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Just Immigration and the Social Gospel

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Abstract

This essay reconsiders the nation's current immigration problems by examining how social gospel leaders faced the country's first immigration laws based on the standards they devised and asks who, if any, exemplified the heart of the social gospel in relation to immigration. It focuses on four leaders of the social gospel: Washington Gladden, the so-called Father of the Social Gospel; Walter Rauschenbusch, the movement's most prominent theologian; Josiah Strong, a leader of the social gospel most often, if perhaps unfairly, remembered for his proclamations of Anglo-Protestant superiority; and Sidney Gulick, a missionary and social activist. While immigration was a major issue in the United States then and now, scholars have given little attention to the relationship between the social gospel and positions on immigration policy. The essay argues that while founders of the movement like Gladden and Rauschenbusch did not live up to the movement's potential in regard to immigration, leaders like Strong and, to a much greater degree, Gulick did.

Keywords: social gospel, immigration, Walter Rauschenbusch, Washington Gladden, Josiah Strong

Introduction

At the peak of the Protestant social gospel movement from 1880 to 1920, over 20 million immigrants, primarily Jews and Roman Catholics from eastern and southern Europe, arrived on U.S. shores. Taking advantage of this mass migration, landlords built shoddy tenement houses that hosted plentiful vermin and lacked indoor plumbing, electricity, and natural light. With few labor regulations, new immigrants, including thousands of children, worked long days in dangerous sweatshops for low wages. High infant mortality and diseases like tuberculosis, cholera, typhoid, and yellow fever killed tens of thousands. At the same time, the social gospel was inspiring progressive Protestants to build God's kingdom here on earth by improving human lives and society. The plight of immigrants and social gospel ideals inspired some of these native-born Americans to move to intercity neighborhoods and open settlement houses to help new Americans improve their lives, while others campaigned to change the nation's immigration policies. Immigrants to the United States still face substantial challenges crossing the border and adapting to life in America, and religious leaders still fight for their rights. Scholars, activists, and pastors grappled with this issue at numerous sessions at the American Academy of Religion's annual meeting in San Diego in 2019. They debated how Christians and people of other religions should respond to the border crisis and engaged in activism by visiting the border for demonstrations, a show of solidarity, and prayer.

This essay reconsiders the nation's current immigration problems by examining how social gospel leaders faced the country's first immigration laws based on the standards they devised and asks who, if any, exemplified the heart of the social gospel in relation to immigration. It focuses on four leaders of the social gospel: Washington Gladden, the so-called Father of the Social Gospel; Walter Rauschenbusch, the movement's most prominent theologian; Josiah Strong, a leader of the social gospel most often, if perhaps unfairly, remembered for his proclamations of Anglo-Protestant superiority; and Sidney Gulick, a missionary and social activist. While immigration was a major issue in the United States then and now, scholars have given little attention to the relationship between the social gospel and positions on immigration policy. The essay argues that while founders of the movement like Gladden and Rauschenbusch did not live up to the movement's potential in regard to immigration, leaders like Strong and, to a much greater degree, Gulick did. While this essay focuses on the privileged white Protestant men who founded the social gospel, variations of their message spread to other racial groups and religions. Assembling the thoughts of these men is a starting point upon which to build. Future research must look to the work of Jane Addams, Vida Scudder, John Ryan, Felix Adler, Emil Hirsch, and others. The conclusion returns to the essay's framing questions to consider whether the work of these leaders models action for today's crisis.

While scholars have ignored the question of immigration policy within the context of the social gospel, immigration would have been a natural issue for social gospelers to address. The heart of the movement coincided with a period of mass immigration to the United States – two decades before and after 1900 – and taught that Christians should apply Jesus's teachings beyond their private spheres. Leaders believed that simple charity was inefficient and possibly even harmful; Christians are instead obligated to combat the unjust, “sinful” social structures that cause poverty and other societal ills. Charles Sheldon's 1896 bestseller *In His Steps* sparked

the first popular movement to ask, “What would Jesus do?” Sheldon’s characters did not provide a clear methodology for ascertaining God’s will, but prioritized actions that would improve the lives of others and society at large. They asked how Jesus would cope with daily problems and what he would do with their lives broadly. As Christians, they felt obligated to reform humanity, and their actions were connected to social reform movements like temperance, fair labor practices, and combating corruption. The postmillennial idealism of social gospelers proclaimed that it was possible to begin building God’s Kingdom on earth. The broad goals of the movement mean that activists had to choose which issues to prioritize.

Most leaders initially focused on labor issues and overlooked immigration policy and the plight of immigrants as subjects of interest. This may relate to their tendency to avoid confronting racial issues as many later critics pointed out, or it may have been too divisive a topic. Progressive religious leaders held conflicting notions of what constituted just immigration. Justice for whom is always a question in these debates, but even that perspective did not neatly divide opinions on immigration. Some religious leaders supported restrictions for the sake of potential immigrants who they believed would be unsuccessful in America. Others advocated limiting immigration if it could be done without discrimination, aware of the potential damage to foreign relations and Christian missions abroad. Many worried about its effects on the U.S. economy and prioritized the needs of current workers. This is to say, immigration reform has long been an intensely debated and complicated issue in U.S. history.

Numerous factors affected people’s willingness to support the United States’ existing policy of open borders. Many believed immigrants spread disease, ignorance, undesirable genetics, and undemocratic ideologies while becoming a burden to charitable Americans. The related popularity of eugenics led religious and political leaders to strengthen immigration barriers, and racial prejudices complicated matters further. Nativists clamored for the dominance of white (Anglo-Saxon or German) men and unapologetically sought to remove or at least bar non-whites from U.S. shores. The fluid categorization of “the white race” at times excluded southern and eastern Europeans, limiting the degree to which Americans welcomed them, though they retained the legal benefits of whiteness (Painter).

The temporal boundaries of this essay span a period in which racism and eugenics played increasing roles in U.S. foreign policy, coinciding with the nation’s growing international presence. With the exception of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, broad categories of immigrants were not barred from the United States until 1903, when Congress deemed anarchists, the insane, epileptics, paupers, polygamists, prostitutes, and pimps inadmissible. Four years later, following the establishment of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization and the increasing prominence of eugenics, additional classes of disabled and diseased individuals, including the feeble-minded, people with tuberculosis, and anyone found to be “mentally or physically defective” in a manner limiting their ability to financially support themselves, could no longer enter the United States. Ostensibly spurred by security concerns, Congress granted immigration officials increasing discretionary power to reject individual immigrants and required applicants to pass a literacy test beginning in 1917. While President Wilson used his veto power with varying degrees of success to support more liberal policies, President Harding initiated a temporary quota system in 1921. Immigration restrictions climaxed with the Johnson-Reed Act (more commonly known as the Immigration Act of 1924 or the National Origins Act), which instituted a quota system based on the proportion of

national origins tabulated in the 1890 census and barred all immigrants from Asia. That system ended in 1965, but, even in the 1920s, as today, most Americans agreed that the immigration system needed drastic adjustments.

Washington Gladden, Father of the Social Gospel

The two most prominent leaders of the social gospel, Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, offered minimal commentary about immigration. Gladden led a Congregational church in Columbus, Ohio and focused his activism on supporting labor unions. His book, *Being a Christian: What it Means and How to Begin*, typifies his understanding of applied Christianity. Based on sermons from the early 1870s, the text argues that conversion entails simply “choosing the Christian life, and beginning immediately to do the duties which belong to it” (1876: 61). Those moral obligations should permeate a Christian’s business deals, their family life, and all exchanges with strangers and acquaintances. A sequel of sorts, *The Christian Way: Wither it Leads and How to Go On* elaborates that Christians are obligated to improve society through both personal interactions and societal improvements like supporting libraries, lecture series, and the beautification of public spaces. Being an “upright man” in the community is just as important as confessing one’s faith (1877: 87). Gladden’s prioritization of the external social manifestations of conversion and Christian life typifies social gospel teachings and set a precedent for the movement.

While this definition of Christianity minimized the role of ritual and dogma and could, particularly during that time, be construed as indirectly anti-Catholic, Gladden was an outspoken critic of the Know-Nothing Party and anti-Catholic literature. He defended the religious minority, describing their behavior in the face of discrimination as “altogether admirable.” He considered such “rank and noxious” prejudices to counter “every dictate of Christian morality” (1909: 363). These positions drew accusations that he was paid off by the Catholic Church and cost him the position of university president at Ohio State University, but also earned him an honorary doctorate from the University of Notre Dame (Gladden 1909: 414-15).

This understanding of Christian charity and defense of American Catholics might suggest that Gladden would be a stalwart defender of immigrants, particularly given the rise of urban social services provided by Protestant groups and the anti-Catholic nature of arguments for immigration barriers. However, he remained largely detached from public debate on the subject. Upon touring the slums of New York, he concluded that immigration exacerbated urban problems, writing, “Immigration . . . drops its sediment largely in the cities and leaves in them great masses of people who do not speak the English language and who can have no conception of the duties of citizenship” (1902: 210). He believed that most immigrants from eastern and southern Europe lacked high intelligence and hoped more rigorous mechanisms to screen immigrants could be developed. A sermon given in 1904 suggested that limiting immigration would be “the kindest expedient” so long as immigrants clustered in urban enclaves (Dorn: 288-91). Programs to relocate city dwellers to rural America, which was viewed as more wholesome, had largely failed. A few years later, U.S. Secretary of Commerce and Labor Oscar Straus engaged Gladden to lead an inspection of Ellis Island, where he reacted positively upon seeing “wholesome, . . . decently clad, . . . thrifty and industrious” immigrants (Guzda: 32). We can only imagine how he reached such broad conclusions on the

basis of a visual inspection, but the experience led him to praise the nation's policy of open immigration, which attended to global concerns in a Christian manner (Dorn: 291). He shared these views in sermons and private letters, but never publicized them widely or made decisive recommendations about immigration policy.

Gladden's biographer, Jacob Dorn, concluded that Gladden said little about immigration and race because he had limited interactions with those populations (288-91). Gladden's encounters with immigrants affected his impression of the situation, but he would have been familiar with their predicament from reading Christian periodicals. Based on these few surviving comments, it appears that his sympathy for immigrants and faith in their future contributions to society increased as he learned more about their situation.

Walter Rauschenbusch, Theologian of the Social Gospel

Walter Rauschenbusch, on the other hand, knew about immigration first-hand. The son of a German immigrant, he lived in Germany for eight years as a child and for later schooling. Following in his father's footsteps, he pastored a Baptist congregation of German immigrants. The struggles of his parishioners during a seven-year tenure at the Second German Baptist Church in New York City transformed Rauschenbusch's understanding of Christianity. While teaching German immigrants at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1897 until his death in 1918, he developed his theology on the social gospel and its relation to the kingdom of God. Increasingly fighting hearing loss, Rauschenbusch's greatest contributions were in shifting theological concerns away from an individualistic focus on substitutionary atonement and salvation to the greater concerns of social obligation and institutionalized sin (Rauschenbusch 1917). Some of this work formed in collaboration with members of the Brotherhood of the Kingdom, a group Rauschenbusch co-founded in 1892. This group of Protestant men sought to promulgate the social gospel within churches and "assist in its practical realization in the world" (White and Hopkins: 73).

Rauschenbusch's personal connections with German Americans, an earlier immigrant group that was more accepted than the southern and eastern Europeans entering at the turn of the twentieth century, familiarized him with urban poverty, but did not cause him to embrace immigration from other countries. While he rarely mentioned immigration in his written works, a commencement speech in 1902 heralded his belief in the superiority of the Teutonic race and, to a similar extent, Anglo-Saxons. Claiming a causal relation between blood (race) and virtue, Rauschenbusch warned that the "alien strains of blood" from new immigrants threatened to dilute America's current superior stock (Aiken: 460). Similarly, his book *Christianizing the Social Order* describes how recent immigrants have "burdened our cities with an undigested mass of alien people, . . . lowered the standard of living for millions of native Americans, [and] . . . radically altered the racial future of our nation" (1912: 278). He used racial scare tactics in an 1895 fundraising letter for Rochester Seminary's German department, describing the looming danger of "seething yellow flocks" and the "blacks of the South" (Dorrien: 43). Perhaps he thought this would encourage support for German studies, but the racism is blatant. These statements, however, did not state how the United States should respond to the perceived threat of foreigners.

Additionally, Rauschenbusch warned that if "Roman sensibilities" were permitted to flourish, they would irreparably damage the relationship between church and state that

provided a foundation for the United States government (1912: 278). Such sentiments were common at this time, even among progressive Christians, many of whom believed that Catholic Americans sought to impose their views on others and would ultimately be loyal to the Vatican. Gladden's defense of Catholics was unusual.

Contrary to these critical comments, Rauschenbusch had previously argued for open borders at a meeting of the Baptist Congress in 1888, saying "I believe in throwing open this country to all who will come, for I believe God made it for all. Who are we that we should close this country against the rest of the world?" The sentiment may not have been entirely policy-minded, however, as he closed the short speech by praising the "pressure of population" because "even the anarchists are a boon to us, for the explosion of a dynamite bomb has set us thinking. We have been turning our attention to social questions in a way we have never done before" (Baptist Congress 1889). This can hardly be understood as a ringing endorsement of immigration. Rauschenbusch blamed immigrants' presence on the corporations and transportation companies that brought these men and women to U.S. shores. If manufacturers and shipping companies did not profit from their presence, he believed the crisis of overcrowded cities and shifting demographics would not exist (Rauschenbusch 1912: 278).

Here, however, Rauschenbusch's commentary on immigration ends.¹ While he advocated liberal immigration policies in the 1880s, his belief in Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic superiority persisted. His preference for stricter controls rose over time, as it did in much of America, but he left no specific policy recommendations in his final decades. Neither Gladden nor Rauschenbusch can serve as a model for today's immigration activists.

Josiah Strong, Crusader for America

In contrast to Gladden and Rauschenbusch, Josiah Strong and Sidney Gulick offered clear advice about immigration to their readers, actively engaged in the political process, and applied social gospel principles to immigration reform. Strong is perhaps the most controversial social gospel leader. Popular in his time, he was excoriated by later critics (Muller). However, as historian James Reed wrote in 1972, Strong is "one of the most quoted but least understood figures in American religious history" (232). Misperceptions of Strong rely heavily on *Our Country*, ignoring subsequent books and the three journals he edited, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, *Social Engineering*, and *Social Service*.² Strong began his career as a missionary in Wyoming, became the general secretary of Evangelical Alliance, an ecumenical missionary group, in 1898, and finally shifted his attention to forming and running the American Institute of Social Service, a publication society.

While his published works, particularly *Our Country: Its Possible Future and its Present Crisis*, received plentiful attention and praise from his contemporaries, that book's positions on assimilation and Anglo-Saxon superiority appear aggressively racist to our eyes today. Commissioned by the American Home Mission Society, *Our Country* argues for the necessity

¹ Rauschenbusch's most recent biographer, Christopher Evans (2004), says even less than this about his views on immigration.

² This oversight is apparent in many scholarly works and pointed out in Littlefield and Opsahl.

of home missions to fulfill America's destiny. The nation, it warns, cannot meet its potential without Christianizing the American West.³ The polemic claims that our country is teetering on a precarious edge, threatened by immigration, Romanism, Mormonism, intemperance, socialism, wealth, and urbanization. The debates surrounding these issues in the late nineteenth century all related to immigration. Strong asked, "Is there room for reasonable doubt that this [Anglo-Saxon] race . . . is destined to dispossess many weaker races, assimilate others and mold the remainder, until, in a very true and important sense, it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind?" (1891: 225). "To this result no war of extermination is needful; the contest is not one of arms, but of vitality and of civilization" (1885: 176).⁴ The belief that races could be "Anglo-Saxonized" shows that he saw "Anglo-Saxon" as a broader category of culture that went beyond traditional ideas of race. A second edition of *Our Country* argued that the 1890 census results provided further evidence for his warnings about immigration. While Strong acknowledged that Anglo-Saxons would have to "answer for many sins against weaker races and against the weaker of their own race," he still believed that Anglo Saxons represented the pinnacle of and greatest potential for Christian righteousness (1893: 54-55). In another apparent contradiction, Strong warned of the "inject[ion] into the veins of the nation a large amount of inferior blood every day" on the same page that he reminds readers, "I do not imagine that an Anglo Saxon is any dearer to God than a Mongolian or an African" (1893: 80). His early work suggests that saving America – by which he means Anglo-Saxon culture – will save the world. While *Our Country* used scare tactics to warn of immigration's dangers, it did not recommend how the United States should combat that problem. Strong's work *New Era; or, The Coming Kingdom* (1893) elaborated on how these themes would work globally, as did *Our World, the New World-Life* (1913).

While Strong's rhetoric sounds patently racist, he was raised surrounded by prominent abolitionists and supported African American communities as part of his Congregational missionary work. Ralph Luker's *The Social Gospel in Black and White* argues that Strong did not understand Anglo-Saxon as a purely racial term. According to Luker, Strong viewed Anglo-Saxons as the "English-speaking people who were the vehicles of God's redemptive purposes because of their cultural, not racial, purity" (271). Strong's background and aims exemplify Luker's description of the social gospel's origins. He writes, "Its origins are found not in the response to urban-industrial problems but in the antebellum voluntary societies whose heart was the home missions movement, and the social gospel itself was less an abstract quest for social justice than it was the proclamation of those religious beliefs and values that could serve to hold the society together" (Luker: 4). This becomes apparent as Strong increasingly shifted his focus to international relations. He believed that such superiority as Christians meant that the United States and Great Britain "must reckon with . . . the enemies of justice, freedom, and education the world over" (1900: 301). His application of the social gospel had broad international implications.

³ This message was particularly prominent in an 1858 American Home Mission Society handbook by the same name, a predecessor of Strong's work. It was an embellishment of an 1842 tract (Edwards: 174).

⁴ Strong qualified that "some of the stronger races, doubtless, may be able to preserve their integrity; but, in order to compete with the Anglo-Saxon, they will probably be forced to adopt his methods and instruments, his civilization and his religion" (1885: 177).

White progressive Protestants like Lyman Abbott and Andover Theological Seminary's George Harris critiqued Strong's call for racial and cultural assimilation, and Strong eventually capitulated to their argument that Anglo-Saxon culture could not and should not be forcibly imposed on all peoples. He accepted that racial differences were too strong to be overcome and permitting them to flourish would foster racial harmony, writing that "God's method is not unity through identity but through variety" (1913: 168, 38). By 1913, Strong had fully reversed his prophecy of an Anglo-Saxonized world, writing, "If we recognize any plan in creation, we must accept such a [racial] differentiation of the human family as an expression of the divine purpose, infinitely wise and benevolent" (1913: 174). Strong advocated for racial equality under both secular law and Christian brotherhood (Luker: 274-75) and chastised the Anglo-Saxon for taking advantage of China and Africa under the auspices of the "white man's burden." He praised the outcome of the Russo-Japanese War, "a victory of every dark race in the world, for the white man had bullied them all" (1913: 160).⁵ As with Walter Rauschenbusch, Strong's view of race affected his thoughts on immigration.

Shifting views on globalization, or "world-life" as Strong called it, also shaped his opinions on immigration. Issues of the *Gospel of the Kingdom*, a monthly study guide for Protestant churches that he edited and published through his Institute of Social Service, gave detailed information and guidance on the question.⁶ The journal's initial subtitle in 1909, "A Course of Study for Men and Women on Living Social Problems in the Light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," was changed to "Studies in Social Reform and What to Do" in 1910. Each issue offered four lessons on a social issue, intended to be studied over the course of a month in church groups. Six issues between 1909 and Strong's death in 1916 address immigration by educating the public with facts, recommending specific actions, and highlighting successful examples from churches around the country. Strong opened the first issue on immigration with an article arguing that environment affects a person's character more than their biological origins. He wrote that science now shows that "the differences between civilizations were created by external influences rather than by inherited tendencies" (1909: 65). Thus, if we can improve the environment of new immigrants – particularly young people and the American-born children of immigrants, they will be quickly assimilated into American culture. If they remain in squalid, dangerous living and working conditions, they will continue to be a threat to our civilization. This argument, following a typical social gospel formula, places responsibility for social tensions directly in the hands of American Protestants and the congregations reading his publication. In this issue and others, the journal encourages direct engagement with immigrants by inviting them to English lessons at the church, offering them meeting space for clubs, and welcoming them into the community. At its core, the social gospel promised glorious rewards if people simply followed the Golden Rule to its fullest extent.

⁵ While Strong insisted that we act honorably on the world stage and rejected Europe's imperialist actions, he still thought the United States had to govern the Philippines because Filipinos are "incapable of self-government" (1900: 287-95).

⁶ The *Gospel of the Kingdom* claimed an annual subscription of 7,000 in 1914 (Anonymous 1914: 142), but its series "Studies in Social Christianity" was reprinted monthly in *Homiletic Review*, which quadrupled readership (Littlefield and Opsahl: 300).

Strong's understanding of eugenics had clearly moderated by the turn of the twentieth century. He did not suggest that pauperism was hereditary, nor advocate race-based exclusion laws. Nevertheless, the June 1909 issue of his journal *Social Service* and subsequent articles in the *Gospel of the Kingdom* continued to advocate for eugenics, the science of how environmental factors affect people's well-being. The latter publication sometimes offered leading discussion questions but leaves many issues up for debate. Strong does not, for example, give a clear argument that Jews or Asians should or should not be excluded but rather invites church groups to discuss the question. The issue did conclude, however, that American Christians were ethically justified in excluding "undesirable elements" from their shores. The April 1911 issue provides contrasting articles by the secretary of the Immigration Restriction League and the director of the National Liberal Immigration League (Hall; Behar). Several months before Strong's death, an issue on "New Americans" began by praising the contributions made by earlier immigrant groups. The "brawn and bone" of peasant classes made the advancement of American industry possible, while the "remarkable physical fiber and intellectual keenness" of Jews benefited the country in other ways. He reminds readers that negative environmental influences from the Old World created flaws that life in the U.S. can overcome. While these racial stereotypes are certainly problematic, their aim is to promote the acceptance of diverse immigrants. The article elaborates, "The very diversity of gifts is a source of enrichment, both biologically and economically. Variety of racial types, whether disposed to blend or not, is a source of power to any country; and variety of gifts both increases the charm and interest in life and adds enormously to industrial possibilities" (Anonymous 1916: 3-4). While still based on racial stereotypes, the article shows a progression of Strong's advocacy. However, by 1916 the journal recommended limiting future immigration until the country's current new Americans are fully integrated and suggested that the government provide a standardized program for the protection, guidance, and education of newcomers (Anonymous 1916: 6). The vast majority of Americans felt similarly at this time, but they approached the issue in various ways, often exposing significant racial or religious bias. Strong, notably, did not advocate racist policies. Once the foremost advocate of Anglo-Saxon superiority, Strong ended his life by promoting values verging on pluralism.

Sidney Gulick, Missionary Activist

Sidney Lewis Gulick presents a unique perspective on the immigration question. The prolific Congregational missionary led the fight against anti-Japanese legislation and directed the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America's Commission on Relations with the Orient. While scholars have not typically included Gulick in studies of the social gospel, he used the movement's language and theology to argue for social justice when speaking to a church audience. Gulick faced a particular challenge because many Americans, including many Christian pastors, regularly dismissed foreign missionaries' ideas as "utopian and idealistic," rationalizing that time abroad negatively altered a person's perception of the world and America's priorities (Gulick 1922: 30; Snow 2007). In *The Fight for Peace: An Aggressive Campaign for American Churches*, Gulick employed the social gospel to reply that "Christ's whole life was chimerical and visionary, based on an impracticable insistence on the superior power of goodness and the impotence of love." While his goals for world peace based in good will towards others may seem naïve, Gulick insisted that "God is love and . . . love will rule. It will rule . . . as followers of Jesus catch His spirit, share His faith, and are ready to suffer with Him

in the redemption of the world, transforming it from what it is into what it ought to be. . . . Christians must seek to establish the Kingdom of God on a world-wide scale through methods of *international righteousness and helpfulness*” (1915: 8, 57). He encouraged churches to organize aid packages and educational exchanges and to lobby Congress to uphold the rights of foreigners on U.S. soil and establish fair immigration policies. All were key elements of Gulick’s blueprint for peace. Gulick displayed his association with the social gospel movement by opening *The Fight for Peace* with a prayer written by Walter Rauschenbusch. Knowingly or not, Gulick was demonstrating the flexibility of the social gospel by invoking a theologian whose racism suggests he may have disagreed with Asian immigration.

While he worked to educate American Christians, he simultaneously used secular approaches to shape legislation. Omitting biblical arguments for equality, he fought scientific racism with evolutionary science and warned of its potential damage to foreign relations and missionary work. One of Gulick’s many books, *The Evolution of the Japanese*, employed scientific language to argue that attitudes, behavior, and other cultural attributes came only as a result of “social,” not “biological inheritance” (1905: 439-40). Like Josiah Strong, Gulick fought popularly accepted beliefs about eugenics, placing blame for poverty and crime on society, not genetics.

Limitations to Japanese immigration were not officially legislated until 1924, which made many legislators uneasy. The unofficial Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 relied on Japanese cooperation. However, while people from eastern and southern Europe were entering the country in undeniably large numbers, Japanese migration was relatively marginal. At its height in 1907, 30,842 Japanese entered the U.S., constituting less than 3 percent of the 1.2 million immigrants that year (Daniels: 115). But even in small numbers, they dominated agricultural production of fresh fruits and vegetables on the West Coast and operated numerous hotels and restaurants (Daniels: 160, 164). Their children attended university in higher numbers than those of native-born parents, but faced prejudice on the job market in the professional fields for which they trained (Takaki: 218-20). The State Department, foreign mission groups, and activists like Gulick tried to caution Congress about the ramifications of enacting a bill so offensive to Japan, but Congress did not head their warnings.

While Strong regularly wrote about the need for Christian internationalism and encouraged activism in his journals, Gulick devoted decades of his life exclusively to this issue. Immigration reform and legal challenges to anti-Japanese policies became his passion upon returning to the U.S. after twenty-six years in Japan. Within a year, he introduced an immigration quota plan to first Senator William Dillingham, the chairman of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, and then to President Wilson directly before presenting the plan to Congress (Taylor: 112). While Congress dismissed his defense of “Asiatics,” he made important allies and continued to spread his positions around the country with assistance from the Federal Council of Churches. Under the auspices of the secular National Committee for Constructive Immigration Legislation (NCCIL),⁷ a group he founded and led, Gulick proposed alternative legislation, lobbied Congress, and promoted sympathetic views toward Japan and Japanese Americans through publications and speaking tours. In January 1920, he

⁷ Originally named the League for Constructive Immigration Legislation

printed a pamphlet with the committee's proposed immigration and naturalization reform. It recommended steep limitations to the total number of immigrants through non-discriminatory means, clearly showing that Gulick was not advocating an open-door policy as his opponents claimed. Introduced by Representative Benjamin F. Welty, the Welty bill (H.R. 14196), as it came to be known, would open naturalization to all qualified applicants, regardless of race, and employ a quota system based on the number of naturalized citizens and their children residing in the United States as of 1920 (NCCIL).⁸ The plan would address the most frequent concern – that immigrants were entering too quickly and in too great of numbers to assimilate. Naturalization was accepted as an indicator of assimilation. To complement his quota system, Gulick called for standardized citizenship classes and more rigorous requirements for naturalization.

NCCIL pamphlets encouraged justice, fair play, and better foreign relations in hope that the U.S. will “apply the golden rule and the plain principles of international honor” (NCCIL; Gulick 1920). Gulick shared these pamphlets with congregations and argued for the need to educate all Christians about these issues (1915: 158). He wrote that “Golden Rule Internationalism is the only practicable method for establishing world peace. Whoever is in earnest for world-peace can gain his end only as he exalts and makes universal the rule of the Golden Rule” (1915: 9).

Anti-Japanese agitators, as Gulick's publications called his xenophobic opposition, misrepresented this legislation as an open door to Asian domination. The Federal Council of Churches' records are filled with letters from the general secretary and Gulick responding to vociferous attacks on his “Japanese propaganda.” Publications and a Chautauqua series by Montaville Flowers convinced many Americans that Gulick was receiving payments from the Japanese government to open the door for their conquest of the United States. Senator James Phelan of California directly accused Gulick of being a “Japanese agent” (Gulick 1919). The Federal Council of Churches published a press release in his defense, but the accusations earned Gulick an eight-year investigation by U.S. Military Intelligence and the Bureau of Investigation and the suspicion of many politicians (Gulick 1919).⁹ False propaganda had discredited Gulick years before he began lobbying Congress for immigration reform.

Conclusion

However social gospel leaders may have felt about immigration restrictions, the National Origins Act moved quickly through the House and Senate in the spring of 1924. President Coolidge and Secretary of State Charles Hughes both criticized the bill, and Sidney Gulick testified at several congressional hearings between 1919 and 1924 to no avail.¹⁰ The bill ultimately used Gulick's quota idea but dropped the naturalization clause and based the

⁸ The NCCIL also helped design a bill (S. 4596) introduced by Senator Thomas Sterling (Gulick 1921: 178).

⁹ Historian Sandra Taylor notes that an unpublicized report from J. Edgar Hoover in 1921 admitted that they could find no evidence of treason or foreign influence, but they continued to investigate him for five more years. Gulick's file was 500 pages long (136-48).

¹⁰ Secretary Hughes made an unfortunate move by asking for a statement from Japanese Ambassador Hanihara Masanao. Henry Cabot Lodge interpreted this statement, which mentioned the “grave consequences” of exclusionary legislation, as a threat, further aggravating opinions about Japan (Taylor: 160).

number of entry permits on the national origin of U.S. residents in 1890. Using earlier census data allowed Congress to accept virtually all Western European immigrants while restricting less desirable émigrés from southern and eastern Europe. This simultaneously limited Catholic and Jewish immigrants in favor of Protestants. While the bill did not specifically address Asians, it barred entry to anyone ineligible for naturalization. Since the Naturalization Law of 1790 limited naturalization rights to white men and women, this broke the informal Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan, which had allowed limited Japanese immigration. Just as Gulick warned, numerous Japanese leaders expressed outrage at such blatant discrimination. The current Japanese ambassador, Masanao Hanihara, and the U.S. ambassador to Japan, Cyrus E. Woods, both resigned in protest.

U.S. immigration laws dropped such explicit racial preferences in 1965, but current debates have revived much of the nativist vitriol of the early twentieth century. This essay provides a glimpse into the past to see how social gospel activists dealt with similar problems. Gladden and Rauschenbusch gave mixed views on immigration during their lifetimes. The former seems to have accepted newcomers as he became acquainted with them later in life, while the latter's belief in white supremacy hindered his ability and perhaps interest in advocating on their behalf. As Strong's understanding of eugenics and race shifted and his attention to global concerns expanded, he became more open to fair immigration policies and the need to respect – and perhaps even embrace – cultural differences. These later views allied with Sidney Gulick, who emphasized the assimilation of second-generation immigrants. While their notions of nationalism and race varied drastically, both saw the global ramifications of immigration policies. Both urged the Christian public to educate themselves through unbiased sources. Gulick presented social gospel ideals and political pragmatism to the United States' most powerful politicians, but failed to prevent strict, race-based immigration restrictions from passing Congress. If Christians today want to be faithful to social gospel ideals they cannot look to its founders for models but must look towards lesser-known figures like Sydney Gulick, who translated the biblical imperative to welcome the stranger into federal legislation and educated the public about these matters. Gulick understood that the kingdom of God could not be established without international righteousness, for which immigration policy is a key aspect.

No Christian leader can remain impartial or wholly ignorant of the crisis facing immigrants and refugees in America today. Support for equitable immigration policies has persisted in mainline denominations, but, again, what is considered “just” is debated. Some of the most vigorous support for immigrants comes from conservative evangelical circles, where biblical literalists like Stephen Land supported the National Association of Evangelicals' 2009 Resolution on Immigration. The document reminds believers of the Bible's many refugees and injunctions to welcome the stranger, telling the faithful to look beyond a simplistic reading of Romans 13 to follow the “rule of law.” While aspects of this biblical interpretation could be found in historical debates, it solidified in the late twentieth century. As the NAE's resolution alludes, Christians still find ways to legitimate rejecting the stranger, and evangelical positions were complicated by support for Donald Trump and his punitive policies on immigration. His “spiritual adviser” Paula White, a well-known purveyor of the prosperity gospel, argues that “compassion” requires “stricter border security and laws” (Rosales). However, despite facing surveillance and harassment by U.S. Customs and Border Protection,

religious leaders continue to protest the unjust treatment of immigrants at the southern U.S. border (Jenkins; Rivlin-Nadler). While the waters of immigration reform remain muddy, hints of the social gospel's potential to build the kingdom of God persist.

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