1890–1993 (hereafter cited as PCGDMR), State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines (hereafter cited as SHSI-DM). See also Prairie Club Minutes, Sept. 1933–May 1945, folder 4, box 1, PCGDMR. The various occupations of members were listed in the Card Index Record of 1890–1941,



In 1935 the Prairie Club of Des Moines celebrated its members of 30 years or more. Front row (l to r): James B. Weaver, James C. Hume, Johnson Brigham, Henry S. Nollen; middle row: Gardner Cowles Sr., H. H. Stipp, James C. Davis, F. I. Herriott; back row: Jesse A. Miller, Harvey Ingham. Photo from State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

the Prairie Club, then, Des Moines's white Protestants could embrace interreligious cooperation while at the same time using the Ministerial Association and other Protestant-only organizations to ensure that interreligious cooperation did not impinge on white Protestant claims for primary moral authority within the city.

MUNICIPAL REFORM had been the subject of discussion at Prairie Club meetings since its founding in the 1890s.²² By 1905, however, municipal reform was more than a discussion topic in

box 13, PCGDMR. Although its membership was limited to 30, the rules allowed members to bring guests, and nonactive members were rotated out in order to open up space for those who could participate in the monthly meetings. Prominent members included Albert B. Cummins, James Berryhill, Henry Wallace Sr., Gardner Cowles, and Harvey Ingham.

22. Prairie Club Minutes, Sept. 1933–May 1945, p. 3, folder 4, box 1, PCGDMR. (The minute book for 1933–1945 includes an insert at the front of the book with a brief history of the club and a list of the speakers and speaker topics since the club's inception.)

Des Moines. Dissatisfaction with city government intensified among business and professional men who believed that corruption and inefficiency burdened Des Moines's government. Using the Commercial Club as a base, these men began to agitate for a new city government that would be more conducive to economic growth and efficiency.²³

While many individuals associated with the Commercial Club were also connected with the city's religious institutions, they did not act on behalf of the churches or frame their project in religious terms.²⁴ Rather, they framed their reform efforts as an attempt to apply business methods to city government. James Berryhill—a wealthy Des Moines businessman whose wife was a leading Unitarian—jump-started the reform campaign when he took a trip to Galveston, Texas. There Berryhill studied the commission form of government that Galveston had implemented in 1901 in the wake of the devastating hurricane that had largely destroyed the city the previous year. Unlike in the mayor-council system used by Des Moines and most other cities, under the commission system each elected official took charge of a single city department. That arrangement effectively merged the legislative and executive functions into one body while making it clear who was responsible for the day-to-day operation of the specific functions of city government. The commission system also eliminated ward-based voting in favor of at-large representation.²⁵

Berryhill first presented his findings to the Commercial Club near the end of 1905. From that time until March 1907—when Iowa's state legislature passed a bill allowing Des Moines to vote on adopting a new charter—the pro-reform forces sought to consolidate support for the plan. They faced strong opposition from various quarters, including organized labor, city officials

23. For the view that municipal government in Des Moines was not as bad as the businessmen believed, see Bionaz, "Trickle-Down Democracy," 246–49.

24. For example, of the Commercial Club's 18 board members in 1908, the biographies of 12 are listed in volume 2 of Brigham's *Des Moines*. Of those 12, 8 are described as being associated with evangelical Protestant denominations: three Episcopalians, two Presbyterians, one Congregationalist, one Disciple, and one Methodist. The other four were one Catholic, one Jew, and two with no religious affiliation listed.

25. Rice, *Progressive Cities*, 34–51.

then in power, socialists, and public service corporations. The opposition had a geographical and class dimension. Most of those who championed the commission system lived in the affluent neighborhoods on the west side of the Des Moines River. Not surprisingly, the working-class population on the east side viewed the elite-led movement with suspicion.²⁶

Supporters tinkered with the commission system in order to appease its critics. They arranged for nonpartisan elections to ease the minds of Democrats who feared irrelevance in a Republican-dominated city, and they responded to cries that the system was antidemocratic by adding initiative and referendum features. In 1906 they also linked their plan with a city-boosting movement spearheaded by the Greater Des Moines Committee, a group that had spun out of the Commercial Club. In November 1906 the Greater Des Moines Committee announced a slogan for its movement: "Des Moines Does Things." Proclaimed in the press and printed on buttons and the sides of streetcars, the slogan quickly became identified with the push for the commission system.²⁷

As Des Moines's businessmen organized and led the campaign for the Des Moines Plan, the city's Protestant leaders mostly cheered from the sidelines. Some, however, caught the booster spirit, none more so than Frank Hodgdon, pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church. In a sermon delivered on February 3, 1907, Hodgdon interpreted the storm that had devastated Galveston and led to its commission system as "cleansing waters" sent by God, and he applauded the work of the Greater Des Moines Committee. Unlike past efforts for reform, in which "the best men said, 'We can't do anything' and 'Why not preach sermons that shall be balm to our souls,'" the booster movement had brought about a different attitude in Des Moines. "Men are saying, 'We can do it,'" Hodgdon declared.²⁸

Not all ministers supported the Des Moines Plan as explicitly as Hodgdon did. Conservatives in the Ministerial Association remained timid about entering too fully into the realm of politics;

26. Bionaz, "Trickle-Down Democracy," 256.

27. "Slogan for Des Moines Chosen," *R&L*, 11/7/1906; Rice, *Progressive Cities*, 38.

28. "Hodgdon Is for Galveston System," *R&L*, 2/4/1907.

at a May 1907 meeting the Ministerial Association censured Hodgdon for his outspoken agitation for the commission system.²⁹ Most evangelical ministers seemed to be sympathetic to the movement, however, and Des Moines's three west-side daily newspapers, united in support of commission government, amplified any supportive ministerial voices. On the last Monday before the special election the *Register and Leader* ran a front-page story stating that it was the "consensus of opinion among the ministers that moral virtue can be obtained for the city only through the Des Moines plan." The *Tribune*, an east-side daily newspaper launched specifically to combat the Des Moines Plan, agreed with the *Register and Leader's* assessment, although its attitude toward ministerial support was decidedly negative. The ministers' willingness to support the Des Moines Plan and thereby join the "assault upon popular government," a *Tribune* editorial declared, would not be forgotten when the ministers "appear before the great white throne."³⁰

It is important to note that the white Protestant establishment did not hold a monopoly on appeals to religious morality. Those sympathetic to the cause of working people pointed out that the Des Moines Plan was conceived largely by the city's elites.³¹ Standing within a long tradition of working-class Christianity that cast suspicion on wealth and empathized with the "common man" over the upper classes, this group appealed to the Bible as they argued that the Des Moines Plan would hinder democracy by concentrating power in the hands of a privileged few.³² Leonard Brown, an economic populist and longtime resident of Des Moines, blasted the idea of running a city government on the basis of business principles. Drawing on a biblical

29. "A Stir Among Ministers," *R&L*, 5/7/1907.

30. "Pastors Plead for Better Conditions," *R&L*, 6/17/1907; "The Pulpit and Press," *Des Moines Tribune* (hereafter cited as *DMT*), 6/21/1907; O'Connell, "Des Moines Adopts the Commission Form of Municipal Government," 82-87.

31. Of the Committee of 300—the group that organized to boost the plan—253 were from the west side, while only 28 were from the east. See O'Connell, "Des Moines Adopts the Commission Form of Municipal Government," 60; Bionaz, "Trickle-Down Democracy," 256.

32. On nineteenth-century expressions of working-class Christianity, see Heath W. Carter, *Union Made: Working People and the Rise of Social Christianity in Chicago* (New York, 2015).

passage from Isaiah 3:5, Brown argued that in practice “business principles” equated to “grinding the faces of the poor.”³³

Some Catholic and Jewish leaders supported working-class Christians in the fight against the Des Moines Plan. Leaders in those communities likely understood that citywide elections would favor the white Protestant majority in the city. Thus, the Hebrew Republican Club and Catholic priest Joseph F. Nugent went public with their opposition to the “anti-democratic” features of the Des Moines Plan.³⁴ Des Moines’s west-side newspapers tended to downplay the religious arguments used by non-Protestants and working-class Protestants, choosing instead to portray white Protestant ministers as the dominant voice of moral authority.³⁵

Voters approved the Des Moines Plan on June 20, 1907. The push for a commission system had been spearheaded by businessmen and framed as the application of efficient business principles to city government. But once the plan passed, Des Moines’s Protestant establishment seized the moment and began to co-opt the “Des Moines Does Things” booster spirit for the purpose of moral reform. For many of Des Moines’s ministers, the slogan fit perfectly with their hopes for a Christianity that could remain relevant to modern life by appealing to “masculine” action rather than the supposedly outdated emphasis on dogma and private piety. At the same time, it resonated with their longstanding belief that they served as moral guardians for the communities in which they lived and worked.

LIKE MANY PROTESTANT LEADERS in the early twentieth century, Des Moines’s Protestant ministers feared that their brand of religion had become feminized. They were right to recognize

33. Leonard Brown, *Our Own Columbia That Is To Be* (Des Moines, 1908), 353. Brown’s criticisms of the Des Moines Plan are featured on pages 339–65. For more on Brown, see Luella M. Wright, “Leonard Brown, Poet and Populist,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 46 (1948), 227–65.

34. Bionaz, “Trickle-Down Democracy,” 255; O’Connell, “Des Moines Adopts the Commission Form of Municipal Government,” 91.

35. On Des Moines’s Jewish community, see Frank Rosenthal, *The Jews of Des Moines: The First Century* (Des Moines, 1957). On Catholics in Des Moines at the time, see Charles Blanchard, “Religion in Iowa—The Catholics,” *Annals of Iowa* 36 (1962), 392–94.

that women tended to be more involved in church activities than men. Within the evangelical Protestant denominations in Des Moines in 1906, the percentage of male communicants ranged from a low of 34.7 percent (Congregationalists) to a high of just 38.4 percent (Disciples of Christ). For Des Moines's Catholics, on the other hand, 47.2 percent of communicants were men.³⁶ That disparity had long been true for American Protestants, but it took on new urgency at the turn of the twentieth century as women became increasingly involved in public life. In response, many ministers sought to refashion themselves and their congregations in masculine hues. "It is more or less true that there are three genders, the masculine, feminine, and ministers," Methodist minister E. T. Hagerman remarked at a meeting of Des Moines's Ministerial Association in late 1907. "What we need is men."³⁷ Believing that men would reject an overly emotional or sentimental religion, ministers shifted toward preaching a more practical message, and they increasingly brought their church structures into conformity with the masculine business world. Furthermore, believing that action appealed to men, they launched numerous social service and reform initiatives.³⁸

36. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, Part I (Washington, DC, 1910), 434.

37. "Need More Vitality in Pulpits Everywhere," *R&L*, 12/24/1907. Hagerman's comments were in response to a paper presented by Harvey Ingham to the Ministerial Association. Ingham had first presented his paper at the Prairie Club and was then invited to share it with the ministers. See Prairie Club Minutes, 1890-1917, p. 32, folder 1, box 1, PCGDMR. Ingham's paper, titled "Art a Symbol of Decadence," was an "arraignment of the idea and practice of Art for Art's sake."

38. Gail Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough': The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-class Protestantism," *American Quarterly* 41 (1989), 440-41; Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 78-83. In truth, women in organizations like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) had pioneered militant reform tactics in the late nineteenth century. But reflecting the reaction against "feminization," after the turn of the twentieth century male-led organizations like the Anti-Saloon League increasingly became the new public face of Protestant moral reform. See Gaines Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), 84-88, 170-74, 190; and K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven, CT, 1985).



A racial and nationalistic component underlay the urgent call for men as well. In the age of Teddy Roosevelt's "strenuous life," white Americans feared the emasculating tendencies of "over-civilization" and linked manliness with white racial supremacy and national progress.³⁹ For American evangelical Protestants

39. Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, 1996), 184-214.

who perceived themselves as guardians of the nation's morality, the call for virile men to serve the nation's increasingly expansive global agenda was also a call for Protestant churches to make sure that America's virile men were moral men. Thus, the Progressive Era Protestant obsession with bringing men into church was not just about preserving the church; it was also about preserving the Protestant character and supposed moral superiority of the American nation.

The passage of the Des Moines Plan made the city a local staging ground for this larger national trend. Even before the plan passed, Des Moines's ministers had begun to discuss their potential responsibility. In October 1906, for example, Methodist minister Orien Fifer spoke to the Ministerial Association about the movement for a "greater Des Moines." Fifer urged ministers to provide the booster movement with a moral backbone by venturing "a little farther in our leadership and activity" and arousing church members "to their civic responsibilities."⁴⁰

Less than two weeks after the passage of the Des Moines Plan, famed revivalist J. Wilbur Chapman (Billy Sunday's mentor) made a similar plea. While holding revival services in the area, Chapman applauded Des Moines's booster movement but cautioned that something was missing. "If you would make your city famous throughout the world," he implored, "you should organize a body to better the moral conditions."⁴¹

Polk County Sunday School Association president H. M. Whinery took Chapman's words to heart. In late July he organized a parade of Sunday School children to march through the streets of Des Moines "singing gospel hymns and waving aloft banners of Christianity." A newspaper reporter praised the event by linking it with the booster movement: "'Des Moines Does Things' had a new demonstration."⁴² Meanwhile, Charles Medbury, pastor of University Christian Church, served notice that Des Moines's evangelical ministers might turn to electoral politics in order to guide the city's moral progress. Nine months before the first election under the Des Moines Plan, Medbury

40. "Team Work Needed among Ministers," *R&L*, 10/9/1906.

41. "Stall-Fed Pastors Don't Suit Chapman," *R&L*, 7/1/1907.

42. "Des Moines Children Make the World Take Notice," *R&L*, 8/11/1907.

urged the city's Protestant churchgoers to focus on moral considerations when choosing the first set of commissioners.⁴³

For Medbury (and most evangelical ministers), the primary moral issues of the day involved alcohol consumption, prostitution, gambling, immoral amusements, and Sabbath breaking. Those concerns were not new; they had been a central part of Protestant moral reform efforts since the nineteenth century, and Des Moines's Ministerial Association had agitated for them in the past.⁴⁴ But the intensity and cooperation with which evangelical leaders pursued moral reform and the way they linked it with modern progress was new. With the commission system in place, Des Moines's evangelical leaders sought to consolidate their forces and launch a moral campaign on an unprecedented scale befitting a pioneering progressive city.

In late 1907, a few months before the 1908 city election, Des Moines's ministers found an opportunity to test their new assertive political approach. At issue was the Mulct Law, a compromise bill passed in 1894 to limit the scope of the 1884 statewide prohibition on alcohol. The law, historian Herman Bateman explains, "retained prohibition" but "permitted carefully regulated saloons to operate in counties where a majority of voters approved."⁴⁵ Anti-liquor forces in the state responded by carefully monitoring saloons for violations and hounding local officials to shut down offenders. But in counties with popular support for alcohol, local officials often declined to enforce the regulations. That infuriated the dries; in 1905 they began urging Governor Albert Cummins to use his power to make sure that recalcitrant officials enforced the law. Cummins did not have the authority to follow the dries' wishes, but criticism from ardent prohibitionists continued.⁴⁶

Cummins shared many of the cultural assumptions of his fierce anti-liquor antagonists. A lawyer in Des Moines before

43. "Opposes Brewery," *Iowa Unionist*, 8/16/1907. *Unionist* articles accessed via www.newspaperarchive.com.

44. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction*, 47-117.

45. Herman E. Bateman, "Albert B. Cummins and the Davenport 'Riots' of 1907," *Arizona and the West* 18 (1976), 111-24.

46. Albert B. Cummins to Charles A. Parkin, 6/30/1907, box 9, Letter Copy Book, vol. 20, Albert Baird Cummins Papers, SHSI-DM.

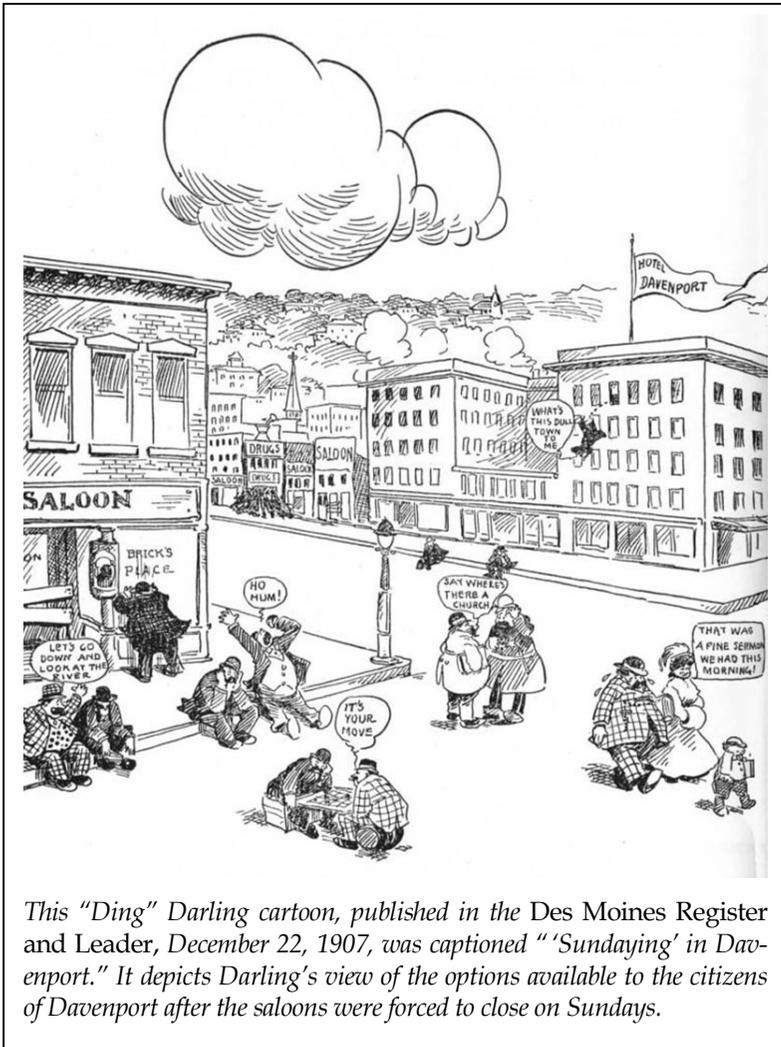
his election as governor, Cummins was cozy with the white Protestant establishment. He spoke to Sunday School classes, supported the YMCA, and saw churches as a "potent ally of good government."⁴⁷ In general he sought to limit the consumption of alcohol and such vices as prostitution and gambling. But he did not match the zeal of many of the evangelical ministers. He was, as he explained in one letter, "connected with the Congregational denomination" but was not a church member; so, too, he did not support statewide prohibition at the time, believing that the Mulct Law was more effective.⁴⁸ For these reasons evangelical moral reformers in Iowa viewed him with suspicion.

In October 1907 the simmering controversy over Mulct Law enforcement boiled over when wets in Davenport accosted a prohibitionist and his lawyer. Word of the Davenport "riots" quickly spread. Seeing an opportunity for manly Christian action, the Des Moines Ministerial Association threw itself into the fray, adopting a resolution that urged Governor Cummins to enforce the Mulct Law. Cummins, with an eye toward positive publicity, responded by inviting the ministers to meet with him and offer advice "respecting the power of the Governor." Des Moines's ministers faced a conundrum. Passing a resolution was one thing; to meet collectively and publicly advise the governor was quite another. After debating the governor's invitation, Des Moines's ministers ultimately agreed to attend. Their meeting with Cummins was cordial and mostly uneventful, but it was also symbolically important: it represented a new willingness on the part of Des Moines's ministers to engage collectively and more openly in political agitation. C. H. Gordon, a professor at Highland Park College and an ardent prohibitionist, described the meeting as historic and concluded that it proved that "Des Moines ministers does [sic] things."⁴⁹

47. Albert B. Cummins to D. J. Lenehan, 3/13/1907, Letter Copy Book, vol. 19, Cummins Papers.

48. Albert B. Cummins to F. E. Heavox, 10/25/1907, Letter Copy Book, vol. 21, Cummins Papers.

49. Albert B. Cummins to the Ministerial Association of Des Moines and Polk County, 10/30/1907, Letter Copy Book, vol. 21, Cummins Papers; "Ministers Debate Cummins Reply," *R&L*, 11/5/1907; "Squiblets," *Iowa Unionist*, 11/8/1907; "Governor Meets the Ministers," *R&L*, 11/12/1907; "Clergymen Thank Governor of Iowa," *R&L*, 11/14/1907; "The Other Side," *R&L*, 11/20/1907. Cummins pri-



Gordon's praise was undoubtedly welcomed by Des Moines's ministers. Well aware of religion's feminine connotations, ministers knew that forging a more masculine Protestantism involved forging more masculine ministers. By throwing themselves into the masculine domain of politics—women did not have the

vately predicted afterwards that the meeting would help "correct the misapprehension" about his stance on the temperance question. See Albert B. Cummins to James A. Smith, 11/13/1907, Letter Copy Book, vol. 21, Cummins Papers.

right to vote in Iowa until 1919—ministers could project a masculine image and potentially recruit men to join their cause. At the same time, by electing candidates sympathetic to the preferred moral safeguards of the evangelical Protestant establishment, ministers could attempt to inculcate morality in men previously unreached by their Christianizing influence. Evangelicals often framed these safeguards as a way to protect women, of course, but increasingly in the early twentieth century they also portrayed them as protecting men from corrupting influences that, according to First Baptist pastor Howland Hanson, “destroy manhood.”⁵⁰

CITY ELECTIONS under the Des Moines Plan worked as a two-step process: a primary election narrowed the candidates for city council down to ten; a general election two weeks later selected five men (one mayor and four councilmen) for office. Each elected official would be assigned to one of five city departments. The simplicity of the arrangement helped build enthusiasm for the election. With clearly delineated roles and responsibilities, voters felt that they could hold elected officials accountable for their assigned duties. That sense, in turn, heightened the responsibility voters felt to elect candidates who could do the job well.

The groups that had united behind the Des Moines Plan struggled to decide which candidates to support. Eventually a committee selected by the Commercial Club settled on a slate of five candidates: Eugene Waterbury, Harry C. Evans, James R. Hanna, Buffon S. Walker, and Charles S. Worth.⁵¹ Deemed the “Des Moines Plan Ticket” by its supporters and the “silk stocking” slate by its detractors, these five represented the supposed consensus of Des Moines’s “best men.” But the consensus had fractured. One of the three west-side dailies, the *News*, refused to back the slate, in part because it did not include controversial former mayor John MacVicar, who had returned to Des Moines from a New York-based stint as secretary of the League of

50. “Children in Beer Wagon,” *R&L*, 9/14/1908.

51. The religious affiliations of all but Worth are listed in Brigham, *Des Moines*, 2:48, 223, 649, 972. Two were Presbyterian (Waterbury and Walker), one a Methodist (Evans), and one a Unitarian (Hanna).

American Municipalities. MacVicar was sure to draw support not only from business and professional men but also from working-class voters who remembered that he had championed municipal ownership of public utilities.⁵² A Methodist, MacVicar saw his evangelical Protestant credentials bolstered by the support of his confidant John J. Hamilton, a prominent Presbyterian layman. In late 1907 Hamilton recognized the growing evangelical political interest in Des Moines, urging MacVicar to get "right on the fundamental moral issues" if he wanted to win in 1908.⁵³

As the city election approached, a group within the Ministerial Association pushed to make moral reform a central part of the campaign. They wanted to force all candidates to go on record on two issues: strict enforcement of the Mulct Law and elimination of the "segregated vice" system within Des Moines.⁵⁴ The latter, common in many cities throughout the United States, confined businesses engaged in vices like gambling and prostitution to specific parts of the city and subjected them to regular fines. Proponents of the segregated vice system argued that it was better to regulate gambling and prostitution and keep it geographically contained than to outlaw it outright and allow it to flourish underground. Opponents, on the other hand, believed that the system effectively provided government sanction and protection for sinful activity that harmed the community. Further, they claimed that it bred corruption, enslaved women, and did not effectively segregate the vice since gambling and prostitution still occurred elsewhere in the city.⁵⁵

Members of the Ministerial Association generally agreed that the segregation system needed to be eliminated. But in 1908 they decided against seeking pledges or putting candidates on

52. Bionaz, "Trickle-Down Democracy," 246, 263-68.

53. John J. Hamilton to John MacVicar, 11/30/1907, John J. MacVicar Papers, SHSI-DM; "Des Moines (Ia.) Notes," *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, 4/19/1916, 406; YMCA circular letter to A. J. Mathis, 4/10/1909, box 1, A. J. Mathis Papers, SHSI-DM.

54. "Objects to Gag Rule," *R&L*, 2/26/1908; "No Pledges Asked from Candidates," *R&L*, 3/3/1908.

55. George Kibbe Turner, "The New American City Government," *McClure's Magazine* (May 1910), 102-3.

record. Most ministers reasoned that the survival of the Des Moines Plan should be secured before moral issues could come to the forefront of local elections.⁵⁶ Although Des Moines's evangelical ministers decided not to engage in collective political action, the city's Christian Endeavor societies (an evangelical young people's group) sent questionnaires to the candidates asking for their positions on five issues: Sunday theater, Sunday baseball, unregulated saloons, the segregated vice system, and whether they had signed the Brewery Petition (which would have indicated approval of bringing a liquor-related business to the city). The letter warned that failure to respond to the inquiry would lead the society to "consider that your views on the subjects are such that a Good Citizen should not support you for the office to which you aspire."⁵⁷ The effort did not go unnoticed. The *Tribune*, continuing its anti-Des Moines Plan activism by opposing the "silk stocking" candidates, suggested that Christian Endeavor members should "keep out of politics and keep on endeavoring to be Christians."⁵⁸ Although the group did not have the clout to make a dent in the election outcome, its activities portended a more politically active evangelical establishment.

So, too, did the sermons preached by evangelical ministers during election season. From March 15 (the Sunday before the primary election) through April 5 (the Sunday after the general election), Des Moines's Protestant leaders proclaimed a new era of political interest and manliness from the pulpit. "It is time for the church to become aroused and come into her own in the control of the city's affairs," asserted O. C. Luce of North Des Moines Methodist Church. Howland Hanson of First Baptist Church saw in the election evidence of a "new manhood" and envisioned God declaring, "'Behold, I will do this thing in Des

56. "No Pledges Asked from Candidates," *R&L*, 3/3/1908; "Moral Issues in the City Campaign," *R&L*, 3/8/1908; "Ministers Will Not Act," *R&L*, 3/17/1908.

57. E. B. Devore to A. J. Mathis, 3/10/1908, box 1, Mathis Papers, SHSI-DM; "Must Declare Themselves," *R&L*, 3/17/1908. In the 1890s Christian Endeavor societies had begun a "Good Citizen" program, which encouraged young people to align themselves with evangelical Protestant moral values. See Foster, *Moral Reconstruction*, 115.

58. Untitled editorial, *DMT*, 3/13/1908, 4.

Moines.'” Finis Idleman, Harvey Breeden’s successor at Central Christian Church, appealed to an unlikely hero while expressing similar sentiments: “Savonarola declares that Jesus had a right to rule Florence. So he had. So has he a right to rule Des Moines.” Charles Medbury, meanwhile, urged “men who count the moral issues supreme” to stand together at the ballot box.⁵⁹

The moral issues that Medbury referred to were, of course, the problems of gambling, alcohol, prostitution, and immoral amusements. But on election day Des Moines’s voters seemed to vote on behalf of another moral issue: that of the concentration of wealth and power in the upper classes. Repudiating the “silk stocking” slate entirely, voters selected A. J. Mathis, John MacVicar, John Hamery, Wesley Ash, and Charles Schramm. All except MacVicar had received favorable comments from Des Moines’s leading labor weekly, the *Iowa Unionist*, and two (Hamery and Ash) had been endorsed by Des Moines’s labor leaders.⁶⁰

If Des Moines’s ministers were disappointed with the results, they quickly recovered. In a post-election sermon, Howland Hanson drew on a New Testament parable to declare that Des Moines faced two options: the narrow road or the broad road. The latter, Hanson argued, would lead to a “wide-open” town that “gives free rein to every animal passion of life” and is “lined with saloons, brothels, opium joints, barbarism, death, and the soul of man partakes of the body’s doom.” The former was the way of “strict law enforcement for the city”; it would lead to “homes, schools and business, churches, life.”⁶¹

With responsibilities clearly delineated in the new city council, the forces of evangelical Protestantism could monitor the new city government for its adherence to the evangelical moral agenda. They had their eye on two officials in particular: the commissioner of public safety (who oversaw the police department) and the mayor.⁶² Employing pulpit and press, they

59. “Qualifications for Officials,” *R&L*, 3/16/1908; “Preachers on Event Today,” *R&L*, 3/30/1908; “Des Moines Decides Today,” *R&L*, 3/16/1908.

60. Bionaz, “Trickle-Down Democracy,” 269; “The Labor Vote,” *Iowa Unionist*, 3/21/1908.

61. “City’s Election Is Theme of Sermons,” *R&L*, 4/6/1908.

62. On the structure of Des Moines’s police system, see Douglas Wertsch, “The Evolution of the Des Moines Police Department: Professionalization and the

planned to exert public pressure on those two officials to lead the city down the narrow path. And if officials failed to follow that path, an election in 1910 beckoned.

As an omen of the increased political involvement to come, John A. Wirt, a dogged defender of a nonpolitical pulpit, died suddenly less than two months after the 1908 election. Fittingly, Wirt's companions in the Prairie Club remembered him as a man "possibly inclined to dogmatism" who did not believe "in certain kinds of [ministerial] activity in public affairs."⁶³

THE FIVE MEN elected to office in 1908 represented a rejection of the very forces that had pushed for the Des Moines Plan. Indeed, the newly elected mayor, A. J. Mathis, had originally opposed the commission system. But the elected officials were not antibusiness radicals. They won not just with a strong showing among working-class voters but also with the support of middle-class voters who rejected a Des Moines Plan slate that seemed forced upon them. In some ways the election results were the best thing that could have happened to ensure city-wide support for the plan, because it invested working-class voters in the success of the commission system.⁶⁴

Because of his experience and skill in politics, John MacVicar was the leading personality in city hall.⁶⁵ Mayor Mathis and newly appointed commissioner of public safety John Hamery stood next in importance and attention. The genial 64-year-old Mathis had friends far and wide in Des Moines, but some evangelical voters had their suspicions. A Democrat from the east side, Mathis had earned a reputation for lenient sentencing when he served as a police judge. Although an evangelical Protestant who personally abstained from alcohol—Mathis was a deacon at Calvary Baptist Church—he did not support statewide prohibition. Mathis's unorthodox views on moral reform became

Decline of Public Disorder Arrests in the Twentieth Century," *Annals of Iowa* 48 (1987), 436–37.

63. Prairie Club Minutes, 1890–1917, p. 39, folder 1, box 1, PCGDMR.

64. Bionaz, "Trickle-Down Democracy," 269–71.

65. Brigham, *Des Moines*, 1:404.

an issue late in the 1908 election, leading the *Tribune* to defend him as “a good Christian man.”⁶⁶

As for Hamery, he was more of a wild card. Elected as an alderman in 1906 under the old city government system, he remained relatively unknown to Des Moines’s business, professional, and religious elites. Upon assuming office, however, he ingratiated himself with Des Moines’s white Protestant leaders by zealously enforcing the law. Hamery especially earned their trust when, on September 15, 1908, he shut down Des Moines’s red light district, located at the time at East Court Avenue. In years past the red light district had been temporarily shut down but always with the knowledge that the brothels would eventually return or relocate. Hamery’s order proved to be permanent.⁶⁷ If evangelical leaders had not known Hamery before the election, they quickly came to view him as an ally.

Leading observers in Des Moines were cautious about proclaiming Hamery’s plan a success. They worried that prostitution would simply spread unchecked throughout the city if not confined to a regulated district. But within a year even Mayor Mathis, who had supported the segregated vice system, came to support Hamery’s plan. “Until lately I had not believed the experiment would prove a success,” Mathis wrote to an inquirer in October 1909, but it “seems to be bringing much better results than segregation.”⁶⁸

Mathis’s rosy assessment of Hamery’s reform reflected an emerging consensus that the Des Moines Plan was a smashing success. With the city’s finances, services, and morality apparently improved, the press lavished praise on the new government. In November 1909 the *Register and Leader* published a feature article under the splashy headline “Eyes of Whole World

66. Brigham, *Des Moines*, 2:553–54; Records 1872–1918, pp. 40–45, box 1, Calvary Baptist Church Records, SHSI-DM. For the *Tribune*’s defense of Mathis, see “Who Is John J. Hamilton?” *DMT*, 3/24/1908; “Judge Mathis’ System,” *DMT*, 3/28/1908; and “Unfair Criticism,” *DMT*, 4/2/1908.

67. Turner, “The New American City Government,” 102; “Tenderloin Ends Tonight,” *R&L*, 9/15/1908; “Lid Goes Down and All Is Still,” *R&L*, 9/16/1908. On prostitution in Des Moines, see Hope C. Mitchell, “Sacrificing Our Daughters: Changing Perceptions of Prostitution in Iowa, 1880–1915” (M.A. thesis, Iowa State University, 2014).

68. A. J. Mathis to B. S. Steadwell, 10/11/1909, box 2, Mathis Papers.

Are on Des Moines, 'The City on a Hill.'" Noting with pride the thousands of letters that had poured into Des Moines asking about the plan, the author declared that despite nearly two years of intense scrutiny "a big flaw is yet to be found."⁶⁹ In 1910 the popular muckraking monthly *McClure's* agreed, publishing an essay that praised the Des Moines Plan for marking "an advance of our civilization at the point where, in many ways, it has been at its lowest—the modern city."⁷⁰

Such glowing reviews might lead one to believe that Des Moines's voters would reelect the five incumbents in a landslide. Certainly the city's evangelical establishment should have been pleased with Hamery's elimination of the segregated vice system. Yet the widespread acclaim for the city only heightened the responsibility that its evangelical leaders felt. If the whole world was indeed watching, the city's guardians of morality could not rest content.

As the 1910 city election approached, evangelical leaders clamored for change, directing most of their ire at A. J. Mathis. The *Tribune* had defended him in 1908, but by 1910 it had been bought out by Gardner Cowles, owner of the *Register & Leader*. It continued publication but was no longer a staunch defender of Mathis.⁷¹

Although Mathis had come around to support the elimination of the red light district, he did not share his evangelical Protestant counterparts' zeal for moral reform. They wanted a champion who believed that white Protestant moral causes were right for the whole city; Mathis seemed uncomfortable with their triumphalist reform initiatives. In early January 1910, for example, even though prize fighting was illegal in Iowa, Mathis welcomed professional boxer James Jeffries to Des Moines, greeting him at the train station and offering him the

69. "Eyes of Whole World Are on Des Moines, 'The City on a Hill,'" *R&L*, 11/28/1909. John MacVicar, serving as one of the five elected commissioners in 1909, included the article as a clipping in his scrapbook. See Scrapbook 3, pp. 20-21, MacVicar Papers.

70. Turner, "The New American City Government," 108.

71. "The Retiring Mayor," *DMT*, 4/4/1910. The *Tribune's* change in ownership is covered in William B. Friedericks, *Covering Iowa: The History of the Des Moines Register and Tribune Company, 1849-1985* (Ames, 2000).

"freedom of the city." Des Moines's ministers censured Mathis. His own pastor, J. W. Graves of Calvary Baptist, issued a statement on behalf of the Ministerial Association denouncing prize fighting as illegal and degrading to public morals. Other ministers called out the mayor by name. Thomas Sykes, pastor of Sixth Presbyterian Church, described Mathis's warm welcome for Jeffries as "an insult to all decent citizens." He urged church members to ensure that such a disgrace would never happen again. With a city election in March and Mathis up for reelection, Sykes's implication was clear.⁷²

In 1908 the Ministerial Association had mostly refrained from endorsing particular candidates or launching a coordinated campaign. For the 1910 election, however, they openly named and denounced candidates. Following their denunciation of Mathis, councilman Wesley Ash came in for a tongue-lashing when he admitted that he occasionally drank bourbon. The Ministerial Association passed a resolution expressing regret that "a candidate for the office of commissioner under the Des Moines plan" should openly admit to immorality and thereby "cast a reproach upon the fair name of our city."⁷³

The Ministerial Association was reinforced by the formation of the Laymen's Civic Union (LCU).⁷⁴ Organized in early February, the LCU took up the idea discarded by the Ministerial Association in 1908: to force candidates to state their positions on pressing moral issues. The LCU identified four such issues: opposition to gambling, the strict regulation of saloons, continuation of the effort to abolish the red light district, and the suppression of "immoral amusements." In order to achieve its aims, the LCU vowed to investigate and make public the "character and qualifications of candidates" regarding "law enforcement

72. "'Big Jeff' Is Welcomed by a Throng," *DMT*, 1/3/1910; "Jeffries Balked by John Hamery," *R&L*, 1/4/1910; "Pastor Praises Public Officials," *R&L*, 1/5/1910; "Minister Flays Mayor," *R&L*, 1/10/1910.

73. "Ash Retains First Place," *R&L*, 3/16/1910.

74. Brigham, *Des Moines*, 1:626-27; John J. Hamilton, *Government by Commission: The Dethronement of the City Boss* (New York, 1910), 164-68. See also an undated clipping from the *Des Moines News* (probably from February or March 1910) titled "Report of the Laymen's League Given Public," located in Scrapbook 3, p. 158, box 3, MacVicar Papers. The LCU was called the Laymen's League in some newspaper reports.

and civic morality” and to work for the election of candidates who met with the league’s approval. Aiming to unite Des Moines’s Protestant churches for moral action, the LCU sought representation from all evangelical churches in the city. Frank Dunshee, an elder at Central Presbyterian Church, served as president. John Hamilton, MacVicar’s confidant, also played an active role.⁷⁵

The LCU’s efforts to secure pledges or statements from candidates met with ridicule from some quarters and intransigence from many of the candidates.⁷⁶ But members cobbled together information from their own investigations and the statements submitted by candidates to issue a report one week before the primary election. Although they did not explicitly endorse a particular candidate or group of candidates, it was clear from the language of the report whom they backed. For mayor, James Hanna earned the most vigorous support and A. J. Mathis the most criticism. Among council candidates, the LCU praised Hamery and offered relatively positive assessments of John MacVicar and Charles Schramm. Wesley Ash, W. H. Brereton, and Zell Roe, on the other hand, received subtle rebukes.⁷⁷

Although the LCU worked toward the same Protestant establishment ends as the Ministerial Association, not all evangelical pastors fully endorsed the LCU’s methods. Howland Hanson, for example, preached a sermon urging Des Moines churchgoers to mobilize in order to provide the city’s booster movement with a moral center. “We rejoice in a Greater Des Moines,” Hanson declared, “but must not forget the relation of civic spirituality to true greatness.” Yet he explicitly rejected the LCU’s tactics. Instead of pressuring candidates for pledges, Hanson urged the “moral minded people . . . gathered in the churches” to repent of “civic indifference” and to strive together for new “ideals of manhood.” Orien Fifer of Grace Methodist Church,

75. “Laymen Take Hand in City Campaign,” *R&L*, 2/7/1910; “Review Records of Candidates,” *R&L*, 3/6/1910; “Laymen Make Inquiry Report,” *DMT*, 3/7/1910. A newspaper report also lists the presence of Johnson Brigham, a Unitarian, at one of the LCU’s meetings. See “Mathis Is Target for Roe’s Words,” *R&L*, 3/21/1910.

76. “Hard Jolt Handed Laymen,” *R&L*, 2/18/1910; “Schramm Slaps Laymen,” *R&L*, 2/21/1910.

77. “What Laymen’s Inquirers Say about Candidates,” *R&L*, 3/6/1910.

on the other hand, praised the work of the LCU, arguing that it represented a much-needed effort by Christian men to get involved in city government. "The one conspicuous failure of America has been her government of cities," Fifer said. He blamed that failure on the "teaching of the devil that Christian men and churches have no business in city politics."⁷⁸

Whatever their differences of opinion regarding the LCU's methods, by the eve of the general election Des Moines's evangelical pastors joined their lay counterparts in support of two candidates: James Hanna for mayor and John Hamery for city council. Just as vigorously, they opposed three candidates: A. J. Mathis, Wesley Ash, and William Brereton. The ministers viewed Hamery's election as crucial: a rejection of Hamery would signify a rejection of his anti-vice policies. "The crisis before us tomorrow is a moral crisis," asserted Charles Medbury. Medbury had the backing of his congregants: the *Register and Leader* reported that when Medbury mentioned Hamery's name, the walls of the church resounded with applause and cheering. A. J. Mathis, on the other hand, came in for rebuke from the ministers, who reminded their congregants of his "disgraceful" act of welcoming Jeffries and pointed out his friendliness with supporters of the saloon. "Let us be men," W. R. Coventry of Clifton Heights Presbyterian declared after denouncing Mathis, "and vote with our conscience and upon Christian principle."⁷⁹

In the eyes of many evangelical Protestant ministers and laymen, the moral issues seemed clear. To be sure, they recognized other election issues at play besides the suppression of vice. Perhaps most prominent was the debate over city ownership of public service corporations. But Des Moines's evangelicals managed to link even that issue to their moral agenda, urging the city to take control of public service corporations in part because such corporations were supposedly in a political alliance with saloon and gambling house owners.⁸⁰

78. "Pays Little Heed to Rash Promises," *R&L*, 2/21/1910; "Lauds Work of Laymen's Union," *R&L*, 3/14/1910. See also "Pastors Give Advice to Congregations," *DMT*, 3/14/1910.

79. "Ministers Plea Is a Clean City," *R&L*, 3/28/1910. See also "Hanson Picks Candidates," *DMT*, 3/25/1910.

80. "'Closed Town' Men Will Be Elected," *R&L*, 3/21/1910.

For many Des Moines residents, however, the moral issues were not as clear-cut as the evangelical establishment believed. *Iowa Unionist* editor D. H. Caldwell, for example, became a thorn in the side of the Ministerial Association, constantly challenging the ministers' claim to moral authority. Subverting the moral censures so often doled out by the ministers, Caldwell argued in August 1908 that the Ministerial Association itself was "one of the evils of our city" because it was narrow-minded and out of touch with ordinary citizens.⁸¹

In 1909 Caldwell's critiques of the evangelical establishment caught the attention of Howland Hanson, who wrote to the *Unionist* editor. Like many of Des Moines's leading ministers at the time—including Frank Hodgdon, Finis Idleman, and Orien Fifer—Hanson followed the path of Harvey Breeden in embracing progressive religious ideas, including more open support for the cause of labor.⁸² Yet Hanson betrayed his moral priorities by spending most of his letter criticizing Caldwell for opposing Sabbath laws and for being friendly with saloon owners. "We do not need a criticism of those institutions which seek to advance public morals," Hanson implored, "while speaking in terms of semi-approval of institutions that break down morals."⁸³ True to form, Caldwell scoffed at Hanson's letter. He rejected a central tenet of the evangelical establishment—their guardianship of the community's moral well-being—writing that clergy could no longer "dictate and domineer" when it came to morality. The people, Caldwell claimed, had as much right to criticize the clergy as the clergy had to criticize others.⁸⁴

Des Moines's African American citizens also followed a different moral calculation when deciding how to vote. For them, a moral city included not just suppression of vice, but also fair treatment of black citizens. Using that calculation John L. Thompson, editor of the *Bystander*, which represented the city's African American residents, endorsed Mathis over Hanna. He also re-

81. "Our Ministerial Association," *Iowa Unionist*, 8/1/1908.

82. "Dr. Idleman Gives Des Moines Church His Farewell Message," *Christian Century*, 1/6/1916, 14; "Organizations Combine in Farewell to Fifer," *R&L*, 9/9/1913; "Element of Nerve Is Demand of Day," *R&L*, 6/24/1912.

83. "Rev. Hanson Has a Grievance," *Iowa Unionist*, 11/12/1909.

84. "In Reply to Reverend Hanson," *Iowa Unionist*, 11/12/1909.

fused to support John Hamery, the candidate so beloved by Des Moines's white Protestant leaders. Thompson would later describe Hamery as "too narrow, and too prejudiced to our race for us to consider him at all." Even in 1916, six years after Hamery's time as commissioner of public safety had ended, Thompson recalled that Hamery's department was the "worst department in treatment of colored people that we ever experienced in the history of Des Moines."⁸⁵

A. J. Mathis, too, was unwilling to cede the moral high ground to his ministerial critics. When they denounced him for welcoming Jeffries to the city, he refused to apologize. "Everybody in Des Moines is not a church goer," he noted, adding that even "if they are they like a little sport." It was not that Mathis did not believe in the benefits of the evangelical faith; when a young acquaintance moved to Omaha, Mathis privately urged him to get involved with a church in his new city. But Mathis felt uncomfortable using coercion. "You can't legislate people into being good," he remarked when asked about the LCU's objectives.⁸⁶

Although not everyone embraced the evangelical establishment's moral issues, they became a central issue in the 1910 election. Evangelical voters undoubtedly celebrated James Hanna's defeat of A. J. Mathis by 15 votes. Yet Hanna's victory was not necessarily a ringing endorsement for evangelical political agitation. John MacVicar, Wesley Ash, Zell Roe, and Charles Schramm claimed the four council seats; John Hamery, the evangelical coalition's favored candidate, finished sixth. Only in the First Ward, Des Moines's most affluent one, located on the far west side of the city, did Hamery poll in the top four. In all four working-class wards located near the river or on the east side, Hamery finished in seventh place. If, as his evangelical supporters claimed, a vote for Hamery was a vote for the preferred morality of evangelical Protestantism, Des Moines's voters had rejected it.⁸⁷

85. "Search Light on the Candidates," *Bystander*, 3/22/1912; "Primary Results," *Bystander*, 3/17/1916. *Bystander* accessed via chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.

86. "No Apology from Mathis," *R&L*, 1/11/1910; A. J. Mathis to W. A. Connolly, 11/17/1909, box 2, Mathis Papers; "First Candidate Files His Papers," *R&L*, 2/1/1910; "Two Big Meetings on Election Eve," *R&L*, 3/28/1910.

87. "New City Council and How It Was Chosen," *R&L*, 3/29/1910; "Official Canvass Makes No Change," *R&L*, 3/30/1910.

Given Hamery's tepid showing, it seems clear that Hanna did not win primarily from the support of evangelical moralists. Rather, Hanna owed his success to a broad campaign that emphasized his honesty and his support for municipal ownership of public service corporations. Employing that strategy, Hanna managed to win the approval of the Ministerial Association's antagonist, the *Iowa Unionist*, despite his support for the moral reforms preferred by evangelicals.⁸⁸ Although Hanna failed to outpoll Mathis in the four working-class wards, by appealing to a constituency beyond the white Protestant voters in Des Moines's affluent districts, he managed to win just enough votes across the city to put him over the top.⁸⁹

There was some irony in Hanna's victory. His opponent, a Baptist deacon and YMCA member, had unquestioned evangelical Protestant credentials. Hanna, on the other hand, was a Unitarian, a member of a congregation led by a woman and denied a place in the Ministerial Association. But Hanna's Unitarian affiliation may have helped him avoid the pitfalls of the evangelical establishment. While evangelical leaders tended to think of themselves as the triumphant moral voice of the entire city, Unitarians had no delusions about their power. With fewer than 200 members, they were, as Johnson Brigham put it in 1905, simply a "little band . . . at the state capital" that "may not soon become the Church Triumphant."⁹⁰ Given Hanna's Unitarian affiliation and its status just outside the evangelical establishment, it is perhaps not so surprising that he managed to speak sincerely to the moral concerns of competing constituencies and win support from both the *Iowa Unionist* and the Ministerial Association.

88. "James R. Hanna," *Iowa Unionist*, 3/18/1910.

89. East side residents cast 165 more votes in 1910 than in 1908, but Mathis earned 483 fewer votes on the east side than he had in 1908. Hanna earned 648 more east side votes than Eugene Waterbury, the "silk stocking" candidate for mayor in 1908. See "Mathis Victory over Waterbury," *R&L*, 3/31/1908; "New City Council and How It Was Chosen," *R&L*, 3/29/1910; "Official Canvass Makes No Change," *R&L*, 3/30/1910.

90. Johnson Brigham, "An Event of Deep Significance," *Old and New: A Journal of Liberal Religion* 13 (May 1905); Church Report for Year 1907-1908, oversize folder, First Unitarian Church Records, SHSI-DM.

HANNA would go on to serve three terms as mayor. In the meantime, the push for a more masculine church accelerated. In 1910, for example, Samuel Zane Batten, a nationally known proponent of the social gospel, accepted a position at Des Moines College, a Baptist school founded in 1865.⁹¹ Batten supported a broad progressive moral agenda, with vice suppression a prominent part of his work. Soon after arriving in Des Moines, Batten helped form the Des Moines Citizens Association, serving as its vice-president. In late 1910 the group threw itself into the fight against the saloon, launching a drive to get signers of a saloon consent petition to withdraw their signatures (petitions were a Mulct Law requirement for saloon operators). The group worked with the LCU in subsequent years as they investigated vice, fought the saloon, and dispatched men to the polls on election day to monitor for potential voter fraud.⁹²

In 1911 Batten also helped lead the charge in Des Moines for the Men and Religion Forward Movement (MRFM), a national campaign advertised as a “stirring challenge to . . . red-blooded Christian men” to get involved with Protestant churches.⁹³ Organizational work for Des Moines’s MRFM campaign launched in the spring of 1911, culminating with a week-long series of meetings and addresses in October. At the official kick-off rally for the campaign, Methodist minister Orient Fifer linked the movement with the Des Moines Plan. “Des Moines, far more than many other cities, will receive close observation,” Fifer argued, because Des Moines had a reputation for “progressiveness” and “for pioneering the way to satisfactory city government.” Charles Medbury followed by praising the MRFM for its potential to “redeem the non-Christian manhood from the clutches of certain destruction.”⁹⁴

91. Samuel Zane Batten, *The Social Task of Christianity: A Summons to the New Crusade* (New York, 1911); Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore, 1991), 141–42.

92. Des Moines Citizens Association to A. J. Mathis, 12/9/1910, box 5, Mathis Papers; “Booze Petition Remains on File,” *R&L*, 1/1/1911; “Church Council Eliminates Three,” *R&L*, 3/20/1914.

93. “A Stirring Challenge to the Red-Blooded Christian Men of Iowa,” *R&L*, 4/2/1911; Bederman, “The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough.”

94. “First Rally for Church Campaign,” *R&L*, 9/25/1911.

The MRFM sought to present church work—especially social service activity—as manly by portraying it as businesslike, efficient, and practical.⁹⁵ Des Moines was no exception to this general trend. But the work of the MRFM in Des Moines was not entirely different from the political mobilization that had resulted from the Des Moines Plan. Des Moines's leading ministers had already urged Christian men to break down the secular and sacred divide by bringing their faith into the realm of politics, and the Laymen's Civic Union had launched "scientific" investigations of candidates' moral positions.

After Des Moines's MRFM campaign, the city's white Protestant leaders sought to channel newly reached men into Protestant institutions. Central Christian Church, for example, held a follow-up "Enlistment Week," and the city's evangelical churches worked together to form the Interchurch Council, a new, broader institutional expression of the evangelical Protestant establishment. As with the MRFM, the council featured social service endeavors and aimed to recruit men into the Protestant churches. J. W. Graves, Mathis's pastor at Calvary Baptist, left behind his ministerial position to serve as the Interchurch Council's first executive secretary.⁹⁶ Thanks in part to the Interchurch Council, Batten boasted in 1912, the "moral and religious forces" were more "fully federated" in Des Moines than anywhere else, and few cities had "a more earnest and active interest in social service."⁹⁷

95. Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 137–42. Central Christian Church's periodical, the *Weekly Worker*, covered the workings of the MRFM in the following issues: 9/8/1911, 10/15/1911, 10/22/1911, 10/27/1911; all are accessible at SHSI-DM.

96. "Enlisting Week," *Weekly Worker*, 10/27/1911, 1; "Batten Warns Churchmen," *R&L*, 5/30/1911. Letters to J. W. Graves explaining the Interchurch Council and offering him the position of executive secretary are found on p. 585 in Records 1872–1918, box 1, Calvary Baptist Church Records, SHSI-DM.

97. Samuel Zane Batten, "The Moral and Religious Life of Des Moines," *Standard*, 4/27/1912, 8; Samuel Zane Batten, "Des Moines," *Missions* 3 (May 1912), 340. Des Moines's Interchurch Council may have been influential within the city, but it was not unique on a national level. In the wake of the formation of the Federal Council of Churches in Christ in 1908, many cities developed similar federated Protestant organizations. On the growth of these groups within Protestantism, see Mislin, *Saving Faith*, 90–118; and Robert A. Schneider, "Voice of Many Waters: Church Federation in the Twentieth Century," in *Between the Times*, 95–121.

The evangelical establishment did not neglect local electoral politics.⁹⁸ The precedent set in 1910 of mobilizing evangelical voters after investigating candidates' positions on moral issues continued through the outbreak of World War I. The success of those efforts fluctuated. The 1912 election, for example, belonged to the Labor League and its allies, who portrayed the election as "a strictly capital vs labor fight." Labor unequivocally won the fight; two of the five elected candidates (Zell Roe and William Needham) received official Labor League endorsements, and the other three (James Hanna, Fred Van Liew, and Joseph Myerly) all earned unofficial support from the *Iowa Unionist*. Zell Roe, the only candidate categorically condemned by evangelical moralists, tallied the second-most votes of the council candidates.⁹⁹

The election in 1914 proved to be more successful for Des Moines's white Protestants. The LCU once again mobilized, but more importantly the Interchurch Council—an organization with a much broader scope of interests—entered the fray at the behest of its executive secretary, J. W. Graves. At a meeting on March 19, just three days after the primary election, the Interchurch Council condemned three candidates for their support of the saloon: R. M. Galbraith, James Conroy, and Harry Frase. The Labor League had endorsed the latter two, so their presence on the list was no surprise. But Galbraith was a businessman, widely recognized as one of two candidates on a businessman's slate along with W. F. Mitchell. The censure Galbraith received led to howls of protest from some businessmen within the Interchurch Council. Still, the council stuck by its decision. "If we win," Graves predicted, "we will get the biggest victory that has ever been won in the country." By bringing the Interchurch Council into a political campaign, Graves felt that Des Moines's evangelical voters were ushering in "a new era in church work."¹⁰⁰

98. "Rig Up Catechism to Try Candidates," *R&L*, 2/19/1912; "Civic Union Gets Line on Politics," *R&L*, 3/4/1912; "Paragraphs from Sunday Sermons," *R&L*, 3/11/1912.

99. "Our Candidates," *Iowa Unionist*, 3/22/1912; "Laymen Report on Council Candidates," *DMT*, 3/4/1912; "Hanna, Van Liew, Roe, Needham and Myerly Form New Council," *R&L*, 3/26/1912.

100. "Church Council Eliminates Three," *R&L*, 3/20/1914; "Bannister Not Missed Replies Rev. J. W. Graves," *Des Moines News*, 3/23/1914.

First Ward with the greatest gap in votes between Mitchell and Galbraith, John Hamery, the darling of the evangelical moralists, did disproportionately better than in the precincts in which Galbraith and Mitchell received roughly equal tallies.¹⁰²

Building on the encouraging results of the 1914 election, the forces of evangelical Protestantism received another boost that year when Iowa-born revivalist Billy Sunday came to town. Launching his campaign on November 1, 1914, Sunday followed his typical pattern of preaching an old-time gospel coated in bombastic theatrics and witty slang, buttressed by attacks on the saloon and effeminate church leaders. By the time he departed, nearly 20,000 people had walked the sawdust trail, including *Register and Leader* editor Harvey Ingham.¹⁰³

That Ingham, a theological liberal, would support Sunday is not surprising. In 1915 the evangelical establishment—particularly in cities like Des Moines, where it remained the dominant religious force—had not yet splintered into competing fundamentalist and modernist camps. Thus, while Ingham's moral vision included interests like racial and economic justice that went beyond the scope of Sunday's message, he could rally around the revivalist's call to manly, practical action and his fight against alcohol.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, just a few months after Sunday's revival in Des Moines, the liberal Protestant *Outlook* published a piece lauding the revivalist. The article's author admitted that Sunday focused on outdated notions like eternal damnation and that he unnecessarily limited his social concern to "the simple saloon issue." Despite those flaws, the article continued, Sunday

102. "Complete Results," *R&L*, 3/31/1914. The disparity occurred in precincts that the *R&L* would describe two years later as strongholds of the "church vote." See "Plunking System Defeated Hamery," *R&L*, 3/18/1916.

103. George Mills, *Looking in Windows: Surprising Stories of Old Des Moines* (Ames, 1991), 114–18. Ingham joined Plymouth Congregational Church soon after the Sunday revivals.

104. On Ingham's liberalism and support for human rights, see Jack Lufkin, "The Founding and Early Years of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Des Moines, 1915–1930," *Annals of Iowa* 45 (1980), 446–50; and George Mills, *Harvey Ingham and Gardner Cowles, Sr.: Things Don't Just Happen* (Ames, 1977), 39–52. On Billy Sunday's broad Protestant appeal in the Progressive Era, see Jennifer Wiard, "The Gospel of Efficiency: Billy Sunday's Revival Bureaucracy and Evangelicalism in the Progressive Era," *Church History* 85 (2016), 587–616.

succeeded where high-minded liberals could not: he reached the “heart and mind and conscience of the man in the street.”¹⁰⁵ Ingham made a similar point when defending Sunday from criticism dispensed by Everett Martin, Mary Safford’s successor at First Unitarian Church. The *Register and Leader* editor argued that Sunday reached men that other preachers could not reach and that he inspired them to action. “He is a power for the right side,” Ingham declared.¹⁰⁶

Events soon after Sunday’s campaign seemed to back up Ingham’s claim, at least for those who viewed the evangelical Protestant establishment as the “right side.” James Hanna, leading a city council friendly to evangelical moral causes, announced that saloon licenses in Des Moines would not be renewed. With that decision, carried out on February 15, 1915, the evangelical Protestant establishment finally had their dry city—if they could keep and enforce it.¹⁰⁷

THE EVANGELICAL political mobilization that began in the wake of the Des Moines Plan’s passage culminated with the election of 1916. At stake was the protection of the most important step toward moral progress since 1908: the elimination of the city’s saloons. Although the Laymen’s Civic Union was still in operation, the most dynamic evangelical political agitation in 1916 came from the pulpit of Plymouth Congregational Church. Nine years earlier Frank Hodgdon had employed the Plymouth pulpit to vigorously support the passage of the Des Moines Plan; in 1916 his successor, J. Edward Kirbye, campaigned to ensure that the Des Moines Plan would continue to be a force for moral progress.

Branching out from church-based organizations, Kirbye led a group of fellow evangelical ministers who joined with the Good Government Association. They settled on a slate of three candidates: John Budd, Ben Woolgar, and Fred German. With

105. Frederick M. Davenport, “On the Trail of Progress and Reaction in the West,” *Outlook*, 6/9/1915, 311–15.

106. “Misjudging Sunday,” *R&L*, 11/18/1914.

107. On the closing of the saloons, see Mills, *Looking in Windows*, 118–22. In 1915 Iowa’s state legislature also overturned the Mulct Law, effective January 1, 1916.

only five men on the council, evangelicals needed just three to ensure that their moral reforms would be properly implemented. In the two weeks leading up to the election Kirbye and Good Government Association members gave speeches, organized get-out-the-vote campaigns, and sent a resolution in support of their three candidates to every evangelical pulpit in the city.¹⁰⁸

On the eve of the election, evangelical pulpits in Des Moines thundered with urgent appeals to vote. "I do not want the words to be scattered far and wide that Des Moines is dropping behind," First Methodist pastor J. L. Hillman pleaded, asking his congregants to vote for "law and order and all that makes for a clean progressive city." Kirbye promoted the Good Government slate with a sermon titled "Shall the Church in Des Moines Be Like the First Church in Jerusalem?" Following the sermon, Plymouth Congregational Church unanimously passed a resolution supporting Kirbye "in this fight he is making for good government in Des Moines."¹⁰⁹

The election results revealed mostly good news for evangelical voters. Two of the three Good Government candidates, Ben Woolgar and John Budd, earned a spot at city hall. Although the voters elected two candidates opposed by the evangelical establishment—Harry Frase and Tom Fairweather (owner of the city's baseball team, the Des Moines Boosters)—newly elected mayor John MacVicar had the trust of white Protestant leaders.¹¹⁰ With three city council members who seemed to support the moral reforms of the evangelical establishment and with the cornerstones of those moral reforms in place—the red light district abolished and alcohol prohibited—evangelical Protestants in Des Moines could be proud of the progress they had made.

THE 1916 ELECTION signaled the end of the unusually intense evangelical voter mobilization that had resulted from the passage of the Des Moines Plan. Eight years earlier, inspired by the evangelical Protestant sense of moral guardianship and the push for

108. "Association Stays Neutral," *R&L*, 3/19/1916; "Voters Take Turn at Political Game as Day Commences," *R&L*, 3/27/1916; "Appeals Made for Good Government," *R&L*, 3/27/1916.

109. "Appeals Made for Good Government," *R&L*, 3/27/1916.

110. "Voters Finish Job of Making a Clean Sweep in Council," *R&L*, 3/28/1916.

a more masculine and active faith, the city's evangelical leaders had entered into the political realm at an unprecedented level. Their efforts intensified two years later during the 1910 election with the formation of the Laymen's Civic Union and the fight to ensure that the moral progress achieved under John Hamery did not recede. Over the next three elections the LCU and evangelical ministers played a prominent role. Their efforts were always challenged by those who held to different conceptions of morality or to a different ordering of moral priorities. Yet the evangelical Protestant establishment repeatedly consolidated its forces and expanded its constituency; if its favored candidates fared poorly in the 1910 and 1912 elections, that pattern was reversed in the 1914 and 1916 elections.

Evangelical Protestants continued to take an interest in electoral politics after 1916, of course, but the context was rapidly changing. One change—women winning the right to vote—promised to bring reinforcements to the white Protestant moral cause.¹¹¹ Yet it also caused a reorientation away from the masculine rhetoric that dominated white Protestant calls for electoral action in the years between 1908 and 1916.¹¹² Meanwhile, the Great War in Europe increasingly pushed international issues to the forefront of public attention while the commission system fell out of favor and a new system, the city manager plan, took its place.¹¹³ The sense that the eyes of the world were on Des Moines abated.

So, too, did the connection between progress and evangelical Protestantism. Buoyed by demographic dominance in Des Moines, in the first two decades of the twentieth century conservative and liberal Protestant leaders could unite behind a push for a practical and masculine faith that sought to embed the moral values inherited from the nineteenth century within the rapidly changing consumer-driven society of the twentieth.

111. Thomas G. Ryan, "Male Opponents and Supporters of Woman Suffrage: Iowa in 1916," *Annals of Iowa* 45 (1981), 537-50.

112. As early as 1916 Rev. R. K. Porter was arguing that only when women received the vote would Des Moines get "that moral and spiritual cleansing of the city which we should so much desire." See "Appeals Made for Good Government," *R&L*, 3/27/1916.

113. Rice, *Progressive Cities*, 100-109.

But with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the fundamentalist movement after World War I, evangelical moral reform increasingly became associated with reaction and maintenance, with protection of an old order rather than the advancement of a new. In Des Moines, as in the country at large, the white Protestant establishment divided in response to this new state of affairs, with some liberal Protestants finding that they shared more in common with the inclusive moral vision of non-Protestant religious leaders like Rabbi Eugene Mannheimer than with their conservative coreligionists.¹¹⁴ We can surmise that in this new postwar cultural climate, the slogan that had previously inspired Des Moines's evangelical leaders to create their "city on a hill" took on a rather different connotation. What had once signified a zeal for progress and cutting-edge reform now seemed to signify the ordinary banality of a city dominated by white Protestants: "Des Moines Does Things."

114. "Quitting Klan Brings Pastor Hate of Some," *R&L*, 3/31/1924. On Mannheimer, see Michael J. Bell, "'True Israelites of America': The Story of the Jews of Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 53 (1994), 111-15. On Mannheimer's involvement in an interwar tri-faith initiative in support of religious pluralism, see Douglas, "Making Iowa Safe for Differences," 234-59.