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# The People's Hour and the Social Gospel: George Howard Gibson's Gilded Age Search for an Organization of the Kingdom of God

Michelle D. Tiedje

*University of Nebraska at Lincoln*

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THE PEOPLE'S HOUR AND SOCIAL GOSPEL: GEORGE HOWARD GIBSON'S  
GILDED AGE SEARCH FOR AN ORGANIZATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

by

Michelle D. Tiedje

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor Kenneth J. Winkle

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 2010

THE PEOPLE'S HOUR AND SOCIAL GOSPEL: GEORGE HOWARD GIBSON'S  
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Michelle Dawn Tiedje, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2010

Adviser: Kenneth J. Winkle

Previous studies of the Social Gospel movement have acknowledged the fact that Social Gospelers were involved in multiple social reform movements during the Gilded Age and into the Progressive Era. However, most of these studies have failed to explain how the reform experiences of the Social Gospelers contributed to the development of the Social Gospel. The Social Gospelers' ideas regarding the need to transform society and their strategies for doing so were largely a result of their personal experiences as reformers and their collaboration with other reformers. The knowledge and insight gained from interaction with a variety of reform methods played a vital role in the development of the ideology and theology of the Social Gospel.

George Howard Gibson is exemplary of the connections between the Social Gospel movement and several other social reform movements of the time. He was involved in the Temperance movement, was a member of both the Prohibition Party and the People's Party, and co-founded a Christian socialist cooperative colony. His writings illustrate the formation of his identity as a Social Gospeler as well as his attempts to find an organization through which to realize the kingdom of God on earth. Failure to achieve the changes he desired via prohibition encouraged him to broaden his reform goals. Like many Midwestern Social Gospelers Gibson believed he had found "God's Party" in the People's Party, but he rejected reform via the political system once the Populists

restricted their attention to the silver issue and fused with the Democratic Party. Yet his involvement with the People's Party demonstrates the attraction many Social Gospelers had to the reforms proposed in the Omaha Platform of 1892 as well as to the party's use of revivalistic language and emphasis on producerism and brotherhood. Gibson's experimentation with a variety of ways to achieve the kingdom of God on earth provides new insight into the experiences and contributions of lay Social Gospelers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## **DEDICATION**

To my family: my mother, Peggy Lang, my father, Claus Tiedje, my sisters, Natalie Nitz and Kimberly Tiedje, my brother, Christopher Lang, my brother-in-law, Preston Nitz, my nephews, Connor and Dayton Tiedje and Sebastian and Cameron Nitz, my husband, Jon Watt, and the members of my ever-extending family. Thank you for making me the person I am, and for supporting me in all that I do.

We are but the individual atoms of the social world.

—George Howard Gibson, *Wealth Makers*

The state is not a ruling king or Kaiser;  
Nor parliament, nor congress of the wiser.  
Take the whole bunch of scheming politicians,  
Add wealth, add privilege, add class traditions,  
Throw in the courts to seal all deeds of power—  
And what are these when comes the people's hour?

We are the people, rousing after slumber;  
We are the working masses—note our number.  
At last we feel as feels the man and brother,  
And rush to ranks, intent on helping each other.  
By the Eternal, equal rights are ours,  
To mines and mills, to sunlit fields and flowers.

—George Howard Gibson, *The People's Hour*

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## INTRODUCTION: AN AGE OF ORGANIZATION

The Gilded Age refers to the period in American history immediately following the Civil War to roughly the end of the nineteenth century. It was a time of immense growth and change for the United States. Industrialization spurred extensive economic expansion, which fostered significant social and political transformations. Scholars generally characterize the Gilded Age as a time of increasing corporate influence, political corruption, dramatic disparity in wealth between the nation's upper and lower classes, increased conflict between labor and industry, and shifting ideas regarding the relationship between the individual and the state. Although the economic growth achieved during the Gilded Age was critical to the eventual emergence of the United States as a world superpower, it caused a great deal of discord. The instabilities and uncertainties of the period led many Americans to question their conceptions of the nature of American society.

The struggle to reconcile the jarring transformations of the Gilded Age with cultural ideals inherited from the nation's founding documents gave rise to a wide variety of social reform movements. Reformers of the period had much in common. They shared a cultural and intellectual heritage rooted in the Enlightenment, Puritanism, and Victorian values. Most were members of the middle and upper middle class, which began to feel increasingly threatened by the rising influence of the industrial upper class. Although the cause, platform, and program varied from one reform group to another, they all believed the integrity of the nation had been corrupted in some way and that immediate action was required to rectify the situation. Gilded Age reformers tended to

travel in the same circles, and it was not unusual for the principles and rhetoric of one group to influence those of another.<sup>1</sup>

Many of these facts are evidenced by the lives of the adherents of the Social Gospel. The Social Gospel was part of a larger trend in liberal theology which traced its roots back to the Enlightenment and enjoyed prominence in the nineteenth century due to the impact of profound social changes, the rising importance of science, and biblical criticism on the Church.<sup>2</sup> In the turbulence of Gilded Age America, theological liberalism manifested itself in Protestant Christianity in the development of what was known at the time as “social Christianity” or “applied Christianity.”

Supporters of social Christianity believed the Church needed to do more to address the social problems of the times. They asserted that the practical application of Christ’s teachings would result in the creation of a more just society, and embraced science as a valid avenue for discovering the true nature of God. They considered cooperation a positive guiding principle for human interaction, and had faith in the ability of people to change society for the better. They also believed the social environment played a critical role in the formation and development of the individual, and argued that the salvation of the individual was dependent upon the salvation of society. Many viewed the theological concept of the kingdom of God not as transcendent (as orthodox Christians did), but as something achievable on Earth through human effort and imperative to the Second Coming of Christ. The establishment of a just society, they

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (1972; repr., New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 763-764.

argued, was therefore not only the path to salvation but also the ultimate goal of Christianity.

Advocates of social Christianity possessed a strong sense of responsibility toward the rest of humankind, and emphasized the need for greater public involvement in the affairs of the community. It is therefore not surprising that their ideals appealed to many Gilded Age Americans, including a diverse array of reformers, who were struggling to cope with the profound changes of the times. The Social Gospelers' ideas regarding the need to transform society and strategies for doing so were largely the result of their personal experiences as reformers and their collaboration with other reformers. Often the most valuable experiences were those which resulted in failure, for failure to enact change via one method tended to open exploration of another, typically leading to a broadening of reform goals and refinement of theological justifications for change. Through their experiences with and as reformers, the supporters of social Christianity began to develop and articulate a new interpretation of the kingdom of God. Thus, the knowledge and insight gained from interaction with a variety of reform methods played a vital role in the development of the ideology and theology of the Social Gospel.

The lives of the Social Gospelers offer the most direct evidence for the significance of the connections between the Social Gospel and other social reform movements of the period. Social Gospelers did not simply travel in the same circles as other reformers—they typically *were* reformers. Most were involved with several reform movements throughout their lifetime, and viewed social reform as a means to bring about the kingdom of God on Earth. George Howard Gibson was exemplary of this fact.

Gibson, a fervent Christian, was born in 1854 and died in 1928.<sup>3</sup> Throughout his life, he owned and edited at least two Prohibition newspapers and was, from October of 1893 to January of 1896, co-owner and editor of Nebraska's official Populist newspaper, which he renamed the *Wealth Makers*. Gibson was also involved with both Christian socialism and the Social Gospel movement—most directly via the Christian Commonwealth Colony, a cooperative society which he and several others established in Muscogee County, Georgia in 1896. He helped edit the colony's periodical, *The Social Gospel*, from which the Social Gospel movement would eventually derive its name.

Like most Social Gospelers, Gibson was driven to find a means to institute the social reforms he believed were necessary to bring American society in harmony with a theologically liberal view of Christ's teachings. Previous studies of the Social Gospel movement have acknowledged the Social Gospelers' involvement with many reform movements but have typically failed to explain why these connections are significant to the Social Gospel itself. Many also fail to adequately distinguish between the various forms of social Christianity, therefore causing confusion regarding what represents evidence of general religious social concern, the Social Gospel, and more radical forms of social Christianity such as Christian socialism. This study of the life of George Howard Gibson will demonstrate how many of the Social Gospelers' ideas about ways to achieve reform evolved over time. His involvement with and eventual break from

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<sup>3</sup> "Sons of the Sanctum: Nebraska's Knights of the Leaden Quill," *New Republic*, December 27, 1888, p. 4; Mehitable Calef Copenhagen Wilson, *John Gibson of Cambridge, Massachusetts and His Descendants, 1634-1899* (Washington, D.C.: McGill and Wallace, 1900), p. 132; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Chicago Ward 32, Cook (Chicago), Illinois, Roll T624\_278*, p. 2A, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1910 [accessed via ancestry.com 23 June 2008]; Illinois State Archives Death Index, pre-1916, [accessed 30 June 2008 via <http://www.ilsos.gov/GenealogyMWeb/deathsrch.html>].

Prohibition and Populism reveals the problems and limitations of social change via the political system which many Social Gospelers confronted. His search for a “pure” and effective means to reform society was one that all Social Gospelers shared, and such experiences shaped the Social Gospel movement.

The “Social Gospel” eventually became the accepted name for all forms of social Christianity,<sup>4</sup> (although this presents some problems which will be discussed in greater detail below). The phrase “Social Gospel movement,” as it will be used here, refers to the progressive development of ideas (both social and religious) which arose from liberal theology and the circumstances of the Gilded Age and coalesced as a result of the combined experiences and efforts of a community of like-minded reformers. There is, however, no small amount of scholarly confusion regarding the definition and nature of the Social Gospel movement. Examination of the literature on the movement reveals that historical interpretation of its origins, definition, nature, and impact has changed over time. A series of seminal works laid the foundation for historians’ initial conception of the movement, but their conclusions varied. A second wave of literature emerged in direct response to the existence of competing theories and attempted to place the Social Gospel within the context of American religious and intellectual history. The historiographical revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s led to a call for renewed interpretation of the Social Gospel in light of evidence that certain groups and areas of study had been neglected, overlooked, or outright excluded in previous accounts of the movement.

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (1940; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 196-197.

Social history, in addition to studies of gender, race, ethnicity, and class, began to challenge preceding accounts of the history of the Social Gospel movement. Subsequent generations of historians have continued to heed the call for a more inclusive approach to the study of the Social Gospel—to the point that recent research has demonstrated a need to redefine the boundaries of the movement to include not only the contributions of all participants regardless of race, ethnicity, class, or gender, but also the life experiences of those participants. Study of the lives of the participants, beyond merely their association with the Social Gospel and into their involvement with other forms of social activism or reform during their lifetimes, provides context for the Social Gospel movement and also renders a more accurate and complete understanding of the times out of which it emerged.

Since the initial studies of the Social Gospel movement exert significant influence on historians' ideas regarding the impetus for its emergence, nature, and impact, a review of the early works on the movement is in order. One of the first works on the Social Gospel was done by Willem A. Visser 't Hooft as his doctoral dissertation for the University of Leiden in 1928.<sup>5</sup> In *The Background of the Social Gospel in America*, Visser 't Hooft made a valuable distinction regarding the definition of the Social Gospel which later historians have, by and large, chosen not to maintain. He argued that there are two senses in which one can refer to the Social Gospel. One consists of a “pure” and “radical” form which fused the religious and social realms to the point that transcendence

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<sup>5</sup> Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Background of the Social Gospel in America* (1928; repr., St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1963), p. i.

was completely eliminated from its theology.<sup>6</sup> In this form, the concept of the kingdom of God was interpreted as something tangible and achievable on Earth, and God was considered immanent and knowable. This new theology was not accepted by all supporters of social Christianity, and bore the brunt of criticism from the Church and from Christians who viewed its interpretation of patristic tradition as a threat to the established order.

The other form of the Social Gospel, which Visser 't Hooft not only considered more influential but also asserted is now pervasive in American culture, he defined as “a tendency of Christian thought in which the social and religious influences interpenetrate and react mutually upon one another.”<sup>7</sup> The adherents of this form of the Social Gospel recognized the interactions between the social and religious realms and believed the Church should pay more attention to social problems. However, they did not necessarily abandon the transcendent elements of Christian theology as the adherents of the pure and radical form of the Social Gospel did. The Social Gospel, in this sense then, refers to a much more general expression of liberal Christianity, whose adherents argued that Christianity and society needed to become more socially-oriented.<sup>8</sup> Visser 't Hooft focused his analysis of the Social Gospel primarily on this form.

At the time he wrote *The Background of the Social Gospel in America* in 1928, Visser 't Hooft was unaware of the origins of the phrase “Social Gospel,”<sup>9</sup> which may partially explain why he felt it necessary to so carefully define his own use of the it.

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<sup>6</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 16-17.

<sup>7</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 17

<sup>9</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 15.



There is evidence of its use in late nineteenth century America,<sup>10</sup> but it is unclear precisely when the “Social Gospel” became the accepted name for all types of social Christianity. Most historians credit popularization of the phrase to the periodical, *The Social Gospel*, which was published from 1898 to 1901 out of the Christian Commonwealth Colony in Muscogee County, Georgia.<sup>11</sup> The theories and practices of the colony, espoused in *The Social Gospel*, were in line with what Visser ’t Hooft classified as the pure and radical form of the Social Gospel.

In other words, the source of the popular name for social Christianity was a paper published by members of a utopian colony which was devoted to demonstrating that the type of lifestyle and social relationships which would bring about the establishment of the kingdom of God on Earth were not only possible but practical. It seems odd, then, that historians who were aware of the origins of the phrase the “Social Gospel” would choose to equate the advocates of all forms of social Christianity with radical Social Gospelers. Although the supporters of social Christianity shared a “relatively homogenous type of religious thought”<sup>12</sup> and were all part of the larger Social Gospel movement, they did not all adhere to the concept of the kingdom of God as something tangible, to be realized on Earth as a prerequisite for the Second Coming of Christ.

While Visser ’t Hooft acknowledged that there are various forms of social Christianity and was explicit in distinguishing between the two forms of the Social Gospel as he viewed them, subsequent historians of the Social Gospel movement have largely failed to delineate between the Social Gospel as a generalized belief in the

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<sup>10</sup> C. O. Brown, *Talks on the Labor Troubles* (Chicago: F. H. Revell, 1886), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, p. 196.

<sup>12</sup> Visser ’t Hooft, p. 16.

interrelatedness of social and religious concerns and the Social Gospel as an adherence to this belief as well as to more specific theological perspectives. Because not all advocates of social Christianity accepted the theological assertion that the kingdom of God is immanent, historians must acknowledge this fact in their studies of Social Gospel movement and avoid treating all forms of social Christianity as equivalent. This could perhaps be achieved by separating use of the phrase “social Christianity” from the phrase “Social Gospel,” with “Social Gospel” only being used to refer to the pure and radical form of social Christianity which those who popularized the phrase adhered to. At the very least, historians must be more explicit in explaining the differences between the various types of social Christianity and more aware of such differences when defining the Social Gospel movement.

Although Visser 't Hooft's *The Background of the Social Gospel in America* was one of the earliest comprehensive studies of the Social Gospel movement, Charles Howard Hopkins' *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* is generally heralded as a more authoritative study. Hopkins used the phrases “social Christianity” and the “Social Gospel” interchangeably. At times he hinted at distinctions between the two,<sup>13</sup> often referring to certain types of social Christianity as early versions of the Social Gospel, but he apparently did not consider the differences between the various types of social Christianity sufficient enough to warrant discussing them in detail. He referred to the Social Gospel alternately as a general attitude regarding the need to apply Christ's teachings to the whole of society, and as a theologically motivated attempt to establish the kingdom of God on Earth.

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<sup>13</sup> Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, p. 318-326.

Subsequent works have expanded upon Hopkins' analysis, but his definition and treatment of the Social Gospel has, for the most part, remained normative. Scholars continue to use the phrase "Social Gospel" to refer to all forms of social Christianity, despite Visser 't Hooft's early attempts to refine the definition of the Social Gospel. Part of this could be due to the fact that early historians of the Social Gospel, including Hopkins in his first study of the movement, did not seem to be aware of Visser 't Hooft's analysis. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* is still often referred to as the "pioneering" historical account of the Social Gospel despite the fact that Visser 't Hooft published *The Background of the Social Gospel in America* a full twelve years before Hopkins published his initial study of the Social Gospel.<sup>14</sup> Citation of Visser 't Hooft's work can be found within the second wave of studies on the Social Gospel movement, suggesting that it became more widely known as research into the Social Gospel grew. It is possible that Visser 't Hooft's audience was, and to some extent still is, limited by the fact that he published his study outside the United States. Most histories of the Social Gospel movement were, and continue to be, written by Americanists, and reliance on American sources would limit the visibility of *The Background of the Social Gospel in America*.

Although certainly neither definitive nor without its flaws, Visser 't Hooft's analysis of the origins of the Social Gospel movement contains a much more global perspective than many of the other early works on the Social Gospel. He was a European by birth and a theologian by training, and it is apparent that both of these facts influenced

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<sup>14</sup> Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, Ed., *Gender and the Social Gospel* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 2.

his approach to the study of the Social Gospel. His principal concern was the intellectual and theological background of the movement. He believed that most American historians of the Social Gospel movement had paid more attention to “sociological and psychological backgrounds and influences rather than intellectual or cultural ones.”<sup>15</sup> He argued that many of the roots of the Social Gospel were to be found in the religious developments of America,<sup>16</sup> but also emphasized the importance of European philosophical, theological, and historical developments.

Visser 't Hooft asserted that both the radical and non-radical Social Gospellers rejected religious revivalism, but were influenced by America's strong Puritan traditions, the pragmatism of the Enlightenment, and the idea that Christianity and science were compatible.<sup>17</sup> Revivalism, he argued, was too focused on the individual and the hereafter for the Social Gospellers, although they did admire its emphasis on the need for practical religion.<sup>18</sup> Puritanism, on the other hand, contained some elements which were useful to the Social Gospellers. Although neither form of the Social Gospel had much in common, theologically, with Puritan Calvinism, certain aspects of Puritanism had become ingrained in American culture by the time of the Social Gospel's emergence. According to Visser 't Hooft, Puritanism demonstrated a willingness to allow the immediate needs of society to generate a fundamental change in religious theory.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the Puritan emphasis on proper personal conduct, shared religious experience, individual relation to God, and the ideal of a Christian society exerted a strong psychological

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<sup>15</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 4-6.

<sup>17</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 103, 123, 139, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 139-144.

<sup>19</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 78-79.

influence in America and therefore influenced the development of the Social Gospel as well.<sup>20</sup>

Visser 't Hooft also argued that Enlightenment thought contributed to the ideology of the Social Gospellers. The Enlightenment challenged Christian doctrine by denouncing the notion of the inherent depravity of man, and insisting instead upon the inherent goodness of man. In doing so, the Enlightenment inspired greater confidence in the ability of humanity to deal with reality. Morality and ethics were pushed to the forefront of religion, as was the idea that mankind is capable of improving its situation on earth.<sup>21</sup> While the Church viewed the ideas of the Enlightenment as a threat, the Social Gospellers enthusiastically embraced them and used them as the framework for their ideology.

Directly connected to the impact of the Enlightenment on the Social Gospel, Visser 't Hooft argued, was the influence of science. He believed that science was one of the chief contributors to the ideology of both forms of the Social Gospel. He described the Social Gospel's relationship with revivalism, Puritanism, and the Enlightenment as one of "partial dependence and partial reaction," while its relationship with science was one of "companionship."<sup>22</sup> Adherents of both forms of the Social Gospel were confident that science could be used to improve the social environment, rid the world of injustice, and enable mankind to discover the true nature of God. Social Gospellers tended to view history as progress, endorsed biblical criticism and Darwin's theory of evolution, and

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<sup>20</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 68, 100.

<sup>21</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 122-123.

<sup>22</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 168.

helped found the field of Sociology. It is clear that the Social Gospellers' views regarding the compatibility of science and religion were vital to the development of their beliefs.

Even though Visser 't Hooft's definition of the Social Gospel and heavy emphasis upon its theological and intellectual background do not appear in later works on the movement, there is evidence that some of his primary arguments have been deemed valid by the scholarly community. Many of his assertions with regard to the background of the Social Gospel can be found in later works on the movement. Although Hopkins, in *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915*, did not place as much importance on the contributions of American Puritanism, the Enlightenment, or revivalism as Visser 't Hooft, he did analyze the role of science as well as both American and European religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions in the rise of the Social Gospel movement. Subsequent studies have generally maintained this analysis, but most have also tended to assert that nineteenth century America's unique socioeconomic and political circumstances—namely industrialization, urbanization, and the development of the market economy—were the primary factors behind the emergence of the Social Gospel.<sup>23</sup> There has been a shift, then, in the factors emphasized by historians of the Social Gospel movement, with more recent works stressing the significance of America's historical situation rather than the movement's theological, intellectual, and cultural heritage.

This has contributed to a view not only that nineteenth century America's experience of industrialization, urbanization, and development of a market economy was

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<sup>23</sup> Clifton E. Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), p. 489; Robert T. Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America: 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 3-4.

unique, but also that the Social Gospel movement is unique. Hopkins asserted that the Social Gospel represents “America’s most unique contribution to the great ongoing stream of Christianity.”<sup>24</sup> Such presumptions about the incomparable nature of American history and the Social Gospel movement have been demonstrated to be false, and can at least in part be attributed to an inclination to view events through a narrow lens, centered upon American developments. After all, the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and the development of a market economy have taken place in other nations throughout the world, and have produced similar forms of socially-oriented, theologically liberal religious movements. Great Britain is a prime example. Christian socialism began to take root there in the decades immediately following the nation’s first steps toward industrialization.<sup>25</sup> Although some of the authors of the second wave of literature on the Social Gospel have questioned whether or not the movement was truly original,<sup>26</sup> pointing to British Christian Socialism as well as to theological developments in Germany,<sup>27</sup> most historians continue to emphasize the Social Gospel movement’s indigenuity.

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<sup>24</sup> Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform*, p. 26-27.

<sup>26</sup> Ahlstrom, p. 788-789.

<sup>27</sup> Ahlstrom, p. 788-789; White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform*, p. 26. In this joint work with Ronald C. White, Jr., Hopkins acknowledged the fact that Christian Socialism emerged in Great Britain just prior to the rise of the Social Gospel movement in America. He and White, Jr. hypothesized that this was a result of the fact that industrialization took place in Great Britain earlier than in America, with each nation responding to the changes within their own religious and cultural contexts. They posited that Christian Socialism was imported to America via the Protestant Episcopal Church. It should be noted, however, that Hopkins’ initial study of the Social Gospel movement, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915*, did not compare British Christian Socialism to the Social Gospel movement. His discussion of Christian Socialism, like the rest of his study, focused heavily upon the United States. His subsequent attention to the case of British Christian Socialism, in his joint work with White, Jr., suggests that views of the Social Gospel movement have broadened with time.

Visser 't Hooft did not emphasize the role of either industrialization or urbanization. He only discussed them briefly, alongside the issue of capitalism (which he acknowledged presented a problem for Christian ethics that the Social Gospellers sought to address.) His study focused more on the movement's status in the twentieth century than on nineteenth century developments. He even discussed the prospects for both forms of the Social Gospel given their position at the time he was writing.<sup>28</sup> This is another way Visser 't Hooft's work differs significantly from that of later historians: most trace the Social Gospel movement's roots back at least as far as the Civil War and assert that it began to decline with the disillusionment which followed the First World War.<sup>29</sup> Visser 't Hooft, on the other hand, delved much further into the Social Gospel's background and argued that the destruction wrought by World War I provoked social thought and action, which stimulated, rather than hindered, the movement.<sup>30</sup> (Although he did concede that, after the war, both forms of the Social Gospel were "less absolute in [their] denunciations and affirmations.")<sup>31</sup> It is possible that from his vantage point in 1928, Visser 't Hooft was not able to consider the movement's background and impact in full, but there are other arguments he made that appear to have been largely accepted by the scholarly community.

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<sup>28</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 30-35. Many of the most recent works of scholarship on the Social Gospel movement acknowledge its influence on a variety of ideological movements which followed, and some also discuss possibilities for the Social Gospel's future resurgence. For two perspectives on this see Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 10-12, 39; Christopher H. Evans, ed., *The Social Gospel Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 153-155. It is clear that Visser 't Hooft's assertion that the theologically liberal, socially-oriented form of the Social Gospel continues to influence American culture has also been accepted by the scholarly community.

<sup>29</sup> Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion, Vol. 1, The Irony of It All: 1893-1919* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 288; Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, p. vii.

<sup>30</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 28-30.

<sup>31</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 30.



Visser 't Hooft criticized both forms of the Social Gospel on several points, and many of these criticisms persist even in the most recent studies of the movement. He believed the Social Gospellers were quite idealistic and optimistic regarding social change, as they viewed history in terms of progress and had faith in the plasticity of human nature.<sup>32</sup> Similar characterizations of the Social Gospellers as idealistic, naïve, sentimental, and impractical can be found not only in Hopkins' initial study of the movement, but in many subsequent works as well. Hopkins asserted that the Social Gospel movement was more concerned with socioeconomic critique than it was with offering practical solutions to society's ills.<sup>33</sup> He did note, however, that once the Social Gospellers realized that the "ethic of stewardship" could not be applied to society as easily as to individuals, they made attempts to emphasize the ways that the Christian law of love could be extended outward from family, church, and political life.<sup>34</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom, in *A Religious History of the American People*, suggested that optimism was a vital foundational ingredient in the Social Gospel, citing utopian ideals present throughout the nineteenth century as a recurrent part of the movement (with antebellum utopian socialism being particularly influential).<sup>35</sup>

Another criticism leveled by Visser 't Hooft, along with a host of subsequent historians, was that the Social Gospel had few moorings in biblical theology and was more interested in reform than religion. He argued that although the movement's adherents shared a common conviction that salvation of the individual was dependent

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<sup>32</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 60, 158.

<sup>33</sup> Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, p. 322-323.

<sup>34</sup> Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, p. 325-326.

<sup>35</sup> Ahlstrom, p. 791-792.

upon the salvation of society, the movement lacked a definite system of thought.<sup>36</sup> This assertion is echoed in the works of Sydney Ahlstrom, Martin E. Marty, Clifton Olmstead, Donald B. Meyer, H. Richard Niebuhr, Henry F. May, and Aaron Abell, among others.<sup>37</sup> Meyer stated that the Social Gospel was concerned with “reform first, religion second,”<sup>38</sup> and Olmstead asserted that, in the minds of the movement’s adherents, theology was subordinate to ethics.<sup>39</sup> In his seminal work, *The Kingdom of God in America*, H. Richard Niebuhr posited that the Social Gospel arose as a result of internal shifts in the theology of American religion which called for greater emphasis on the application of Christian ethics to everyday life.<sup>40</sup>

May and Abell challenged Niebuhr, insisting that external social factors were the primary impetus for the Social Gospel,<sup>41</sup> (although they also asserted that the role of external factors does not necessarily indicate that the movement lacked theological justification). Once the Social Gospelers finally developed a definite theological foundation for their activities, thanks primarily to Walter Rauschenbusch in the early twentieth century, it was also criticized as being nothing more than the result of efforts to reinterpret patristic tradition for the sake of cultural relevancy.<sup>42</sup> John C. Bennett, in an

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<sup>36</sup> Visser ’t Hooft, p. 50.

<sup>37</sup> Ahlstrom, p. 796; Marty, p. 290; Olmstead, p. 489-490; Donald B. Meyer, *The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 167; H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (1937; repr., Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), p. 150; Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 186; Aaron I. Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943), p. 36.

<sup>38</sup> Meyer, p. 182.

<sup>39</sup> Olmstead, p. 490.

<sup>40</sup> Niebuhr, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> May, p. 42.

<sup>42</sup> John C. Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy* (New York: Scribner, 1946), p. 42; John C. Bennett, “The Social Gospel Today,” in White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), p. 287. In Bennett’s essay in White, Jr.

essay published in Hopkins and White, Jr.'s 1976 joint work, argued that criticism of the Social Gospelers' views of reality and theological assumptions represents little more than an assertion that the Social Gospelers were "products of their own time and place."<sup>43</sup> Although he believed that their notion of the kingdom of God was not in line with New Testament scholarship, he argued that their optimism was not a flaw in and of itself and was proven false more by historical events than by theological criticism.<sup>44</sup>

Arguments regarding the validity of the Social Gospel's ideology and theology aside, it is clear that the movement represented a threat to more than the social injustice it sought to eliminate. Some believe many of its ideas continue to endanger Christian doctrine. In his conclusions regarding the theological implications of the movement, Visser 't Hooft warned of a danger inherent within the movement's doctrine of serving God by serving men: it could eventually lead to the replacement of religion with "barren moralism."<sup>45</sup> Visser 't Hooft considered the radical form of the Social Gospel—that which not only insisted upon the interrelatedness of the social environment and religious life, but also asserted that God was immanent and the kingdom of God was achievable on Earth—to be the greatest threat. If Christianity were to focus upon and become centered around "utilitarian ethics," he argued, it would lose the transcendental qualities which

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and Hopkins' joint work, he points to the fact that there are several different senses in which one can refer to the Social Gospel. Like Visser 't Hooft, he believed that certain general aspects of the Social Gospel continue to influence both the Church and American culture. However, in his discussion of the Social Gospelers' concept of the Kingdom of God, Bennett did not indicate that some who considered themselves Social Gospelers did not adhere to this interpretation of the Kingdom of God as something tangible and achievable on Earth.

<sup>43</sup> John C. Bennett, "The Social Gospel Today," p. 285.

<sup>44</sup> John C. Bennett, "The Social Gospel Today," p. 285-287.

<sup>45</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 39-40.

made it a religion in the first place.<sup>46</sup> His warnings regarding the theological repercussions of the Social Gospel have not been lost on other scholars of the movement.

Criticism of the theologically liberal nature of the Social Gospel has come from historians and theologians alike, although the harshest criticism has typically been leveled by those with an interest in the challenges the movement presents to conservative and fundamental theology or to the socioeconomic structure. It is important to clarify that although criticism of the movement can be found in a wide range of studies on the Social Gospel, many of the first and most prominent critiques of the movement's reformist nature originated during the apogee of neo-orthodoxy. Neo-orthodoxy developed in the aftermath of the First World War. It rejects liberal theology, along with its optimistic view of humanity, idea of historical progress, and willingness to be critical of biblical scripture. It asserts that God's Word cannot be "reduced to a literal concern for the teachings of Jesus,"<sup>47</sup> and blames theological liberalism for pulling away from traditional doctrine. Adherents to neo-orthodoxy assert that liberal theology places too much faith in human affairs and efforts, and thus detracts humanity from faith in God as a transcendent being.

Visser 't Hooft was among the first to conclude that, due to its social and ethical emphases, the Social Gospel was incapable of producing in its adherents a life which was rooted in Christian truth, because such a life must be focused upon serving God, not mankind.<sup>48</sup> In this way, his arguments are very much in agreement with neo-orthodoxy. (Other early proponents of neo-orthodoxy include Karl Barth, H. Richard Niebuhr,

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<sup>46</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 39-40.

<sup>47</sup> Ahlstrom, p. 944-945.

<sup>48</sup> Visser 't Hooft, p. 39-40.

Reinhold Niebuhr, Emil Brunner, and Paul Tillich.) It is important to acknowledge that although the advocates of both forms of the Social Gospel were theologically liberal in the sense that they embraced science and biblical criticism as a means to understand Christ's teachings and had faith in the ability of humanity to improve the world, it was possible for them to be theologically liberal and socially, politically, or economically conservative. In other words, "not all liberals were Social Gospelers, and not all Social Gospelers were liberal."<sup>49</sup> In fact, the vast majority of Social Gospelers were thoroughly rooted in the socially conservative Victorian culture of nineteenth century America. Even though they were open to many of the scientific and theological developments taking place, as well as to the idea that reform could make the world more just, they were still accountable to the mores of their generation and class.

Although historians continue to describe the Social Gospel movement as naively idealistic with regard to its faith in human nature and ineffective with regard to its ability to enact widespread social change, its main trend is not typically described as radical.<sup>50</sup> It is on this issue that Visser 't Hooft's definition of the Social Gospel requires clarification. He and subsequent scholars agree that the more general form of the Social Gospel—that which accepted the need for the Church to be more socially-oriented but rejected the idea that the kingdom of God was a tangible and achievable on Earth—was not radical. Obviously Visser 't Hooft considered the form of the Social Gospel he described as

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<sup>49</sup> Ronald C. White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877-1925)* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), p. xx. This assertion had been made previously by Sydney Ahlstrom. See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (1972; repr., New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 788.

<sup>50</sup> Peter J. Frederick, *Knights of the Golden Rule: The Intellectual as Christian Social Reformer in the 1890s* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1976), p. 5-6, 9.

“pure” and “radical” to be radical, and he viewed it as such due to the fact that it departed so greatly from previous Christian doctrine and called for such fundamental changes to the nation’s economic and social structure. Even though most scholars are not as explicit with regard to their definition of the Social Gospel, they generally agree that advocates of this form of the Social Gospel were radical.

This does not mean, however, that the advocates of this form of the Social Gospel were radical in the political sense. They sought to rid the world of social injustice in order to establish the kingdom of God on Earth per their theological beliefs, but they attempted to do so using traditional democratic means. They did not attempt to initiate a revolution or overthrow the government as a way to accomplish their goals; instead they sought to convince people that their way of thinking about and solving the world’s problems was best. They articulated a critique of certain aspects of America’s socioeconomic structure, which some certainly interpreted as radical in and of itself, but they attempted to convert people to the Social Gospel rather than force it upon them. Politically then, the movement was not radical,<sup>51</sup> although it was liberal, theologically, and in the sense that it favored reform and progress.

Much as the theologically liberal nature of the Social Gospel represented a threat to conservative and fundamental theology, the reforms it sought with regard to America’s socioeconomic structure likewise represented a threat to those with an interest in preserving the status quo. But the Social Gospellers were far from the harshest critics of American society at the time. Another form of social Christianity which emerged in the nineteenth century represented an even greater threat to the established order: Christian

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<sup>51</sup> Ahlstrom, p. 804.

socialism. Both the theological and political beliefs of Christian socialism are generally described as radical, but certain clarifications are required here as well. Adherents believe that Christ's teachings, if applied to everyday life, lead directly to socialism. But socialism can be interpreted to mean many different things, and it is particularly difficult to define within the context of nineteenth century America.

There was an increase in socialism in the United States during the late nineteenth century, but many scholars have asserted that that this was only partially due to the influence of European Marxist doctrines. In *The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement*, Howard Quint argued that this surge in American socialism was primarily a protest against the social inequality which was becoming ever more apparent in American society at the time.<sup>52</sup> The vast majority of Americans were, at best, uneasy with European Socialism,<sup>53</sup> and the Social Gospellers were no different. The notion of class warfare was incompatible with their emphasis on the efficacy of cooperation and brotherhood as guiding principles for human interaction.<sup>54</sup> Reformist members of America's middle class, including many of the radical Social Gospellers, desired a "softened" form of Socialism.<sup>55</sup> They found it in Laurence Gronlund's *The Cooperative Commonwealth*, Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*. The socialism Gronlund, George, and

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<sup>52</sup> Howard Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement* (1953; repr., New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964), p. vii.

<sup>53</sup> Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (2003; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 64-65.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (1994; repr., New York: BasicBooks, 1995), p. 67.

<sup>55</sup> McGerr, p. 64-65.

Bellamy advocated did not contain the emphasis on class warfare or revolution which the American middle class (and Social Gospellers) found so unpalatable.<sup>56</sup>

Adherents of the non-Marxian socialism of Gronlund, George, and Bellamy called their belief system “Christian socialism.” (There were some connections to British Christian Socialism, although once again there is evidence that American scholars have placed more emphasis upon the importance of American developments.) There were some among them, such as William Dwight Porter Bliss and the Reverend George D. Herron, who also considered themselves Christian socialists but occasionally expressed agreement with the Marxist idea that force would be necessary to institute the structural changes they sought. But figures such as Herron and Bliss represent outliers, the “radicals among the radicals.” Many of the early Christian socialists were often associated with the Social Gospel in some way; some scholars even refer to them as the more radical voices of the movement.<sup>57</sup> Most Social Gospellers, however, were not Christian socialists. Like the majority of Americans at the time, most were strongly opposed to Socialism and favored reform as a means to prevent it.<sup>58</sup> That does not mean, however, that Christian socialism failed to influence the Social Gospel movement.<sup>59</sup> Even those who rejected Socialism’s revolutionary rhetoric and emphasis on class struggle were appreciative of Christian socialism’s attempts to awaken the Church to the

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<sup>56</sup> Edward K. Spann, *Brotherly Tomorrows: Movements for a Cooperative Society in America, 1820-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 178, 180, 182-183, 226.

<sup>57</sup> Olmstead, p. 491-492; Ahlstrom, p. 799.

<sup>58</sup> Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, p. 171; Willard H. Smith, “William Jennings Bryan and the Social Gospel,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (June, 1966), p. 46 [accessed via JSTOR 11 July 2008].

<sup>59</sup> Samuel Ehlen Walker, “Populism and Industrialism: The Ideology of the Official Organ of the Nebraska Populist Movement” (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska-Omaha, 1970, text-fiche), p. 50-53.



need for social action.<sup>60</sup> And the Social Gospel was not the only reform movement which Christian socialists were involved with during the late nineteenth century.

Like the Social Gospelers, Christian socialists traveled in the same circles as other reformers of the period, and were often attracted to social reform movements which shared their critique of the status quo and desire for change. Connections have been drawn not only between the Social Gospel and Christian socialism, but also between the Social Gospel, Christian socialism, and Midwestern Populism. Sydney Ahlstrom asserted that Populism and the “great agrarian crusade” influenced the Social Gospel movement, although most historians do not include Populism in their accounts of the Social Gospel because Populism lacked both “an urban orientation and the presuppositions of theological liberalism.”<sup>61</sup> Like the Social Gospel, Populism was motivated by economic difficulties, humanistic in orientation, favored reform, and had faith in the ability of people to change society for the better.<sup>62</sup> Populism was also ideologically aligned with the Social Gospel via its emphasis on cooperation, which was no doubt a source of attraction for Social Gospelers and Christian socialists alike. Norman Pollack argued that Populism had the potential to lead America in a socialistic direction.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform*, p. 4; Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, p. 171, 323.

<sup>61</sup> Ahlstrom, p. 788.

<sup>62</sup> Robert W. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), p. 154, 158; Norman Pollack, *Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 53.

<sup>63</sup> Pollack, p. 61. Pollack has been criticized for using the state of Illinois as the basis for his research. See Samuel Ehlen Walker, “Populism and Industrialism: The Ideology of the Official Organ of the Nebraska Populist Movement” (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska-Omaha, 1970, text-fiche), p. 12.

Many historians cite the radical Social Gospel periodical *The Kingdom* as demonstrative of the connections between Midwestern Populism, the Social Gospel, and Christian socialism.<sup>64</sup> Ronald C. White, Jr. and Charles Howard Hopkins called *The Kingdom* “a vehicle for expressing the vast Midwestern discontent of late Populism stirred into a peculiar mix of social gospel [*sic*] radicalism.”<sup>65</sup> They described it as the mouthpiece of George D. Herron,<sup>66</sup> and concluded that there is a great need for research into the relationship between Midwestern Populism and the Social Gospel.<sup>67</sup> Despite its connections to radicalism, nearly every prominent Social Gospel leader contributed something to *The Kingdom* during its five years of publication.<sup>68</sup>

The Social Gospel has been tied to other types of reform movements as well. The body of literature on the Social Gospel reveals that while the early works on the movement focused upon its adherents’ efforts to deal with problems directly related to the effects of industrialization and urbanization, later works have uncovered the Social Gospelers’ attention to other forms of social injustice. Connections between the Social Gospel and other social reform movements first began to be noted by historians during the rise of social history in the 1960’s and 1970’s.<sup>69</sup> As historians devoted specific attention to issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class, a different account of the Social Gospel movement began to develop. The participation of women became more apparent, as did connections with racial reformers and concern for rural labor. Historians

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<sup>64</sup> White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform*, p. 150; Quint, p. 130-134; James Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 180.

<sup>65</sup> White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform*, p. 150.

<sup>66</sup> White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform*, p. 150.

<sup>67</sup> White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform*, p. 178.

<sup>68</sup> White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform*, p. 150.

<sup>69</sup> White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform*, p. xii.

began the work of reconstructing a more inclusive, complete account of the Social Gospel and called for other scholars to do the same. Their inducements did not go unheeded.

The most recent studies of the Social Gospel movement have focused specifically on researching the participation of previously neglected, overlooked, or excluded groups. In *Gender and the Social Gospel*, editors Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford stated that previous studies of the Social Gospel have focused upon pastors and professors in northeastern and Midwestern America, and are notably non-gender-specific.<sup>70</sup> They argued that historians need to make a deliberate effort to pay attention to the roles of women in the Social Gospel and examine a broader range of sources than just those belonging to the movement's white, male, middle-class leaders.<sup>71</sup> Susan Hill Lindley's study of the history of women and religion in America makes many of the same arguments.<sup>72</sup> Both works demonstrate the involvement of women in a wide range of social reform efforts throughout the United States, particularly via home mission and settlement movements.<sup>73</sup> John Patrick McDowell even asserted that women's involvement in mission work in the South demonstrates the presence of the Social Gospel there, something early historians of the movement denied.<sup>74</sup> Richard C. Goode likewise attempted to demonstrate the presence of the Social Gospel in the South, although he

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<sup>70</sup> Deichmann Edwards and De Swarte Gifford, p. 2-3.

<sup>71</sup> Deichmann Edwards and De Swarte Gifford, p. xi, 14.

<sup>72</sup> Susan Hill Lindley, *"You Have Stept Out of Your Place:" A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 136.

<sup>73</sup> Lindley, p. 136, 141-143; Deichmann Edwards and De Swarte Gifford, p. 64, 169.

<sup>74</sup> John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Women's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886-1939* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), p. 2-5.

cites Populism as the connecting factor.<sup>75</sup> All four of these studies, while valuable contributions to the history of the Social Gospel movement, fail to make a clear distinction between the two forms of the Social Gospel and other religiously motivated social reform efforts of the period. At times it seems as if the authors consider any type of religious reform to be evidence of the radical form of the Social Gospel.

This flaw can also be found in recent studies on the participation of Social Gospelers in nineteenth and early twentieth century racial reform. In *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877-1925)*, Ronald C. White, Jr. stated that early historians of the Social Gospel accused the movement of lacking a commitment to racial reform.<sup>76</sup> He asserted that the Social Gospel was introduced to the issue of race following its involvement in the southern Temperance movement, mission societies, and labor and agricultural reform.<sup>77</sup> His study links the Social Gospelers to racial reform via their participation and leadership in organizations which worked to promote racial equality. Ralph E. Luker used similar methods to establish connections between the Social Gospel and racial reform, although he argued that the Social Gospel movement was actually an extension of antebellum home missions.<sup>78</sup> Calvin S. Morris extended the connection further by arguing not simply that Social Gospelers were involved with racial reform, but that some African-Americans actively sought racial advancement via the Social Gospel (although he stated that the movement's faith in progress was not generally

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<sup>75</sup> Richard C. Goode, "The Godly Insurrection in Limestone County: Social Gospel, Populism, and Southern Culture in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Religion and American Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Summer, 1993), p. 156-159 [accessed via JSTOR 19 July 2008].

<sup>76</sup> White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All*, p. xx.

<sup>77</sup> White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All*, p. xxii, 43.

<sup>78</sup> Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 4.

accepted by African-Americans due to its implicit emphasis on the expansion of Anglo-Saxon civilization.)<sup>79</sup> These three works succeed in demonstrating that Social Gospelers were concerned with many forms of social injustice, but they are also ambiguous with regard to the definition of the Social Gospel. White, Jr. and Luker admitted outright their difficulty in distinguishing between general religious social concern and the Social Gospel.<sup>80</sup>

In the process of revealing the participation of groups not included in early works on the Social Gospel movement, these latest studies have illustrated that the Social Gospel and other nineteenth century social reform movements were interrelated. But they have also contributed to the complexity of the Social Gospel, and called into question the traditional definition of it, derived from Hopkins' initial study.<sup>81</sup> By demonstrating that the Social Gospelers were concerned with more than simply those issues directly related to industrialization and urbanization, recent research has made the movement more difficult to define. In their joint work in 1976, White, Jr. and Hopkins argued that the definition of the Social Gospel movement needs to be enlarged "even as its geographical, religious, and social boundaries are redrawn and expanded."<sup>82</sup> In recent works on the movement historians have clearly attempted to do so, but this presents a problem which White, Jr. and Hopkins do not seem to have anticipated.

Because the differences between the two forms of the Social Gospel have been obscured, so have the lines between the Social Gospel and other religiously motivated

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<sup>79</sup> Calvin S. Morris, *Reverdy C. Ransom: Black Advocate of the Social Gospel* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1990), p. 166-167.

<sup>80</sup> White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All*, p. 224; Luker, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform*, p. xi, 80.

<sup>82</sup> White, Jr. and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform*, p. xi.

social reform efforts of the period. While new studies have contributed to a more accurate and complete account of the Social Gospel movement, they have also tended to assert (either implicitly or explicitly) that all advocates of all forms of social Christianity were radical Social Gospelers. In these broader studies of the Social Gospel movement, if scholars acknowledged the distinction between the Social Gospel as a general attitude regarding the interactions between the social environment and religious life and the Social Gospel as a combination of this attitude with the more specific theological assertion that the kingdom of God is immanent, much of the confusion regarding who was a radical Social Gospelers and who was simply a religiously-minded social reformer could be avoided.

As scholars enrich the history of the Social Gospel and place it within the context of its times, it is important that they continue to bear in mind the fact that although the radical Social Gospelers shared many similarities with other nineteenth century reformers and other forms of social Christianity, they possessed a theology which set them apart. The Social Gospelers strongly believed that they were reviving a Christian ideal which had become lost with the march of time and threatened by the emergence of the market economy. They sought to save society by eliminating social injustice and establishing the kingdom of God on Earth, which they interpreted as a tangible Christian order. This is something which previous forms of Christianity had neither espoused nor attempted; it is what separates the radical Social Gospelers from the other religious social reformers of the time. Historians should not allow the need for inclusion to undermine their renderings of the true nature of the Social Gospel.

## CHAPTER 1

### A THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE: GIBSON'S FAMILY AND BACKGROUND

George Howard Gibson was born in Saccarrappa, Maine on April 8, 1854.<sup>1</sup> His background reveals a pattern that was common to the majority of Social Gospelers: his family was well-established, middle class, ardently religious, and had been heavily involved in community affairs from the time they first arrived in America. In a brief biographical article which appeared in the December 27, 1888 edition of the Nebraskan temperance paper the *New Republic*, which Gibson was almost certainly interviewed for, his lineage on



his mother's side was traced back to the 1600s.<sup>2</sup> The article reports that his maternal great grandfather, Samuel Prentiss, graduated from Harvard College in 1771, and that his

<sup>1</sup> "Sons of the Sanctum: Nebraska's Knights of the Leaden Quill," *New Republic*, December 27, 1888, p. 4. This article features a series of biographies of prominent local reform paper editors and journalists, including Gibson. It is apparent that each subject was interviewed for their biography. Also see Mehitable Calef Copenhagen Wilson, *John Gibson of Cambridge, Massachusetts and His Descendants, 1634-1899* (Washington, D.C.: McGill and Wallace, 1900), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> "Sons of the Sanctum," *New Republic*, December 27, 1888, p. 4.

mother's cousin, S. S. Prentiss, served in Congress.<sup>3</sup> Research not only confirms these facts,<sup>4</sup> but also reveals that Gibson's father's side of the family was likewise quite prominent.

Gibson's paternal great grandfather, Captain Timothy Gibson, was a descendent of John Gibson, who had immigrated to Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1634.<sup>5</sup> Capt. Timothy Gibson served in the French and Indian War, and saw action at Crown Point.<sup>6</sup> By 1770, he was prosperous enough to purchase a large acreage, mill, and house for himself and his wife.<sup>7</sup> He served as a delegate to the Fourth Provincial Congress of New Hampshire which convened at Exeter, New Hampshire on May 17, 1775 to discuss the safety of the towns in the colony.<sup>8</sup> He signed the New Hampshire Declaration for Independence, also known as the "Association Test" of 1776, and served as a delegate to the state convention held at Concord on June 13, 1778.<sup>9</sup> He was also elected Justice of the Peace for the County of Hillsborough, New Hampshire on September 11, 1776, and

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<sup>3</sup> "Sons of the Sanctum," *New Republic*, December 27, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Seargent Smith Prentiss, *A Memoir of S. S. Prentiss, Volume I* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), p. 14 [accessed via Google Books 8 July 2008]; Charles James Fox Binney, *The History and Genealogy of the Prentice or Prentiss Family in New England, From 1631 to 1852* (Boston: Charles James Fox Binney, 1852), p. 144-146 [accessed via Google Books 8 July 2008].

<sup>5</sup> Mehitable Calef Coppenhagen Wilson, *John Gibson of Cambridge, Massachusetts and His Descendants, 1634-1899* (Washington, D.C.: McGill and Wallace, 1900), p. 132; George Thomas Little, Henry S. Burrage, and Albert Roscoe Stubbs, eds., *Genealogical and Family History of the State of Maine, Volume 3* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1909), p. 1245 [accessed via Google Books 8 July 2008].

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 127; Little, Burrage and Stubbs, p. 1246.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 127; Little, Burrage and Stubbs, p. 1246.

<sup>8</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 127; Little, Burrage and Stubbs, p. 1246; Nathaniel Bouton, ed., *Provincial Papers: Documents and Records Relating to the Province of New Hampshire, From 1764 to 1776* (Nashua: Orren C. Moore, State Printer, 1873), p. 469 [accessed via Google Books 8 July 2008].

<sup>9</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 128; Nathaniel Bouton, ed., *State Papers: Documents and Records Relating to the State of New-Hampshire During the Period of the American Revolution, From 1776 to 1783* (Concord, New Hampshire: Edward A. Jenks, State Printer, 1874), p. 240 [accessed via Google Books 8 July 2008].



later served twice as Henniker, New Hampshire's selectman (town officer), three times as its town clerk, and five times as its town representative to the state.<sup>10</sup>

In 1798, Capt. Timothy Gibson moved from Henniker to Brownfield, Maine, where he purchased 900 acres of tilled land and timber land as well as another 100 acres in the nearby town of Fryeburg, Maine.<sup>11</sup> When he moved, he took an African American man named Lancaster Hodges with him.<sup>12</sup> One source indicates that Hodges was born in Danvers, Massachusetts, went to Henniker, New Hampshire "when a lad," and resided with Capt. Gibson's family until his death in 1878, at the age of 107.<sup>13</sup> Another source states that Capt. Gibson swapped his land in Henniker for the Brownfield property, which Hodges had been living on with a farmer named Ebenezer Jacobs. After the swap Hodges at first went to Henniker with Jacobs, but later desired to return to Brownfield, at which time Capt. Gibson took him in.<sup>14</sup> Local history sources from the period attempt to portray Hodges as a cherished friend or member Capt. Gibson's family.<sup>15</sup> Given the fact that he lived with the family for several generations, it is likely that the Gibsons (probably including George Howard Gibson) came to genuinely care for Hodges, and may even have considered him a member of the family.

Yet it is almost certain that Hodges was (or at least at some point in his life had been) a slave, even if the Gibsons did not consider him such. Capt. Gibson's status would have afforded him the financial resources to be able to purchase slaves, and

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<sup>10</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 128; Bouton, p. 332; Leander W. Cogswell, *History of the Town of Henniker* (Concord: The Republican Press Association, 1880), p. 300, 302-303, 305-307, 579-580 [accessed via Google Books 8 July 2008].

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> Cogswell, p. 351.

<sup>13</sup> Cogswell, p. 351.

<sup>14</sup> William Teg, *History of Brownfield, Maine* (Cornish, Maine: Carbrook Press, 1966), p. 145.

<sup>15</sup> Cogswell, p. 351.

although slavery was increasingly marginal in the North in the years after the American Revolution, small slave-holding households were not uncommon for either New Hampshire or Maine.<sup>16</sup> Most slaves in the area would have worked as servants, farmhands, craftsmen, and general laborers.<sup>17</sup> Hodges may have been the slave of Jacobs, serving as his farmhand until the land swap with Capt. Gibson, or he may have actually been purchased by Capt. Gibson during his time in New Hampshire. There is not enough information to say for certain which scenario, if either, is true, but there is evidence that George Howard Gibson grew up knowing that some may have considered Hodges part of the extended family. Hodges' presence in the Gibson family, a number of years during which he was blind and quite elderly, likely contributed to the development of George Howard Gibson's progressive views, including his admiration of abolitionists and perhaps also his tendency to frame social reform in terms of a battle of the forces of good against oppression and "slavery."<sup>18</sup>

Captain Gibson's fourth child, Timothy Gibson, Jr., was George Howard Gibson's paternal grandfather. Timothy Gibson, Jr. was also involved in public affairs throughout his life, holding the positions of town officer, justice of the peace, and county

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619-1877* (1993; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), p. 29-30.

<sup>17</sup> Kolchin, p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> George Howard Gibson, "Wholesome Self-Criticism," *Wealth Makers*, January 2, 1896, p. 2; George Howard Gibson, "A New Republic," *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2; George Howard Gibson, "It Was Ignorance Defeated Us," *Alliance-Independent*, November 15, 1893, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, "The Law of Happiness," *Wealth Makers*, December 17, 1895, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *Wealth Makers*, March 7, 1895, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, "Christian Cooperation or Labor Communion," *Wealth Makers*, July 18, 1895, p. 1, 4, 5; George Howard Gibson, "The Duty of Colored Voters," *Wealth Makers*, October 10, 1895, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, "News of the Election," *Wealth Makers*, November 7, 1895, p. 2; George Howard Gibson, "Socialism the Great Danger," *Wealth Makers*, November 18, 1895, p. 2.

commissioner.<sup>19</sup> His third child, born in Brownfield on September 18, 1811 and also named Timothy Gibson, was George Howard Gibson's father.<sup>20</sup> By this time the Gibson family was still quite prosperous, both financially and socially, but continued to live and work on their family farms while contributing to the development of their communities. Timothy Gibson married Martha Miller of Brownfield on May 24, 1833 and had three daughters with her before she died in July of 1846.<sup>21</sup> He married his second wife, Mary P. (Prentiss) Freeman of Saccarappa, Maine, on November 29, 1847 and relocated to Saccarappa sometime between November of 1847 and October of 1851.<sup>22</sup> On October 20, 1851, they had a son, Henry Prentiss Gibson, and on April 8, 1854, George Howard Gibson was born.<sup>23</sup>

Gibson's mother died on April 22, 1857, when he was barely three years old,<sup>24</sup> yet he carried an admiration for her throughout his life.<sup>25</sup> He described her as "a woman of superior mind and marked literary tastes," from whom he inherited a "thirst for knowledge" and "faculty of memory and ability of reason."<sup>26</sup> Despite the many achievements of his paternal ancestors and the fact that he grew up without his mother, Gibson seemed particularly proud of both her and her family. In the earlier-cited biography of Gibson from the temperance paper the *New Republic*, which he appears to

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<sup>19</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 130.

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 131.

<sup>21</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 131.

<sup>22</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 132. Based upon the fact that she had two surnames prior to her marriage to Timothy Gibson, it seems that Mary P. (Prentiss) Freeman had been married previously. She was most likely a widow at the time of her marriage to Timothy.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 132.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 131.

<sup>25</sup> George Howard Gibson, "Heaven," in *The People's Hour: And Other Themes* (Chicago: The Englewood Publishing House, 1909), p. 129.

<sup>26</sup> "Sons of the Sanctum," *New Republic*, December 27, 1888, p. 4. Gibson was almost certainly interviewed for this article, therefore one can assume that the information it contains regarding his mother and her family is representative of his opinions of them.

have been interviewed for, only his mother and her side of the family are mentioned. He may have simply been less familiar with his father's heritage than his mother's, but Gibson also clearly valued the intellectual abilities he believed his mother to have possessed and thought that it was through his maternal grandmother that he gained the "tastes and talents" which drew him into "literary work."<sup>27</sup>

Although his mother died very early in his life, Gibson was not without maternal figures. Two of his three elder sisters survived to adulthood,<sup>28</sup> and it seems Timothy Gibson was intent upon ensuring that his children had both a father and a mother present in their lives: he remarried twice more before he died. By 1860, he had married a woman by the name of Sarah Appleton and had moved the family to the Appleton family farm in Buxton, Maine.<sup>29</sup> In the census of 1860, he listed the value of his real estate at \$6,000 and his personal estate at \$618,<sup>30</sup> so the family was still getting along quite well. Yet it appears that Sarah also died, robbing Timothy of his third wife and the children of another mother. In the census of 1870, Timothy's wife is listed as Abbie N. Gibson, and the family had moved back to Brownfield, Maine.<sup>31</sup> Abbie was likely a widow, as she

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<sup>27</sup> "Sons of the Sanctum," *New Republic*, December 27, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 132.

<sup>29</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860: Buxton, York, Maine, Roll M653\_451, p. 0, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008].

<sup>30</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860: Buxton, York, Maine, Roll M653\_451, p. 0, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008].

<sup>31</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States*, 1870: Buxton, Brownfield, Maine, Roll M593\_550, p. 68, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1870 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008]. The family name is misspelled in this census (spelled as "Gipson"), but all of the other information is correct. Since divorce was quite rare in the second half of the nineteenth century, it is more likely that Sarah Appleton Gibson died than that she and Timothy Gibson divorced. Still, the possibility remains that divorce did, in fact, occur, although this author could find no evidence of it.

claimed to have a personal estate worth \$2000.<sup>32</sup> However, times had clearly become more difficult for the family; Timothy listed the value of his real estate at \$1500 and his personal estate at \$800.<sup>33</sup> George Howard Gibson, by this time sixteen years old, and his brother Henry Prentiss Gibson, age eighteen, were both working on the family farm and were not attending school.<sup>34</sup>

The *New Republic's* biographical article on Gibson states that he was forced to quit school at the age of fourteen due to “weak eyes,” but that with the exception of Latin and Greek he still possessed “more than the necessary qualifications to enter college” at that age.<sup>35</sup> It must have been a disappointment to the young Gibson not to be able to attend college, as the much admired members of his mother’s family had, but private study and self-education became a lifelong focus for him.<sup>36</sup> Given the paths that each of the Gibson children took, learning was probably emphasized throughout their upbringing. On May 8, 1872, Henry Prentiss Gibson married Amanda Dutch, a young teacher and member of the National Education Association, which held several conferences in Nebraska.<sup>37</sup> It is unclear if this is what first attracted the Gibson family to the state of Nebraska, but by 1873 they had all relocated to Nebraska from Brownfield. Henry

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<sup>32</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States*, 1870: Buxton, Brownfield, Maine, Roll M593\_550, p. 68, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1870 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008].

<sup>33</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States*, 1870: Buxton, Brownfield, Maine, Roll M593\_550, p. 68, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1870 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008].

<sup>34</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States*, 1870: Buxton, Brownfield, Maine, Roll M593\_550, p. 68, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1870 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008].

<sup>35</sup> “Sons of the Sanctum,” *New Republic*, December 27, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Right to the Point,” *Wealth Makers*, July 25, 1895, p. 4; Gibson, “The People’s Hour,” in *The People’s Hour*, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 132; Eliza A. Gibson Stickney, *Reminiscences of Brownfield: Short Sketches from the History of the Town* (E. Brownfield, Maine: E. A. G. Stickney, 1901), p. 13.

became a real estate broker in Lincoln, while Timothy and the rest of the family took up residence in Rising City, Nebraska. By at least 1876, there were even several of Henry and George's cousins living in Omaha.<sup>38</sup>

Little is known of what occupied George Howard Gibson's time in the years between his settlement in Rising City and his involvement with the temperance movement or what exactly prompted him to take his first steps into social reform. The *New Republic's* biography of Gibson states that "from the age of twenty-one he was nine years an invalid confined in darkness by his eyes," but that he "used the time thinking out the great problems of nature and life [and] acquired the habit of careful, logical, persistent reasoning."<sup>39</sup> If Gibson was blind from 1875 to 1884, there is nothing in the historical record (aside from the *New Republic's* biographical article) which verifies the fact. From a medical standpoint the story sounds quite far-fetched. Yet this appears to be the story Gibson told the *New Republic*, and he clearly believed it had an impact on his life. If he did have some sort of difficulty with his eyes which was cured or somehow resolved itself after nine years, it probably would have contributed greatly to his zeal for pursuing goals that he would have been hindered from achieving during the period of blindness. The loss and subsequent recovery of his sight, in addition to his childhood and experience of contemporary historical events, may therefore have played a large role in Gibson's decision to become involved with social reform.

There were a wide variety of changes taking place in American society during Gibson's childhood and through the years of his supposed blindness. Many of these

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<sup>38</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 133.

<sup>39</sup> "Sons of the Sanctum," *New Republic*, December 27, 1888, p. 4.

changes would have been particularly troubling (and made reform activities particularly appealing) for a young man of Gibson's background and status. Industrialization brought a series of fundamental transformations to America. Prior to the Civil War, industrial technology had been viewed with great optimism by most Americans. It seemed to offer a sure and steady path to progress, abundance, increased quality of life for all citizens, and evidence of the superiority of the American way. The economy boomed, output of consumer goods soared, and home production of goods decreased. Cities began to increase in both number and size as people flocked to the centers of industry for employment. The number of farmers also increased from 1865 to 1920, but rural growth was not sufficient to keep pace with urban expansion.<sup>40</sup>

As the nation industrialized and urbanized, both time and the workday became more regimented as business owners sought to improve efficiency and gain greater control over their workers. Work and daily life became time-oriented rather than task-oriented, and the separation between family life and livelihood increased as more people spent more time working outside the home. Businesses also sought to improve efficiency via consolidation, espousing the doctrine of laissez-faire even while working to establish political and economic alliances which would decrease risk and ensure profits.<sup>41</sup>

Corruption became a common feature of the nation's corporate, political, and financial systems, and industrialization failed to eliminate poverty. The gap between the poor and the wealthy actually increased dramatically during the Gilded Age. Although Americans

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<sup>40</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920* (1975; repr., Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1996), p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (1982; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), p. 84.

took advantage of the opportunities presented by industrialization and the emergence of the market economy, many were ambivalent about and often frustrated by the ways their daily lives and national systems were altered.

A series of economic crises and labor conflicts only heightened Gilded Age Americans' feelings of uncertainty and frustration. Throughout the 1880s, the Great Plains experienced a land boom. Railroads played a significant role in this growth, as did boosterism. Railroads aggressively sold land along the lines of track, and civic boosters promoted idealistic visions of the West in an effort to encourage settlement.<sup>42</sup> The land boom attracted Eastern lenders, and the number of mortgages on Western farms increased.<sup>43</sup> The West devoted more and more of its resources to the nation's agricultural and industrial production, and became increasingly incorporated into the Eastern industrial system.<sup>44</sup> At the same time American agriculture was shifting from subsistence to commercial farming, with much of the farmer's success tied to land values.<sup>45</sup> The eventual collapse of the Western land boom contributed directly to the dissatisfaction and rise of social activism among farmers.<sup>46</sup>

From 1873 to 1896, the world also experienced an international "great depression" which led to overproduction of commodities and an average fall in prices by one third.<sup>47</sup> In the United States, the industrial panics of 1873 and 1893 led to dramatic increases in unemployment, poverty, and social unrest. During the late 1880s and 1890s,

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<sup>42</sup> Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (1992; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 22, 49.

<sup>43</sup> McMath, p. 23.

<sup>44</sup> Trachtenberg, p. 22.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> Hofstadter, p. 56.

<sup>47</sup> Hofstadter, p. 39.



railroads consolidated, causing freight and transportation rates to skyrocket.<sup>48</sup> Drought struck, indebtedness increased, and a grass-roots agricultural movement took hold in America's rural areas to combat what farmers viewed as unlawful and un-American transportation, economic, and land monopolies.

During the same period, the population of the United States nearly doubled, with immigrants primarily from Eastern Europe and Asia representing a third of the total population increase between 1860 and 1900.<sup>49</sup> The composition of the nation's workforce was altered: by 1870 one out of every three industrial workers in the U.S. was an immigrant.<sup>50</sup> Greater ethnic diversity contributed to changing ideas regarding the working classes, which were increasingly perceived and portrayed as unwashed, uncivilized, and potentially contaminated with dangerous European ideas. When conflict erupted among industrial laborers, it seemed European socialism had reached the U.S. The railroad strikes of 1877 confirmed that class violence on a national scale was possible in America. Labor conflict continued into the 1880s, reaching a peak in what labor historians now term the Great Upheaval of 1886, during which the Knights of Labor led a railroad strike in the Southwest, the Haymarket riot occurred in Chicago, and agitation for the eight-hour workday crested.<sup>51</sup> The Pullman strike of 1894 demonstrated that the government was willing to interfere in labor struggles and use the military to break strikes. In the final two decades of the nineteenth century social tensions in

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<sup>48</sup> McMath, p. 47, 101.

<sup>49</sup> Trachtenberg, p. 87-88.

<sup>50</sup> Trachtenberg, p. 87-88.

<sup>51</sup> Trachtenberg, p. 71.

America reached fever pitch, to the point that many had serious concerns over rebellion and revolution.<sup>52</sup>

Gibson, as a self-identified intellectual and a member of the American middle class, would have been among those most anxious about the influx of immigrants and the working class's and farmers' responses to the economic instability of the Gilded Age.<sup>53</sup> Many members of the middle and upper middle class began to trumpet calls for reform, not only as a means to avoid revolution but also because an increasing number of them were dissatisfied with the changes taking place in American society. Intellectuals, professionals, and supporters of a growing movement in liberal theology believed that American ideals and government were being threatened by large corporations, political corruption, concentrated wealth, and manipulation of the nation's economic systems by members of the industrial upper class. They shared a deep respect for American principles and had faith in the efficacy of the U.S. Constitution and system of government, but thought certain forces were eroding American virtues and pulling the nation in the wrong direction.

A large factor in the increased activism of the middle classes during this period was the challenge they perceived to their status as purveyors and models of American culture. Victorian values dominated the Gilded Age and, in the minds of the middle and upper middle classes, Victorian values were central to what it meant to be American. Individual freedom, balanced by self-discipline, hard work, and a commitment to

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<sup>52</sup> Trachtenberg, p. 40.

<sup>53</sup> Trachtenberg, p. 87-88, 145,149; Hofstadter, p. 163-164.

domesticity, was central to Victorian ideology.<sup>54</sup> But the transformations caused by industrialization and urbanization brought about the rise of the industrial upper class, which began to alter and even reject Victorian mores. The industrial “upper ten,” which actually constituted more like one or two percent of the U.S. population, lauded the Victorian emphasis on individualism while simultaneously forging class-based business and political alliances which were anything but individualist in nature.<sup>55</sup>

They further violated the Victorian traditions they claimed to honor by replacing the Victorian ethics of hard work and self-restraint with lifestyles of leisure and self-indulgent consumption of consumer and luxury goods. Strict adherence to the idea of marriage as a lifelong commitment gave way to the increasing acceptability of divorce, and Victorian domesticity—with the home as a private haven for both parents and children—was discarded in favor of a form of domesticity which was centered upon public roles as hosts and hostesses rather than on private roles as fathers and mothers.<sup>56</sup> The industrial upper class’s “half perversion and half repudiation” of Victorian values was central to the mobilization of the middle classes.<sup>57</sup> Middle and upper middle class Americans began to search for a way to—if not remove—at least restrict the economic, political, and cultural influence of the industrial “upper ten.”

One method was to promote middle class Victorian values as normative and those of the industrial upper class as un-American; another was to attempt to initiate tangible reforms. Often the two went hand in hand. However, the majority of the middle class

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<sup>54</sup> Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (2003; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 56.

<sup>55</sup> McGerr, p. 7, 9.

<sup>56</sup> McGerr, p. 10-11.

<sup>57</sup> McGerr, p. 13.

was uncomfortable with the idea of fundamental changes to the nation's socio-economic structure. They believed small-scale reforms and the restoration of a "responsible elite" (themselves) to a position of power and cultural authority was the best solution.<sup>58</sup> Most were already active in politics and community affairs,<sup>59</sup> and utilized this experience in their attempts to find an effective way to institute reform. Cultural values were central to the reform efforts of the middle classes, as was reform via legislation and religion.

The Christian Church of nineteenth century America was, by and large, a middle class institution, and its stance on social issues was often reflective of the interests of the middle classes.<sup>60</sup> Individualism was endorsed by Christianity just as it was by Victorians, but in the years after the Civil War—as the effects of industrialization, urbanization, and the emergence of the market economy began to transform American society—many began to speak out against Christianity's emphasis on individualism and demand that the Church acknowledge the impact of the social environment on the individual.<sup>61</sup> The Social Gospelers articulated these arguments most passionately. Typically of middle class backgrounds,<sup>62</sup> they participated vigorously in Gilded Age social reform. Both the Social Gospelers and middle class Victorian reformers shared a belief that it was natural for the middle and upper middle class to be in a position of leadership over the masses,<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Hofstadter, p. 163-164.

<sup>59</sup> H. Wayne Morgan, ed., *The Gilded Age: A Reappraisal* (1963; repr., New York: Syracuse University Press, 1967), p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> James Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 20.

<sup>61</sup> McGerr, p. 58-59.

<sup>62</sup> Dombrowski, p. 26-27.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994; ed., 1995), p. 52; Hofstadter, p. 152.

were confident that the working and lower classes shared their values,<sup>64</sup> believed that education of the working and lower classes was imperative to their ability to fight corruption, held that the majority of reforms needed to take place within the nation's cities,<sup>65</sup> and thought the state should be used to curb the negative effects of individualism.<sup>66</sup> Both groups also viewed the remaking of the lower classes in their image as a way to quell the dissatisfaction of the lower classes, prevent revolution while avoiding fundamental reforms to social and economic systems,<sup>67</sup> and restore the middle classes and, in the case of the Social Gospellers, restore the Church to more secure positions as the defenders and representatives of American virtue.

However, there were some among both the middle classes and the Social Gospellers who believed that more fundamental changes to the nation's socio-economic structure were necessary. Gibson was situated squarely within this group. He and others like him conceived of themselves as the guardians of American virtues, and were comfortable with their status as members of the middle class.<sup>68</sup> They tended to view "the issues of the day in economic and religious rather than cultural terms"<sup>69</sup> and avoided class-based language, yet nevertheless implicitly expected other classes to adopt their values and viewpoints. They constituted a significant portion of nineteenth century social reformers. Their beliefs were often the result of involvement with several reform

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<sup>64</sup> Hofstadter, p. 19; McGerr, p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> Trachtenberg, p. 105.

<sup>66</sup> McGerr, p. 67.

<sup>67</sup> Hofstadter, p. 163-164.

<sup>68</sup> McGerr, p. 42.

<sup>69</sup> Peter J. Frederick, *Knights of the Golden Rule: The Intellectual as Christian Social Reformer in the 1890s* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1976), p. 5.

movements as well as exposure to the literature of “social prophets” of the period.<sup>70</sup>

Many progressed from small-scale or single issue reform movements to those with broader agendas as a direct result of their contact with new ideas and collaboration with other reformers.

Gibson developed a passionate belief in the need for broad, fundamental reform and became a Social Gospeler as a result of his experience with limited reform via the temperance movement (and later what he came to view as limited reform within Populism) as well as his exposure to the ideas of certain “social prophets.” His family’s history of community involvement and public leadership, progressive views, emphasis on the importance of education, and personal financial hardships were also central to the development of his ideology and religious views. Although there is no record of Gibson’s initial steps into social reform, many of his later ideas—as well as those of many other Social Gospelers and reformers of the period—can be connected to a body of literature written by social critics of Gilded Age America. Those works most relevant not only to the development of Gibson’s ideology but also to the development of the Social Gospel and Christian socialism include Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty*, Laurence Gronlund’s *The Co-Operative Commonwealth*, and Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*.

All three of these works were infused with middle class values and theologically liberal concepts, and Gronlund and Bellamy advocated a non-Marxist version of socialism. This literature expressed the anxieties of the middle classes even while it inspired them to join the cause of reform. Many prominent nineteenth century

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<sup>70</sup> Frederick, p. 19-20.

intellectual Christian social reformers experienced dramatic “awakenings” upon encountering the messages of George, Gronlund, and Bellamy.<sup>71</sup> Howard Quint argued that Social Gospelers who advocated fundamental reforms owed a greater intellectual debt to social critics like George, Gronlund, and Bellamy than to the oft-cited influences of the Episcopal Church and British Christian socialists.<sup>72</sup>

In *Progress and Poverty*, published in 1879, George aligned himself with the supporters of social Christianity by questioning why industrialization was not eliminating poverty and dismissing the idea that poverty was God’s will.<sup>73</sup> He differed from Gronlund and Bellamy in his assertion that some competition was necessary to society as cooperation would not rid the world of need.<sup>74</sup> He also believed that socialism was dangerous and that simpler reforms such as land taxation could solve the nation’s problems.<sup>75</sup> George’s work was among the first of many to utilize economic theory as a “weapon in the social and political conflicts of a nation in crisis.”<sup>76</sup>

Gronlund’s *The Co-Operative Commonwealth* was published in 1884. It introduced Americans to a much altered, more palatable form of socialism—one free of the emphasis on class conflict.<sup>77</sup> Many Americans were resistant to the idea that the nation even had social classes, let alone that they were destined to oppose one another in

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<sup>71</sup> Frederick, p. 18-19. A few examples include Walter Rauschenbusch, W. D. P. Bliss, Henry Demarest Lloyd, George Herron, and Vida Scudder.

<sup>72</sup> Howard Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement* (1953; repr., New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964), p. 105.

<sup>73</sup> Henry George, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth: The Remedy* (1879; repr., New York: The Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1992), p. 3, 463; Dombrowski, p. 39.

<sup>74</sup> George, p. 316-317.

<sup>75</sup> George, p. 245, 320-321, 413-414, 436, 442, 447-449, 461, 468, 471.

<sup>76</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (1972; repr., New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 793.

<sup>77</sup> Edward K. Spann, *Brotherly Tomorrows: Movements for a Cooperative Society in America, 1820-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 178.

violent conflict.<sup>78</sup> During the 1880s and 1890s, however, Social Gospelers and other reformers examined “softened” forms of socialism, such as that offered by Gronlund, as a potential formula for reform.<sup>79</sup> Although scholars sometimes fail to distinguish between Marxist socialism and the “softened,” non-Marxist socialism of Gronlund and Bellamy,<sup>80</sup> the differences between the two forms were both real and significant for Gibson and other Gilded Age reformers.

Gronlund is credited with appealing to the elitism of the middle classes and intellectuals by presenting socialism as something that was the cause not merely of the destitute and downtrodden, but of those who were educated and morally cultivated.<sup>81</sup> Most wanted no association with the “godless Marxists,” and viewed non-Marxist socialism (termed “Christian socialism” by many adherents) as a means to avoid revolution.<sup>82</sup> Although Gronlund and Bellamy are credited with inspiring an increase in socialism in the U.S. during the last decades of the nineteenth century,<sup>83</sup> their arguments would not have held nearly as much sway were it not for the idealism contained within the “Americanized” version of socialism they presented.<sup>84</sup> Friedrich Engels was even critical of such “utopian” socialism, arguing that it impeded natural social development.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Quint, p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> McGerr, p. 64-65.

<sup>80</sup> Ahlstrom, p. 799-800.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Digby-Junger, “The Gilded Age Journalist as Advocate: Henry Demarest Lloyd and ‘Wealth Against Commonwealth’” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1989), p. 400.

<sup>82</sup> Quint, p. 106-107.

<sup>83</sup> Quint, p. vii.

<sup>84</sup> Spann, p. 228.

<sup>85</sup> Spann, p. 227-228; Fredrick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, trans. Edward Aveling (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1910), p. 58, 74-76 [accessed via Google Books 19 September 2009].



Gronlund is cited as a source of many of Bellamy's ideas, presented within *Looking Backward*.<sup>86</sup> Unlike *The Co-Operative Commonwealth* and *Progress and Poverty*, *Looking Backward* is a novel. Published in 1888, it tells the story of a man named Julian West who falls asleep only to wake up more than one hundred years later to a world without poverty.<sup>87</sup> The society Bellamy describes through West possesses many of the same general characteristics as Gronlund's modified form of socialism. In the novel, cooperation has replaced competition as the guiding principle for human interaction, and the state owns the means of production and distribution.<sup>88</sup> Bellamy's emphasis on ethics and rejection of the use of force appealed to many Americans but were especially soothing to the anxious middle classes who, by the late 1880s, were increasingly aware of the growing separation between the classes.<sup>89</sup> *Looking Backward* is sometimes granted too much credit for inspiring Social Gospelers and other Gilded Age reformers, but it expressed the tensions middle class Americans saw between capitalists and workers and contributed greatly to the development of the ideology of Gibson and other social reformers of the period.<sup>90</sup>

Writings from Gibson's early career as a reformer demonstrate that he was aware of the works of George, Gronlund, and Bellamy, and his interest in their ideas only increased with time. When the *New Republic's* biographical article of him appeared in December of 1888 Gibson had "been five years a prohibitionist,"<sup>91</sup> but there is little

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<sup>86</sup> Quint, p. 30, 78.

<sup>87</sup> Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888; repr., New York: First Signet Classic Printing, 2000), p. 63.

<sup>88</sup> Bellamy, p. 55-60.

<sup>89</sup> Trachtenberg, p. 79; Quint, p. 77-78.

<sup>90</sup> Spann, p. 182-183; Dombrowski, p. 84.

<sup>91</sup> "Sons of the Sanctum," *New Republic*, December 27, 1888, p. 4.

evidence of his reform activities prior to 1888. The prompt for his initial entry into the temperance movement and the extent of his early participation are unknown, but it is likely that the movement's moral and religious stance on social issues and belief in the efficacy of legislation to solve social problems were large factors in Gibson's attraction to it. The fact that the debate over prohibition dominated Nebraska politics during the 1880s certainly did not hurt either. The reappearance of the Prohibition Party in Nebraska during the 1880s, and the subsequent increase in its attention to the economic and social issues of the day had a significant impact on the evolution of Gibson's reform ideology.

## CHAPTER 2

### EVERY FOE OF THE PEOPLE: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE *NEW REPUBLIC*

This New Republic, the ideal nation, is a dream of our own, also, and we think we have a vision of things to come, of changed conditions, of right enthroned through the gradual enlightenment of the people who make the laws, and the enlightenment must come largely by means of such papers as we intend to publish in this beautiful capital of this grand commonwealth of Nebraska.

—George Howard Gibson

Although the historical record contains only fragmented evidence of his life during the 1880s, the information that is available suggests Gibson struggled to find a way to marry his interest in social justice with his livelihood. His involvement with the temperance movement progressed substantially throughout the decade, with the development of his interest in broad reform paralleling that of the state Prohibition Party. The Prohibition Party first appeared in Nebraska in 1874, following a conference of Nebraska temperance societies in Lincoln on August 10, 1874.<sup>1</sup> Prior to that time the state had only possessed a disjointed collection of temperance societies, including the Independent Order of Good Templars, Red and Blue Ribbon clubs, and the like.<sup>2</sup> After the Prohibition Party was defeated in the election of 1874 it disbanded, and did not return to the Nebraska political scene for another ten years.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1880 and 1890, the influence of the temperance movement in Nebraska grew to such an extent that the issue of prohibition came to dominate state politics,

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, Official Project No. 665-81-3-19, sponsored by the University of Nebraska (Lincoln, March 1940), p. viii.

<sup>2</sup> In 1872 there was a State Temperance Union in Nebraska. The state's Prohibition Party that emerged in 1874 was likely a continuation of this league. See U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, Official Project No. 665-81-3-19, sponsored by the University of Nebraska (Lincoln, March 1940), p. 44-45, 51.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 44-45, 51.

forcing both the Republican and Democratic parties to take a stance.<sup>4</sup> In 1881, the debate had become so heated that the State Legislature attempted to mediate the dispute between the prohibition and anti-prohibition camps by passing the Slocumb High License Law.<sup>5</sup> The law required higher licensing fees for saloon owners, gave city and town council members the option to prohibit the sale of alcohol, made saloon owners responsible for damages directly related to liquor sales, and reduced the level of evidence required to prove the guilt of saloon owners in legal suits for damages.<sup>6</sup> The Slocumb Law was meant to appease temperance groups, but actually ended up fueling the determination of both prohibitionists and anti-prohibitionists. Anti-prohibitionists considered the law unnecessary and restrictive, while temperance organizations tended to view the law either as a step toward prohibition or as a “legal basis [for] crime and vice.”<sup>7</sup>

Until 1884 the Independent Order of Good Templars, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) (established in Nebraska in 1875), and the Red and Blue Ribbon clubs were the main forces keeping the temperance issue alive in the state.<sup>8</sup> They did so by supporting local political candidates who favored prohibition, circulating petitions, and promoting lectures on temperance. The WCTU even brought their president, Frances E. Willard, to Omaha in August of 1883 to speak against high license

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<sup>4</sup> Joe A. Fisher, “The Liquor Question in Nebraska, 1880-1890” (M.A. thesis, Municipal University of Omaha, 1952), microfilm, p. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Fisher, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Fisher, p. 110.

<sup>7</sup> Fisher, p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Fisher, p. 57. From 1885 onward, the Law and Order Leagues in the state (the first of which was formed in Omaha) were also allies of the temperance movement. Although not specifically dedicated to temperance, the Law and Order Leagues helped the cause by pushing for more stringent enforcement of the state’s liquor license laws. See Fisher, p. 57-58.

legislation and for prohibition and female suffrage.<sup>9</sup> The visit from this high profile temperance figure may have had an impact on Gibson—he became a prohibitionist the same year Willard visited Omaha and, throughout his years as a journalist, he often praised Willard for her work on behalf of the temperance movement and women’s suffrage.<sup>10</sup>

In the election of 1884 the Nebraska Prohibition Party returned. Its campaign platform not only called for prohibition, but also recognized the efforts of the WCTU, supported women’s suffrage, called for the public domain to be protected from purchase by corporations and syndicates and reserved for “actual settlers,” maintained that state educational lands should be leased rather than sold, and encouraged all citizens to join in the prohibition effort regardless of “previous party ties.”<sup>11</sup> During this time, Gibson was still living in Rising City, Nebraska. At some point in 1884 he emerged from the “darkness” he had been confined to by his eyes since 1875.<sup>12</sup> This, along with his father’s death in December of 1884,<sup>13</sup> gave Gibson a newfound independence and seems to have spurred him into action. By 1885 he had relocated from Rising City to Summit Township, Nebraska.<sup>14</sup> In 1887 he was living in Omaha and working as an agent for the Western White Bronze Company.<sup>15</sup> The company marketed the metal alloy known as

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<sup>9</sup> Fisher, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup>“Sons of the Sanctum: Nebraska’s Knights of the Leaden Quill,” *New Republic*, December 27, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 111-112.

<sup>12</sup> “Sons of the Sanctum,” *New Republic*, December 27, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Mehitable Calef Copenhagen Wilson, *John Gibson of Cambridge, Massachusetts and His Descendants, 1634-1899* (Washington, D.C.: McGill and Wallace, 1900), p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska State Census of 1885*, Summit Township, Butler, Nebraska, Locality M352\_06, p. 2, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1885 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008].

<sup>15</sup> J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, *Omaha City and Douglas County Directory*, Vol. 13 (Omaha: J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, 1887).

“white bronze” as a less expensive and more durable alternative to stone. It was sold and used primarily as raw material for grave markers and monuments.<sup>16</sup> Gibson continued to work at Western White Bronze throughout at least part of 1888,<sup>17</sup> but some time that year he began editing a temperance paper called the *Rising Tide*, for which he was honored as a “son of the sanctum” in the December 27, 1888 issue of the *New Republic*.

The *Rising Tide* was a monthly publication—most likely a newsletter rather than a newspaper—but it did well enough that in 1889 Gibson was editing the paper full time.<sup>18</sup> That same year he also married a young woman named Isadore “Mary” Swan.<sup>19</sup> In either late 1889 or early 1890, the *Rising Tide* merged with the *Omaha Leader*, another temperance paper. Gibson became both owner and editor of the *Omaha Leader*, which began to be published once per week.<sup>20</sup> By at least early 1890, he was successful and secure enough to bring his stepmother, Abbie N. Gibson, to Omaha to live with him.<sup>21</sup> A measure of his success with these temperance papers can be attributed to the fact that his

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<sup>16</sup> Barbara Rotundo, “Monumental Bronze: A Representative American Company,” in *Cemetaries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture*, ed. R. E. Meyer (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilm Inc. Research Press, 1989), p. 263-91; Samuel Orcutt, *A History of the Old Town of Stratford and the City of Bridgeport, Connecticut* (New Haven, Connecticut: Press of Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1886), p. 2:814.

<sup>17</sup> J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, *Omaha City and Douglas County Directory, Vol. 14* (Omaha: J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, 1888).

<sup>18</sup> J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, *Omaha City and South Omaha City Directory, Vol. 15* (Omaha: J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, 1889).

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, *John Gibson*, p. 132; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*: Edwardsville, Madison, Illinois, Roll T623\_326, p. 8B, Enumeration District 46, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1900 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008]. There is very little information available about Gibson’s wife other than the fact that she and Gibson were married on September 12, 1889, her maiden name was Isadore Swan, she was born sometime in 1855 in Connecticut, her parents were first generation immigrants from Scotland, and she chose to go by the first name “Mary” rather than Isadore.

<sup>20</sup> J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, *Omaha City and South Omaha City Directory, Vol. 15* (Omaha: J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, 1889); J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, *Omaha City and South Omaha City Directory, Vol. 16* (Omaha: J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, 1890).

<sup>21</sup> J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, *Omaha City and South Omaha City Directory, Vol. 16* (Omaha: J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, 1890).

interest in broad reform was progressing at a pace very similar to that of a significant segment of the Nebraska Prohibition Party.

Following the failure to achieve its goals in 1884—and in light of the Democratic Party’s opposition to prohibition and the Republican Party’s and Farmers’ Alliance’s avoidance of the issue—the state Prohibition Party revised its platform for 1885. It called upon all temperance people to unite with the party on behalf of the cause of prohibition, denounced the high license law as a “disgrace to the moral sense of our people by its legalization of a disreputable business,” and reiterated the party’s support for women’s suffrage.<sup>22</sup> From 1886 to 1896, the platforms of the Nebraska Prohibition Party became increasingly broad in scope, and contained many of the same planks as those found in the state platforms of the Farmers’ Alliance, Anti-Monopoly Party, and People’s Party.<sup>23</sup> Given the significant changes taking place at the time, in both American society in general and Nebraska specifically, Gibson and other reformers in the state would have had difficulty restricting their attention to a single social issue. This tension was particularly evident within the Nebraska Prohibition Party from 1886 to 1890, the same years that Gibson’s involvement with the temperance movement peaked.

By the election of 1886 the Republican Party was in favor of submitting a prohibition amendment to the state constitution to allow the people of Nebraska to decide the issue.<sup>24</sup> The Democratic Party, however, denounced prohibition as “dangerous to the liberty of the citizen, and hostile to the welfare of the people” while the State Farmers’

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<sup>22</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 117-118.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. viii.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 127.

Alliance took no stand.<sup>25</sup> The National Union Party (a short-lived attempt at a new third party that likely arose in response to the tremendous labor conflicts that occurred throughout the nation in 1886 and whose goals bore a strong resemblance to many of those later articulated by the People's Party) favored prohibition.<sup>26</sup> On August 19, 1886, the state Prohibition Party held a well-attended convention in Lincoln and extended its platform to cover no less than twenty one points.<sup>27</sup> Not since its initial appearance in Nebraska in 1874 had the party included such a diverse array of issues in its purview.<sup>28</sup>

The Nebraska Prohibition Party Platform of 1886 began with an acknowledgement of God as the “rightful sovereign of all men” (something it had not done the previous year).<sup>29</sup> It advocated prohibition, women's suffrage, rescindment of the statute allowing foreigners to vote in local elections, abolishment of the state's contract convict labor system, pensions for disabled Union Civil War soldiers, direct election of all government officials in the executive and legislative branches, a more “careful and just imposition of taxes,” and public education.<sup>30</sup> It also denounced high license legislation, protested the Democratic and Republican Parties' creation of a state railroad commission, called for “just and equitable” transportation rates on state railroads, legislation for the purpose of settling disputes between capital and labor, greater public

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<sup>25</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 121; 127-128.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 122-123.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 123-125.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 54-56. Its platform in 1884 included eight points and in 1885 included six points, most of which focused primarily upon prohibition. See U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, Official Project No. 665-81-3-19, sponsored by the University of Nebraska (Lincoln, March 1940), p. 111-112, 117-118.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 117-118, 123. The party platform from 1874, however, did contain an explicit acknowledgement of the omnipotence of God. See U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, Official Project No. 665-81-3-19, sponsored by the University of Nebraska (Lincoln, March 1940), p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 124.



vigilance over the power of corporations and individuals, and stated that the government should maintain “complete control” of economic conditions, currency, land ownership, and “all other particulars on which the general diffusion of prosperity may directly or indirectly depend.”<sup>31</sup> The platforms of the other political parties included coverage of many of these same issues, suggesting that the people of the state—at least the most vocal people—were concerned about them. By broadening its platform in an attempt to increase its party’s appeal, the Nebraska Prohibition Party encouraged public debate of a wider range of issues. This was viewed by many, including Gibson, as a step in the right direction, but other prohibitionists saw it as an unwanted and dangerous distraction from the party’s true cause. The subject would be the source of much friction and controversy within the party for the next ten years.

Nonetheless, the broadened platform apparently succeeded in attracting more voters to the Prohibition Party. Although the total number of votes received by the Prohibition Party in the Nebraska elections of 1886 was quite small compared to those received by the Republican and Democratic parties, it did slightly better in 1886 than it had in 1885. In 1887, the Nebraska Prohibition Party continued to advocate more than just prohibition. Although its platform was reduced to twelve points and a few of the planks from the previous year disappeared, those that remained were more specific and direct. The party again acknowledged God as the “rightful sovereign of all men,” denounced high license legislation, called for the repeal of the statute allowing foreigners to vote in local elections before becoming naturalized, supported women’s suffrage and equal rights for all citizens regardless of “sex, race or color,” advocated pensions for

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<sup>31</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 124-125.

disabled Union soldiers, and declared that officers of the executive and legislative branches should be elected rather than appointed.<sup>32</sup>

It also indicted the Republican Party of Nebraska for “defeating the submission of a prohibitory amendment in our last legislature” and condemned the Democratic Party of Nebraska for “disloyalty to the principles of free government” for its refusal to support the same amendment.<sup>33</sup> The Prohibition Party also invited “the working men of Nebraska to join the prohibition party [*sic*] in its crusade against all enemies of honest labor” and called for “government control of railroads and telegraphs.”<sup>34</sup> These latter two points were not addressed in the platforms of either the Republican or Democratic parties in 1887, leaving the Prohibition Party as the only major political representative of the issues in the state.

The election of 1888 demonstrated just how important the liquor question had become in Nebraska.<sup>35</sup> The supporters of temperance were so influential that they could no longer be ignored by the Republican and Democratic parties.<sup>36</sup> The Democratic Party, which had earlier demanded that the Slocumb High License Law be repealed, reversed its position and argued that the Slocumb law was “the best and most practicable solution of the liquor traffic question.”<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, the platform of the Republican Party again announced a willingness to allow the voters of Nebraska to decide the issue.<sup>38</sup> But the increased attention on the question of prohibition also increased pressure and conflict

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 130-131.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 130-131.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 130-131.

<sup>35</sup> Julia Permelia Watson, “The Evolution of the Temperance Movement in Nebraska” (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1925), microfilm, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> Watson, “The Evolution of the Temperance Movement in Nebraska,” p. 38.

<sup>37</sup> Fisher, p. 67; U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 135.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 138-139.

within the Prohibition Party. Some believed the party should focus all of its energies solely on the issue of prohibition, while others (such as Gibson) believed the party should take a stand on all of the pressing social reform issues of the day.

The party presented two platforms in 1888, one in February and another in August. The February platform was nearly identical to the platform from the previous year except it made no reference to government ownership of railroads and telegraphs, called for regulation of “all decent branches of public commerce,” and invited wage laborers to join the party in its fight against the “enemies of honest labor.”<sup>39</sup> The August platform differed in that it extended the party’s support of female suffrage but did not contain the language favoring equal rights for all citizens regardless of race and color that had been present not only in the February 1888 platform, but in the 1887 platform as well.<sup>40</sup> The August platform also reinserted the call for government ownership of railroads and telegraphs, and demanded tariff reform and protection of the civil Sabbath.<sup>41</sup> The presence of two platforms and the differences between them demonstrate that debates regarding party direction and scope were taking place within the Prohibition Party. By the election of 1890, tensions had grown to such an extent that two separate prohibition political factions emerged.

In its twenty-first session the Nebraska State Legislature passed Senate Bill No. 31, adding to the ballot for the election of 1890 an amendment to the state constitution banning the manufacture, sale, and distribution of alcohol.<sup>42</sup> On April 17, 1889 a meeting

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<sup>39</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 136.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 137.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 137.

<sup>42</sup> Fisher, p. 97.

of all the state's prohibitionists was held in Omaha. Plans for the upcoming campaign were discussed, but there was widespread disagreement about whether or not a third party was necessary to the amendment's success. Some did not wish to become mired in politics, and believed the efforts of a "non-partisan temperance league" would be sufficient to get the amendment passed.<sup>43</sup> No consensus was reached, the issue was set aside, and a resolution was passed urging all temperance organizations in the state to do as much as they could to see that the prohibition amendment passed.<sup>44</sup>

In June of 1889, Prohibitionists and likeminded Independents, Republicans, and Democrats met and formed the Nebraska Non-Partisan Prohibition Amendment League in an attempt to appeal to and get the support of as many voters as possible. On August 21, 1889 the Prohibition Party held a convention in Lincoln to devise a platform.<sup>45</sup> Gibson served as the convention's secretary.<sup>46</sup> The resulting platform was once again broad in scope but, like the platforms of 1888, contained evidence of the conflicts present within the Prohibition Party. The party acknowledged the supremacy of God, pledged full support for the pending prohibition amendment, denounced the saloon as the "training school of anarchy," condemned both the Republican and the Democratic parties for "treachery" and "hostility" (respectively) to prohibition efforts, and praised the WCTU.

The planks in support of broad reform included opposition to "all trusts and monopolies," an invitation to the wage-earning laboring classes to join the Prohibition

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<sup>43</sup> Fisher, p. 97.

<sup>44</sup> Fisher, p. 97.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 144.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 144.

Party in its fight against the “greatest and most conscienceless monopoly the world has ever known,” and statements in favor of government control of railroad and telegraph lines, the Australian ballot system, and women’s enfranchisement (although the language advocating equality for all regardless of race and color was again absent).<sup>47</sup> The party also stated that it believed it both wise and necessary to keep “all our work separate from all combinations and free from all compromises,” yet asserted that a political party was essential “as a platform of principles can only become practical through a party pledged to their enforcement.”<sup>48</sup> Although both the Prohibition Party and Gibson appear to have embraced the need for broad reform by 1889, debates regarding the need for a prohibition political party continued.

In the time leading up to the election of 1890, prohibition forces worked tirelessly to promote the prohibition amendment. Meetings, lectures, and debates on the issue were held throughout the state.<sup>49</sup> Temperance figures such as Francis Murphy and Helen Gouger spoke in Omaha, and churches increased their prohibition activities.<sup>50</sup> Opposition to prohibition was stronger in Nebraska’s cities than in its rural areas.<sup>51</sup> (Residents of rural areas were increasingly interested in the success of the newly emergent People’s Independent Party, which entered Nebraska politics for the first time in the election of 1890.<sup>52</sup> This new party focused upon the concerns of farmers and viewed the liquor question as a distraction from its primary its goals—its platform

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<sup>47</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 143-144.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 144.

<sup>49</sup> Fisher, p. 99-100.

<sup>50</sup> Fisher, p. 100; Watson, p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> Watson, p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> Watson, p. 39; U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 147.

completely avoided the issue of prohibition.)<sup>53</sup> Opposition to prohibition was particularly strong in Omaha due to the presence of a large number of breweries and the millions of dollars of capital invested in them.<sup>54</sup> Gibson, as editor of the *Omaha Leader* by late 1889 or early 1890, would have faced virulent attacks from Omaha's anti-prohibitionist papers.<sup>55</sup> Yet there is no evidence of Gibson's views until after the defeat of the prohibition amendment.

In preparation for the election of 1890 the Prohibition Party again held two conventions: one in February and another in August.<sup>56</sup> Gibson did not serve as an officer at either convention. At the February 19, 1890 meeting the party presented not only a platform, but a "plan of organization" as well. The plan of organization addressed logistical issues such as fundraising, campaign strategies, and utilization of the press to communicate the party's principles to the electorate.<sup>57</sup> The platform essentially consisted of a series of general statements regarding the need for prohibition, the impracticality of high license legislation, and the party's eagerness to work with all people and

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<sup>53</sup> John D. Barnhart, "The History of the Farmers' Alliance and of the People's Party in Nebraska," (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1930), microfilm, p. 234; U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 149-150. The Republican, Anti-Monopoly, and Union Labor parties and the State Farmers' Alliance also all chose to omit any mention of either prohibition or high license legislation from their 1890 platforms. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, denounced the Republican Party for its "hypocrisy" with regard to the liquor question and declared support for high license legislation. See Barnhart, p. 103; U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, Official Project No. 665-81-3-19, sponsored by the University of Nebraska (Lincoln, March 1940), p. 148-160.

<sup>54</sup> Watson, p. 39.

<sup>55</sup> Although copies of the *Omaha Leader* are not known to have been preserved, evidence from Gibson's brief time as editor of the *New Republic* supports the fact that he faced significant opposition in Omaha and was admired by his fellow temperance journalists for keeping the *Omaha Leader* afloat during the difficult time between the Nebraska State Legislature's decision to put the prohibition amendment on the ballot and the time the amendment was defeated in the election of 1890. See the *New Republic*, October 30, 1890 and December 5, 1890 editions.

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 152-153.

<sup>57</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 150-152.

organizations to achieve prohibition.<sup>58</sup> The platform put forth at the convention on August 27, 1890 was much more specific. It was again a broad platform, containing planks on a variety of social issues of the day, from prohibition and women's suffrage to direct election and government control of corporations.<sup>59</sup> The Non-Partisan Prohibition Amendment League also held a convention, on April 15, 1890, but their platform focused solely on advancing prohibition and denouncing high license legislation.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the efforts of both the Prohibition Party and the Non-Partisan Prohibition Amendment League, the prohibition amendment to Nebraska's state constitution failed (as did the high license amendment that was also on the ballot during the election). Prohibitionists cited fraud, political corruption, violence, and voter confusion as primary reasons for the defeat. They had stated as early as February of 1890 that oppositional forces had worked to fool the electorate into believing that the vote was between prohibition and high license legislation.<sup>61</sup> They also maintained that illegal voting had taken place, that non-citizens were paid for anti-prohibition votes, and that prohibitionists had been assaulted or otherwise intimidated throughout the day of the election.<sup>62</sup> In spite of the amendment's defeat many prohibitionists vowed to continue the fight, believing that the amendment would have passed were it not for the dishonorable tactics employed by their opposition. The large disparity in votes between those in favor and those opposed to the amendment suggests otherwise—it would seem that the Nebraska

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<sup>58</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 151-152.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 152-153.

<sup>60</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 153-155.

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 151.

<sup>62</sup> Watson, p. 43; Fisher, p. 104-105, 106-108; George Howard Gibson, "Is a Contest Desirable," *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2.

prohibitionists overestimated the extent to which the local electorate desired prohibition.<sup>63</sup> And the prohibitionists' enthusiasm did little to help keep temperance papers in business.

Gibson's *Omaha Leader* was just one of many Nebraska temperance papers to fail after the defeat of the prohibition amendment. Although copies of neither the *Rising Tide* nor the *Omaha Leader* are known to have been preserved (probably due to the fact that they were most likely newsletters, with a more limited readership than that of a full-fledged newspaper) evidence of his views during the latter years of his involvement with the temperance movement and the Prohibition Party has been preserved within five issues of the *New Republic*, which Gibson edited from November 20, 1890 to December 19, 1890. The *New Republic* was one of the temperance papers that vowed to redouble its efforts after the prohibition amendment failed.<sup>64</sup> Even prior to Gibson's arrival the paper supported broad reform and did not limit its attention solely to prohibition. It announced its consolidation with the *Omaha Leader* and offered a welcome to Gibson as the new editor-in-chief in its November 20, 1890 edition.

Gibson moved to Lincoln to edit the *New Republic* sometime in late 1890. He was introduced to readers by his associate editor, the Reverend Charles Eugene Bentley. Bentley stated he had had an "intimate acquaintance" with Gibson for the past ten years, and offered the following assurance regarding Gibson's ability to manage the paper: "The paper will be reliably prohibition, true in every respect to our party needs and highest interest, but broad in its consideration of questions that affect society, government, and

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<sup>63</sup> Fisher, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> H. W. Hardy, "Good-Bye Reader," *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2; C. E. Bentley, "The Twain Made One," *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2.



reform.”<sup>65</sup> Bentley was one of many religious men at the time who were becoming increasingly interested not only in the spiritual and theological implications of social questions, but also in how the political system could be utilized to achieve social change for religious benefit. Like Gibson, Bentley’s participation in politics increased in tandem with his interest in broad reform. He was also similar to Gibson in that he came from a well-established New England family, grew up on a farm, was ardently religious, and was devoted to the lifelong pursuit of knowledge.<sup>66</sup>

Bentley was born in Warners, New York in 1841, but moved to Clinton, Iowa in 1866.<sup>67</sup> In 1878 he moved to the same county in Nebraska as the Gibson family and remained there for nearly thirteen years.<sup>68</sup> In 1880 Bentley helped organize the Baptist Church at Surprise, Nebraska, and remained its presiding pastor for at least two decades.<sup>69</sup> Considering his physical proximity to the Gibson family and the fact that he had known Gibson since 1880, it is very likely that Bentley was not only familiar with the entire Gibson family but was also the family’s minister. One of Bentley’s biographers stated the following regarding Bentley’s religious attitudes and ministerial style:

The doors of his church have always been opened for every righteous reform. His plain uncompromising declarations of truth as he preaches political righteousness and denounces parties that have made a “Covenant with Death,” are in refreshing

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<sup>65</sup> C. E. Bentley, “The Twain Made One,” *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Lawrence F. Prescott, *1896: The Great Campaign, or, Political Struggles of Parties, Leaders, and Issues* (Loyal Publishing Co. Publishers, 1896), p. 249-251 [accessed via Google Books 20 November 2009].

<sup>67</sup> Prescott, *1896: The Great Campaign*, p. 249-251; James Penny Boyd, *Parties, Problems and Leaders of 1896: An Impartial Presentation of Living National Questions* (James Penny Boyd, Publishers’ Union, 1896), p. 590, 593 [accessed via Google Books 20 November 2009].

<sup>68</sup> Prescott, p. 251; Boyd, p. 593; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska State Census of 1885*, Summit Township, Butler, Nebraska, Locality M352\_06, p. 2, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1885 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008].

<sup>69</sup> Prescott, p. 255; Boyd, p. 594.

contrast to the timid time-serving utterances of the average license party preacher.<sup>70</sup>

Even this limited insight into Bentley's faith demonstrates that he shared the Social Gospelers' belief in the connections between the social and political realms, and the similarities in Bentley's and Gibson's backgrounds as well as the parallel trajectory of their reform interests and rhetoric suggest that Bentley was one of Gibson's first spiritual and intellectual mentors.

Bentley was quite the man to emulate—he was a prestigious advocate of broad reform during the late nineteenth century. In 1884 he split from the Republican Party to join the Prohibition Party.<sup>71</sup> He was the Prohibition Party's temporary chairman that year, permanent chairman in 1888, and chairman again in 1890 and 1892.<sup>72</sup> He was a prominent figure in the wing of the party that believed prohibition alone would not solve society's problems, and that attention should be given to all of the pressing social issues of the day. In 1892 he ran for governor of Nebraska, and in 1896 he ran for president of the United States as the candidate of the National Party (a party he helped form to promote prohibition in addition to “broad gauge” issues such as monetary and land reform, government ownership of railroads and telegraphs, a reduced work day, and

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<sup>70</sup> Prescott, p. 255; Boyd, p. 594. This description of Bentley bears a striking resemblance to one of Gibson's subsequent mentors, the Reverend George Davis Herron. For more on Herron see Chapter Three.

<sup>71</sup> Prescott, p. 252; Boyd, p. 593. 1884 was the year that the Prohibition Party reappeared on the Nebraska political scene following an absence for 10 years.

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, p. 112, 136, 152, 177, 238, 243. In 1898 Bentley was chairman of the Liberty Party, a broad reform party that was the successor of the National Party. Both parties were composed primarily of Prohibitionists who had broken away from the Prohibition Party in order to promote multiple reform issues. See U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, Official Project No. 665-81-3-19, sponsored by the University of Nebraska (Lincoln, March 1940), p. 206, 220, 243.

more).<sup>73</sup> Interaction and collaboration with other reformers, including Bentley, was vital to the development of Gibson's ideology as a Social Gospeler. If Bentley was an early mentor of Gibson's it would partially explain why Gibson began his reform career with the temperance movement, and why he became progressively more interested in a wide range of social reform issues.

The evolution of Gibson's religious and social views can be traced through the writings he left behind as a prohibitionist, Populist, and Social Gospeler. Gibson made it immediately clear to the *New Republic* readers that he would continue to work toward the same objectives and promote the same principles as he had when he was editor of the *Omaha Leader*.<sup>74</sup> He emphasized, for the sake of those unfamiliar with his views, the purpose of the paper:

The New Republic is the state organ of the prohibition party [*sic*] and the only state paper that will fight every foe of the people. That is its business. It has no one class simply to work for, but demands justice for all workers. It declares for the equal birthrights and equal liberty and protection of all. With intense hatred of oppression it will expose and attack injustice wherever it is found.<sup>75</sup>

Like Bentley, Gibson believed that a variety of social problems needed to be addressed in order for social justice to be established. He asserted that the national government should control the volume of monetary circulation, loan money at low rates, own all "natural" monopolies (such as railroads, mines, and telegraphs), and buy and give "local"

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<sup>73</sup> Prescott, p. 253-254; Boyd, p. 593.

<sup>74</sup> George Howard Gibson, "Our Salutation," *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Gibson, "Our Salutation," *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2. Another local prohibition paper, the *Looking Glass*, later used this statement to accuse Gibson of thinking himself superior. See George Howard Gibson, "Not Our Intention," *New Republic*, December 12, 1890, p. 2.

monopolies (such as city lighting, water supply, street railways, and the like) to local governments.<sup>76</sup> But he was also quick to stress the centrality of the liquor question.

In 1890 Gibson, like other temperance supporters of the period, believed that the “rum traffic vote” or the “whisky vote” was a tool used by all monopolies to bolster their power.<sup>77</sup> He saw it as the source of “all forms of evil,” and argued that “no party can secure general reforms without fighting it.”<sup>78</sup> So although he was in favor of a wide range of reforms, in 1890 Gibson agreed with the Prohibition Party’s affirmation (articulated throughout each of its platforms) that the liquor question was of paramount concern. But he also hinted that he saw the need for a party that would “bring together all producers to organize against non-producers and oppressors.”<sup>79</sup> This party would unite “on an anti-monopoly, anti-saloon, equal rights platform,” and Gibson believed a call would be issued in the spring or summer of 1892 for a convention to discuss its establishment.<sup>80</sup> This prediction of the People’s Party convention of July 4, 1892 demonstrates that Gibson was a man very much in tune with the political climate of the time. As his career as a reformer progressed, he would come to focus much less upon the liquor question and more upon the need to eliminate all monopolies and create a social and political system that was rooted in the Social Gospel concept of Christian brotherhood and the kingdom of God.

In the first issue of the *New Republic* Gibson edited, he discussed his interpretation of the significance of the paper’s name and the role of the press in

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<sup>76</sup> Gibson, “Our Salutation,” *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Gibson, “Our Salutation,” *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2

<sup>78</sup> Gibson, “Our Salutation,” *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2

<sup>79</sup> Gibson, “Our Salutation,” *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2

<sup>80</sup> Gibson, “Our Salutation,” *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2

achieving reform. The idea of utopia, which later became central to the Social Gospelers' concept of the kingdom of God, featured prominently in his ideas for the future of the country. Gibson expressed affection for the name of the paper, stating that he saw "breadth, inspiration and promises in it."<sup>81</sup> He associated the name "new republic" with the ultimate goal of his reform efforts:

This New Republic, the ideal nation, is a dream of our own, also, and we think we have a vision of things to come, of changed conditions, of right enthroned through the gradual enlightenment of the people who make the laws, and the enlightenment must come largely by means of such papers as we intend to publish....<sup>82</sup>

Although he believed the nation had serious problems and envisioned a new, "ideal" republic, like most reformers of the time Gibson did not attempt to challenge the principles America was founded upon.<sup>83</sup> He instead sought to use those principles and the American polity to bring about social justice.

Gibson believed that the U.S. possessed a "model government in theory," one that was fully capable of establishing justice, but did not believe that reform and progress were possible "until the oppressed people reason and inform themselves."<sup>84</sup> Only once the people were "enlightened" could they create and pass laws that would make society

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<sup>81</sup> George Howard Gibson, "A New Republic," *New Republic*, November 20, 1892, p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Gibson, "A New Republic," *New Republic*, November 20, 1892, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> As Michael Kazin has asserted in *The Populist Persuasion*, Americans view the systems of their society through the lens of the American Revolution and the documents that laid the foundation for the new nation. Since the American Revolution has already occurred, the values regarding what it means to be American have already been cast, and "advocating a new type of polity and a new constitution seems unnecessary, dangerous, close to treason." Therefore the reform that takes place in America typically takes place within the framework of established ideas regarding what it means to be American. Reformers such as Gibson did not challenge these ideas, but rather argued that various corrupting forces were diverting America from its ideal path. See Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (1994; repr., New York: BasicBooks, 1995), p. 12-13.

<sup>84</sup> Gibson, "A New Republic," *New Republic*, November 20, 1892, p. 2.

more just.<sup>85</sup> Gibson was not alone in this belief—many of the leaders and participants in nineteenth century reform movements believed that education of the populace was crucial to social change and that if the people simply informed themselves they would be able to see the reforms that were necessary.<sup>86</sup> In Gibson’s mind, the *New Republic* (and the reform press in general) were vital tools in the effort to reform the nation.

Gibson’s editorials during his brief time with the *New Republic* illustrate his growing attraction not only to broad reform, but also to the social solutions proposed by fellow Social Gospelers, cooperative communities, and the Farmers’ Alliance. It is clear that he was following the writings of other Social Gospelers by at least late 1890.

Throughout the issues of the *New Republic* he edited, Gibson repeatedly referenced and advertised *The Dawn*, the official organ of the Society of Christian Socialists.<sup>87</sup> *The Dawn* was edited by the Reverend William Dwight Porter Bliss, a well-known figure in the history of both Christian socialism and the Social Gospel movement.<sup>88</sup> Among *The Dawn*’s associate editors were Francis Willard and Edward Bellamy, and Washington

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<sup>85</sup> Gibson, “A New Republic,” *New Republic*, November 20, 1892, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Of course, implicit in this belief was the idea that the public was incapable of understanding the causes of social problems without the guidance and leadership of a “responsible elite,” and that only after it had become properly “enlightened” could the public recognize the “appropriate” remedies to society’s ills. See Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 163-164 for a discussion of the presence of this belief in the Progressive movement.

<sup>87</sup> Advertisement for *The Dawn*, *New Republic*, November 20, 1892, p. 4, December 5, 1890, p. 2. Gibson referred to *The Dawn* as “a teacher of pure primitive Christianity.” See George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *Wealth Makers*, October 18, 1894, p. 4. His interest in *The Dawn* continued until the paper was discontinued in March of 1896. See Chapters Three and Four.

<sup>88</sup> W.D.P. Bliss was an Episcopal priest and the founder of the American chapter of the Society of Christian Socialists, which was established in 1889. He was heavily influenced by British Christian Socialists, and best known for editing *The Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (1897, revised 1909). For more on Bliss’s contributions to the Social Gospel movement, see Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), p. 26-30, 129, 168-171. For a summary of Bliss’s religious and social beliefs, see Richard B. Dressner, “William Dwight Porter Bliss’s Christian Socialism,” *Church History*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (March 1978): p. 66-82 [accessed via JSTOR 20 February 2008].

Gladden (one of the primary leaders of the Social Gospel movement) occasionally contributed articles.<sup>89</sup> Even if *The Dawn* was the only social Christianity publication Gibson was reading at the time (which is unlikely), he would have been exposed to a wide variety of theologically liberal ideas and Social Gospellers via *The Dawn*. In at least one of his editorials while with the *New Republic*, Gibson analyzed and agreed with the arguments of several Social Gospellers, including Gladden.<sup>90</sup>

Gibson's affinity for the ideas of Edward Bellamy was also obvious as early as 1890, just two years after the publication of Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward*. In the November 28, 1890 edition of the *New Republic*, Gibson noted that Bellamy was planning to start a newspaper to promote Nationalism, the political movement inspired by Bellamy's softened form of socialism as presented in *Looking Backward*.<sup>91</sup> Later, Gibson also reported that a "Bellamy scheme" was to be started in Omaha by J.H. Van Dorn.<sup>92</sup> Like many Americans at the time, Gibson was intrigued by the potential of cooperatives to solve social problems. Beginning in the 1880s, America experienced an increase in communal activity to an extent not seen since before the Civil War.<sup>93</sup> This wave of communalism is attributed not only to the economic and social instabilities of the times, but also to the appearance of a great deal of indigenous utopian literature authored by the

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<sup>89</sup> Washington Gladden, "The Eight-Hour Problem," *The Dawn*, July-August 1890, p. 137-147 [accessed via The Internet Archive <<http://www.archive.org/details/TheDawn.VolIi1-Vol.Ii7Nov.1890>> 30 December 2009].

<sup>90</sup> George Howard Gibson, "An Interesting Symposium," *New Republic*, December 12, 1890, p. 2. The other ideas Gibson analyzed in this editorial include those put forth by Professor Merrill E. Gates of Amherst College, Reverend Joseph Cook, John Habberton, and Professor H.B. Adams of Hopkins University. Gibson also quoted the Reverend Thomas Dixon, Jr. at length, and often included summaries of religious sermons in the editions of the paper he edited. See Rev. Thomas Dixon, Jr., "The Moral Import of the Farmers' Alliance," *New Republic*, December 12, 1890, p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *New Republic*, November 28, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *New Republic*, December 19, 1890, p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Robert S. Fogarty, *All Things New: American Communes and Utopian Movements, 1860-1914* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 1-3.

likes of Bellamy, Henry George, and Laurence Gronlund.<sup>94</sup> From the 1880s through the first few years of the twentieth century, many reform-minded Americans hoped and worked for the establishment of a national cooperative society.<sup>95</sup>

At least as early as his time with the *New Republic*, Gibson was considering the practical religious and social applications of cooperative communities. His curiosity was growing at a time when the Social Gospel movement was building momentum and during the same period when American communal activity peaked. In a discussion of cooperatives, Gibson asked:

Would not society organically constituted on a co-operative plan, assigning labor and justly dividing products, be better than the present individual war and scramble which results in the luxurious ease of a few at the top, uncertain positions with anxious care between, and the sinking, hopeless, desperate classes at the bottom?<sup>96</sup>

The influence of Bellamy can be seen in this characterization of the struggle against poverty and oppression.<sup>97</sup> Gibson expressed anxiety about these degrading social conditions as well as the declining position of the Church. He wondered how Christianity could be expected to thrive when people were forced to breathe the “atmosphere of hell” and live in a society where “the instinct of self-preservation makes each to struggle with, prey upon or work against his brother.”<sup>98</sup> He was one of many people during the period to assert that the social environment was directly related to

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<sup>94</sup> Fogarty, p. 9; Yaacov Oved, *Two Hundred Years of American Communes* (1988; repr., New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1993), p. 6, 12; Edward K. Spann, *Brotherly Tomorrows: Movements for a Cooperative Society in America, 1820-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 177, 226.

<sup>95</sup> Spann, p. 177.

<sup>96</sup> George Howard, Gibson, “The Co-Operative Specific,” *New Republic*, November 28, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> See Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888; repr., New York: First Signet Classic Printing, 2000), p. 6-9.

<sup>98</sup> Gibson, “The Co-Operative Specific,” *New Republic*, November 28, 1890, p. 2.



spiritual salvation. (In fact, this idea was one of the central themes of the Social Gospel.) Gibson not only believed that cooperatives might be a way for the nation to improve the lives of its citizens by preventing poverty and oppressive class competition; he also thought that cooperative communities might enable the Church to lead the way in social reform and assert its relevancy in American society.<sup>99</sup> If the Church did not act, Gibson argued, it would “slowly but surely lose its life and power.”<sup>100</sup>

Gibson was also becoming increasingly interested in the work of the Farmers’ Alliance. The first Nebraska chapters of the National Farmers’ Alliance were established in April of 1880.<sup>101</sup> They began to enjoy great success in the late 1880s due to insufficient rainfall and widespread drought, crop failures, increased indebtedness (particularly among farmers), the collapse of the real estate boom, and sharply rising railroad freight rates.<sup>102</sup> As a result of these problems and the organizational efforts of the Farmers’ Alliance, the dominant issue in state politics shifted from the liquor question to economic questions—particularly as they pertained to the unique situation of farmers.<sup>103</sup> The Farmers’ Alliance, like Gibson, emphasized the importance of popular education. In 1889 it established its own Bureau of Education, which held discussion and debate meetings, promoted Alliance speakers, started a circulating library, published a monthly manual recommending courses of study, and reached out to the reform press to

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<sup>99</sup> Gibson, “The Co-Operative Specific,” *New Republic*, November 28, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>100</sup> Gibson, “The Co-Operative Specific,” *New Republic*, November 28, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> Barnhart, p. 13, 22-24.

<sup>102</sup> Barnhart, p. 13, 22-24; John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party*. (1931; repr., Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 20-35; McMath, p. 100-101. Improvements in Nebraska farmers’ economic situations during 1882 and 1883, and the relative stability of railroad rates during the early 1880s, had caused interest in the Alliance to wane for several years.

<sup>103</sup> Robert W. Cherny, *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), p. 161-162.

promote certain literature it considered helpful to the Alliance cause.<sup>104</sup> Alliance membership peaked in 1890 due to the organization's success in combating dramatic increases in the prices of jute bagging and binder twine.<sup>105</sup>

Gibson devoted significant attention to the Farmers' Alliance during his time with the *New Republic*. In his salutation to readers he announced that he was in "full sympathy with the farmers," but was still (at that time) committed to the idea that the saloon powers were the source of all social evil.<sup>106</sup> He included the *Farmers' Alliance* newspaper in his "clubbing list," which offered readers special rates of the *New Republic* if they purchased it along with a subscription to another paper.<sup>107</sup> He even added an "Alliance Department" to the *New Republic*.<sup>108</sup> Gibson was beginning to question whether or not prohibition alone could lead to social justice, and was looking at the Farmers' Alliance as an organization that would possibly address all the reforms he believed were necessary. In a time before the Social Gospelers were even aware of being part of a larger movement, Gibson was looking to the Farmers' Alliance for moral answers to economic and social problems.<sup>109</sup> In its critique of certain aspects of American society and in its rhetoric of producerism, brotherhood, and Christianity, Gibson and others saw in the Farmers' Alliance a potential means to remake society—to

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<sup>104</sup> Barnhart, p. 135-136. Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* was among those books the Alliance regularly recommended.

<sup>105</sup> Robert C. McMath, Jr. *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (1992; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 95-97.

<sup>106</sup> Gibson, "Our Salutation," *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>107</sup> Clubbing List, *New Republic*, November 20 and 28, 1890; December 5, 12, and 19, 1890, p. 2. From June 12, 1889 to December 7, 1890, the official organ of the Farmers' Alliance was simply entitled *Alliance*. Beginning December 14, 1890, the paper's name was changed to the *Farmers' Alliance*.

<sup>108</sup> See Alliance Department, *New Republic*, December 5 and 12, 1890, p. 4; December 19, 1890, p. 3.

<sup>109</sup> "Alliance Education: The Organization Must be Sustained in This Part of its Work," from the *National Economist*, reprinted in *New Republic*, December 12, 1890, p. 4; Rev. Thomas Dixon, Jr., "The Moral Import of the Farmers' Alliance," *New Republic*, December 12, 1890, p. 4.

reorganize it and replace the principle of competition with cooperation. It was not until several years later that Gibson discovered for himself that although the Alliance (and later the People's Party) was critical of what it viewed as an unbalanced and unfair system of economic distribution, it was ultimately not as critical of capitalism and individualism as he would have hoped.

As Bentley and the National Party demonstrated, Gibson was not the only member of the temperance movement to believe that more than just prohibition was needed to reform the nation. And Gibson believed it was only a matter of time before all temperance supporters came to see broad reform as a necessity. In his mind, the spirit of reform was building and would eventually culminate in a national moral revolution.<sup>110</sup> In the third issue of the *New Republic* that Gibson edited, he began to more explicitly advocate some of the same principles as the Farmers' Alliance. Although his arguments still referenced the importance of the liquor question, they were much less focused upon it. He also began to utilize populist rhetoric, framing his arguments in terms of "producers" and "non-producers,"<sup>111</sup> and speaking of the need for an "industrial alliance," a "brotherhood of workers."<sup>112</sup> He praised the farmers for their ability to organize and unite, and called for an industrial alliance within the cities and villages. He proposed that such an alliance be started in Lincoln:

Let these industrial alliances be formed in every part of the city and multiplied in every city and village of this state and all the other states. Let it be made a brotherhood of workers who meet together to discuss common interests, to perfect each other's knowledge of facts which vitally concern their welfare and discover

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<sup>110</sup> George Howard Gibson, "All Coming Together," from the *Progressive Age*, reprinted in *New Republic*, December 5, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>111</sup> George Howard Gibson, "How Do You Get Your Living?," *New Republic*, December 5, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> George Howard Gibson, "A Great Industrial Alliance," *New Republic*, December 5, 1890, p. 2.

what legislation they should demand and secure. By the industrial wealth-producing classes combining, finding out what is for the common good and taking united action with the ballot, wrongs can be quickly righted, shirkers driven into the ranks of the producers, the principal wastes checked, and poverty and anxiety almost entirely removed.<sup>113</sup>

In the next edition of the paper, Gibson even invited those interested in his proposition to his office at 128 Burr Block on a Saturday evening to “discuss needs, decide upon a declaration of objects and form the constitution of an Industrial Army or Alliance.”<sup>114</sup> He also predicted the rise of a national industrial party of “wealth-producers” that would be composed of independents of all kinds, and have a platform “as broad as justice.”<sup>115</sup> And he offered his readers some very bold advice:

The New Republic has this one word to the prohibition party [*sic*] workers: Get in the right line of the industrial movement. Join the Farmers’ Alliance, and do something to broaden them out. Organize no more prohibition clubs (distinctively and simply for prohibition), but form in every village and city industrial alliances to discuss other questions in connection with the saloon question. Broaden out at once and stand in the channel through which must flow the on-coming tide of a great industrial movement to change the laws. It is in sight and our leading minds must think quickly and act wisely.<sup>116</sup>

Not unsurprisingly, these declarations did not sit well with Gibson’s fellow temperance supporters.

Gibson’s enthusiastic attention to the Farmers’ Alliance and to issues many did not see as being related to prohibition apparently angered his readers. In the next issue of the *New Republic* he apologized for and even backed away from his statements. He admitted that he was in the habit of expressing his own ideas, but stated that readers must

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<sup>113</sup> Gibson, “A Great Industrial Alliance,” *New Republic*, December 5, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *New Republic*, December 12, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> George Howard Gibson, “The Industrial Party,” *New Republic*, December 12, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> Gibson, “The Industrial Party,” *New Republic*, December 12, 1890, p. 2.

have misinterpreted what he said as he had “reasoned from a prohibition party standpoint.”<sup>117</sup> Yet then he contradicted himself, stating:

We proposed the broad prohibition work which seemed to us necessary to success. We did not advocate leaving our party, or joining and working for other political bodies. We still think what we proposed the wise and necessary thing to do. But if we did not convince others that we are right we shall not insist upon the expression of ideas that will be displeasing to the main body of prohibitionists. The *New Republic* is, and should be and will be, the organ and mouthpiece of the Nebraska prohibition party [*sic*].<sup>118</sup>

On the same page, Gibson attempted to extend an olive branch to his fellow prohibitionists by writing an editorial criticizing the Farmers’ Alliance—the “people’s party”—for its reticence to address the “saloon question” (i.e. the liquor question).<sup>119</sup> He asserted that if the Alliance remained silent on the question, it would be taken as evidence of the organization’s corruption by saloon powers.<sup>120</sup>

It is clear that Gibson was shaken by the opposition to his ideas that he encountered from fellow prohibitionists. Since he was already seriously considering the merits of the Farmers’ Alliance and believed the organization was superior to the Prohibition Party in scope, organization, and potential, the negative reaction to his ideas may have been enough to convince Gibson that it was time to move on from the Prohibition Party. In the next edition of the *New Republic*, G.M. Plumb had replaced Gibson as editor and his criticism of Gibson was obvious. While discussing the importance of the New Year, Plumb emphasized that the paper had “risen above the plan

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<sup>117</sup> George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *New Republic*, December 19, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Gibson, Untitled, *New Republic*, December 19, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>119</sup> George Howard Gibson, “The Law of Political Association,” *New Republic*, December 19, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> Gibson, “The Law of Political Association,” *New Republic*, December 19, 1890, p. 2.

of selfish political preferment.”<sup>121</sup> He declared that the Prohibition Party would not follow the “Independent mermaid...to the bottom of the sea,” and would rather die than “abandon” its principles.<sup>122</sup> Plumb encouraged the “Prohibition Alliance men” to “give us a place at your fireside,” but declared that the *New Republic* needed to and would be self-sufficient and would not permit any “foolishness” to permeate its ranks.<sup>123</sup> Although the Alliance was praised in this edition, readers were also warned to wait and see what the Alliance demanded before joining the cause.<sup>124</sup>

In spite of this criticism, the *New Republic* maintained that Gibson had left the paper strictly for business reasons, and wished him “unlimited success and prosperity in a field of great usefulness.”<sup>125</sup> It may not be possible to know whether or not Gibson volunteered to leave the paper or was ousted, but given his passion for reform and his growing enthusiasm for the Farmers’ Alliance, it is unlikely that he was disheartened by the change in his situation. The available evidence suggests that he took full advantage of the opportunity to explore his alternatives. In fact, failure to achieve the changes he desired via prohibition encouraged him to continue to experiment with new ideas and new reform strategies. Although he continued to experience failure, all of Gibson’s experiences as a social reformer contributed to the development of his identity as a Social Gospeler.

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<sup>121</sup> G.M. Plumb, “Happy New Year,” *New Republic*, January 1, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>122</sup> Plumb, “Happy New Year,” *New Republic*, January 1, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>123</sup> Plumb, “Happy New Year,” *New Republic*, January 1, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>124</sup> “Wherein Lies Its Strength,” *New Republic*, January 1, 1891, p. 3; Untitled, *New Republic*, January 1, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>125</sup> Untitled, *New Republic*, January 1, 1891, p. 1.

### CHAPTER 3

#### A PARTY OF HEROES: SOCIAL SALVATION AND THE PEOPLE'S PARTY

No friends, rich men are not fond of moral revolutions with an economic complexion, for there is a possibility that they may disturb the long reign of financial usages and commercial customs, which these men of large estate find most comfortable.

—*Alliance Rural*, 1890

In the years immediately following his time with the *New Republic*, Gibson worked to find a place for himself within an organization or movement that possessed the vision and drive he believed were necessary to rid the nation of a wide range of economic and social injustices. He continued to live in Lincoln throughout 1891 and 1892, working as an ad solicitor for the *Farmers' Alliance* (the state's official Farmers' Alliance newspaper) in 1891 and serving as the paper's temporary editor-in-chief for several months in early 1892.<sup>1</sup> During 1892 Gibson also wrote and edited a collection of poems and songs on the subject of working-class labor. These were published not only as a sheet music series called "Songs of the People,"<sup>2</sup> but also in the song book *Armageddon: The Songs of the World's Workers Who Go Forth to Battle with the Kings, and Captains and Mighty Men* (which was published out of Lincoln in 1894).<sup>3</sup> Copies of neither are

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Edgerton, "Announcement," *Alliance-Independent*, October 5, 1893, p. 4. Although Gibson and his stepmother lived in Lincoln in 1891, they also appear in the Omaha city directory for that year. This is likely due to the fact that they relocated to Lincoln so late in 1890. See J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, *Omaha City and South Omaha City Directory, Vol. 17* (Omaha: J. M. Wolfe & Co. Publishers, 1891).

<sup>2</sup> Edgerton, "Announcement," *Alliance-Independent*, October 5, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> George Howard Gibson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, December 19, 1894, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI; Cary Nelson, *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 295.

known to have been preserved, most likely due to the fact that they were small-scale publications.<sup>4</sup>

In January of 1893 Gibson wrote to Henry Demarest Lloyd requesting his support and participation in a “magazine enterprise” Gibson was attempting to undertake with the publisher Charles H. Kerr.<sup>5</sup> Gibson wished to have Lloyd’s name connected with the magazine because he felt that his own “comparatively unknown” name was unlikely to “command the confidence and cooperation of those who have needed capital.”<sup>6</sup> He offered to “do double work on half pay,” and assured Lloyd that it would be work he would “not be ashamed of.”<sup>7</sup> Lloyd turned Gibson down, apparently uncomfortable with the venture and with Kerr’s reputation. Gibson then apologized for requesting Lloyd’s aid and expressed some of his own concerns about Kerr’s reputation and ability to publish “an economic review and people’s [sic] magazine.” Gibson admitted that although he had read Lloyd’s works and was therefore sure of Lloyd’s “moral qualifications,” Lloyd had no such means of knowing him.<sup>8</sup> He announced his plans to

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<sup>4</sup> However, some of Gibson’s poems have been preserved within issues of the *Alliance-Independent* and the *Wealth Makers*. In 1909 Gibson also published a collection of poetry. See George Howard Gibson, *The People’s Hour: And Other Themes* (Chicago: The Englewood Publishing House, 1909).

<sup>5</sup> George Howard Gibson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 16, 1893, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI. The Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company was (and still is) based in Chicago. During the late nineteenth century, it was particularly well known for publishing labor and socialist works.

<sup>6</sup> George Howard Gibson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 16, 1893, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

<sup>7</sup> George Howard Gibson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 16, 1893, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

<sup>8</sup> George Howard Gibson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, February 11, 1893, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.



move to Chicago the following month and his hope to take advantage of Lloyd's former invitation to visit and "cultivate acquaintance and friendship."<sup>9</sup>

By this time Gibson seemed confident that writing was a calling of sorts, a way for him to translate his passion for social justice into a career, assume a position of leadership in debates regarding social questions, and educate the populace on the need for reform. From March or April of 1893 to October of 1893 Gibson lived and worked in Chicago as a freelance writer.<sup>10</sup> In October he was presented with the opportunity to enter the ranks of the nascent People's Party when the position of editor at Nebraska's official Populist newspaper became open. In April of 1892 the *Farmers' Alliance* changed its name to the *Alliance-Independent*, and on October 5, 1893 Gibson became the paper's editor.<sup>11</sup> His advocacy for broad reform and the Farmers' Alliance in his earlier editorial work for the *Rising Tide*, *Omaha Leader*, and the *New Republic* appears to have endeared him to some within the People's Party.

Gibson was introduced to the *Alliance-Independent's* readers as a man who "belongs to no faction, but has sought only for the past five years to promulgate the principles of the people's movement."<sup>12</sup> Yet in his "Salutatory" to readers Gibson chose to emphasize his belief in God and faith in the brotherhood of man rather than his

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<sup>9</sup> George Howard Gibson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 16, 1893, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

<sup>10</sup> George Howard Gibson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 16, 1893, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI; George Howard Gibson to Caro Lloyd Withington, September 17, 1906, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI; J. A. Edgerton, "Announcement," *Alliance-Independent*, October 5, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> On March 15, 1894 Gibson changed the paper's name from the *Alliance-Independent* to the *Wealth Makers*. See George Howard Gibson, "Concerning Our New Name," *Wealth Makers*, March 15, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> J. A. Edgerton, "Announcement," *Alliance-Independent*, October 5, 1893, p. 4; Gibson began editing the *Rising Tide* in 1888.

commitment to the principles of the People's Party. He stated that the "one thing I would do [is] spread the truth, moral, economic and political, the truth which shall make men free."<sup>13</sup> He did not ignore the principles of the People's Party, but rather addressed them in a general fashion and situated them within what he believed was their proper religious and social context. He stated that all of "God's priceless, abundant gifts" belonged to one individual as much as to another. Therefore monopolies of any kind were the "parent evil," the source of all of the world's miseries.<sup>14</sup> Although it is not readily apparent from this "Salutory," the Omaha Platform of 1892 was the source of Gibson's attraction to and belief in the People's Party.<sup>15</sup> He referred to it constantly throughout his time as editor, particularly when responding to criticism that his ideas were "socialistic" rather than truly Populist.

The wide range of reforms contained within the Omaha Platform convinced Gibson that the People's Party was the only political party in the nation with the vision and principles needed to remake society on the basis of cooperation rather than competition. He ardently believed that this was the party's goal: to make society less individualistic and more communal in nature, although many Populists at the time disagreed with him (as have many historians since). After experiencing such a negative reaction to his attempts to broaden the scope of the Nebraska Prohibition Party, Gibson was very enthusiastic about the potential of the People's Party. Not far into his new editorial position, he referred to the prohibitionists as a group that did not "understand

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<sup>13</sup> George Howard Gibson, "Salutory," *Alliance-Independent*, October 5, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Gibson, "Salutory," *Alliance-Independent*, October 5, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> George Howard Gibson, "Why I Am a Populist," *Alliance-Independent*, November 30, 1893, p. 4.

any evil except liquor.”<sup>16</sup> For this reason, he argued, the Prohibition Party was jealous of the People Party’s recognition of the relationship between the distribution of wealth and morality.<sup>17</sup>

Gibson also expressed resentment regarding the treatment he and other “broad gauge” prohibitionists had received, writing:

Three and four years ago a prohibition speaker could not talk and a prohibition editor could not write freely on economic questions, so called, without being criticised [*sic*] and losing caste in the prohibition camp. This is not mere assertion but experience. It is a more respectable, prudent thing to do now, because, thanks to the Populist party [*sic*] anti-monopoly ideas are in the air and pressing upon the attention of all men.<sup>18</sup>

He asserted that before the People’s Party arose it was easy to believe that the Prohibition Party was the only “God-and-morality party” [*sic*], but with the Omaha Platform the “superior moral teaching” of the Populists was revealed.<sup>19</sup> In a later editorial, Gibson was less resentful of the prohibitionists. Although he stated that he was certain that the People’s Party was “where every voter should now be found,” he praised the Prohibition Party for its opposition to land, money, and transportation monopolies and encouraged prohibitionists to unite with the People’s Party on these three questions.<sup>20</sup> Despite the unpleasant manner of his departure from the Prohibition Party, he strongly believed that the Populists could achieve social justice and was anxious to work with any reform group that agreed with the primary tenets of the People’s Party.

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<sup>16</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Our Friends the Prohibitionists,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 25, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Gibson, “Our Friends the Prohibitionists,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 25, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Gibson, “Our Friends the Prohibitionists,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 25, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Gibson, “Our Friends the Prohibitionists,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 25, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Union of Reform Forces,” *Wealth Makers*, July 18, 1895, p. 4.

Gibson's faith in the People's Party was rooted not simply in the reform measures proposed in the Omaha Platform, but in his interpretation of the larger purpose of those reforms. In his mind, the goals of the party were the same as his: to make American society (and eventually the entire world) more just. And he believed a more just world would naturally be a more Christian world. In the planks of the Omaha Platform and the rhetoric of the People's Party, Gibson saw the Social Gospel.<sup>21</sup> He thought the Populists recognized that economic and social problems were inherently political, moral, and religious problems as well.<sup>22</sup> In one editorial he wrote that he saw poverty spreading rapidly throughout the world, but still had hope for society:

I also see the salvation contained for all in the changeless principles and just demands of the People's party [*sic*]. *They are God's demands* [*sic*]. They are the demands of *justice* [*sic*]. It is my faith in this political gospel of justice, of law to be enacted, that makes me zealous in defense of the Omaha platform.<sup>23</sup>

The platform's emphasis upon the need for the people to have greater control over the government, natural resources, land, currency, transportation, and the like appealed to Gibson's desire to rid the world of social injustice. He believed that if the reforms proposed in the Omaha Platform were enacted, the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth would be a great deal closer to realization.<sup>24</sup> And, at least at the time he assumed the position of editor, he had cause for confidence in the political potential of the People's Party: Nebraska's elections in 1890 and 1891 demonstrated that the Republican

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<sup>21</sup> George Howard Gibson, "The Future of the Populist Movement," *Alliance-Independent*, January 4, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> George Howard Gibson, "The Great Social Problem," *Alliance-Independent*, February 15, 1894, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, "Patchwork Philosophy," *Wealth Makers*, November 14, 1895, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> George Howard Gibson, "To Err is Human," *Wealth Makers*, May 16, 1895, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Gibson, "To Err is Human," *Wealth Makers*, May 16, 1895, p. 4.

Party could be defeated and, in the early 1890s, the membership of the People's Party and the Farmers' Alliance crested.<sup>25</sup>

Gibson also assumed that the People's Party shared his disdain for individualism and competition. He believed that individualism was the source of all the "evils" that afflicted mankind, and that monopolies and poverty were two of the most egregious manifestations of individualism and selfishness.<sup>26</sup> He asserted that although the Church endorsed individualism, true Christianity was defined by men serving one another.<sup>27</sup> True Christians, he argued, did not make their living "by the sweat of others;" God's law applied as much to the market place as to every other area of life.<sup>28</sup> Like most Social Gospelers, Gibson was quite critical of the Church's unwillingness to acknowledge the relationship between the social environment and religious salvation.<sup>29</sup>

He believed that individual sin contributed to social conditions, but so did "social (legislative) sin."<sup>30</sup> He was angered by what he saw as the Church's ignorance of social sin (which he interpreted as legislative sin) because he believed such ignorance made the Church unable to see the true extent and source of society's problems.<sup>31</sup> The Church was

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<sup>25</sup> John D. Barnhart, "The History of the Farmers' Alliance and of the People's Party in Nebraska," (dissertation, Harvard University, 1930), microfilm, p. 290-291; H. Wayne Morgan, ed., *The Gilded Age: A Reappraisal* (1963; repr., New York: Syracuse University Press, 1967), p. 168; U.S. Work Projects Administration, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940*, Official Project No. 665-81-3-19, sponsored by the University of Nebraska (Lincoln, March 1940), p. 147, 161.

<sup>26</sup> George Howard Gibson, "The Great Social Problem," *Alliance-Independent*, February 15, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> George Howard Gibson, "What is Christianity?," *Wealth Makers*, June 7, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Gibson, "What is Christianity?," *Wealth Makers*, June 7, 1894, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, "The Law of Happiness," *Wealth Makers*, December 17, 1895, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, "Teaching Evil in God's Name," *Wealth Makers*, April 26, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Gibson, "Teaching Evil in God's Name," *Wealth Makers*, April 26, 1894, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, "Driven to Throat-Cutting," *Wealth Makers*, May 24, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> George Howard Gibson, "Justice, Love, and Charity," *Alliance-Independent*, January 11, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Gibson, "Justice, Love, and Charity," *Alliance-Independent*, January 11, 1894, p. 4.

only aware of and trying to cope with effects, not causes.<sup>32</sup> The People's Party, on the other hand, he saw as a "brotherhood-of-man idea movement" that was born to save society from selfishness and the worship of individualism.<sup>33</sup> When he encountered opposition to any of these views or faced accusations that he was not a true Populist, Gibson repeatedly referred to his devotion to the principles of the People's Party as set forth in the Omaha Platform. He also asserted that those who dared to speak the truth were always "opposed, defamed and hated" and decried as "anarchists" or "socialists."<sup>34</sup>

Yet the body of historical literature on Populism indicates that the Populists were less interested in brotherhood and cooperation than Gibson and other like-minded social reformers were inclined to believe. The instability of the times—widespread drought, crop failures, increased indebtedness and foreclosure rates, and sharply rising railroad freight rates—made it much more difficult for farmers to be economically successful.<sup>35</sup> In a changing world, they were no longer certain how to be independent competitors in the nation's economy.<sup>36</sup> The formation of agricultural co-operatives, which social reformers such as Gibson viewed as a sign that rural labor was willing to move toward a more communal way of life, were typically an attempt on the part of local farmers to restore economic competition to what they viewed as fair conditions—not begin a national movement to socialize agricultural production.<sup>37</sup> While opposition to monopoly was central to the popularity and momentum of the People's Party, most farmers simply

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<sup>32</sup> George Howard Gibson, "Justice, Love, and Charity," *Alliance-Independent*, January 11, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *Wealth Makers*, May 30, 1895, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> George Howard Gibson, "A Confusion of Tongues," *Wealth Makers*, September 19, 1895, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Barnhart, p. 13, 22-24; John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*. (1931; repr., Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 20-35.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 58-59.

<sup>37</sup> Morgan, p. 153.

wanted a return to the time when they—as individuals—could compete for a chance at making a large profit.<sup>38</sup> Gibson correctly identified antimonopolism as a core principle of Populism, but his religious and moral views strongly colored his interpretation of the ultimate purpose of the reforms contained within the Omaha Platform. The disparity between Gibson’s views and the objectives of local farmers created a disconnect that would eventually cause Gibson to lose faith in the idea that the People’s Party, or any political party, could bring about the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

Gibson was not alone in his belief that the People’s Party had the potential to transform society into something resembling the kingdom of God (or at least make society more communal in nature). Among the more recognizable figures who shared his view of and interest in Populism (at least for a time) were the Reverend Thomas Dixon, Jr., Henry Demarest Lloyd, the Reverend George Davis Herron, and Julius Wayland, among others.<sup>39</sup> It is not difficult to see why Gibson and others saw a connection between the tenets of the People’s Party and the goals of the Social Gospel, particularly when the party’s emphasis on producerism and brotherhood as well as its use of revivalistic, evangelical, and utopian language are taken into account. Many people of the period, including farmers, believed that a national crisis was impending.<sup>40</sup> The

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<sup>38</sup> Morgan, p. 161-162.

<sup>39</sup> A large portion of the editorial staff and readership of *The Kingdom* (published out of Minneapolis, Minnesota) also likely saw a connection between Populism and the Social Gospel. Charles Howard Hopkins and Ronald C. White, Jr. referred to *The Kingdom* as “a vehicle for expressing the vast midwestern [*sic*] discontent of late Populism stirred into a peculiar mix of social gospel radicalism.” They also called for more research to be conducted on the relationship between Midwestern Populism and the Social Gospel. See C. Howard Hopkins and Ronald C. White, Jr., *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), p. 150, 178.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994; ed., 1995), p. 30.

preamble of the Omaha Platform identified this as a serious concern.<sup>41</sup> As Michael Kazin has pointed out, a late nineteenth century political party composed primarily of rural Protestants would have found it natural to couch its arguments regarding the need to rid the world of corruption in Christian language.<sup>42</sup> Christianity was a source of common ground for most Americans at the time. Christian rhetoric was used by the Populists not to win converts to Christianity, but to win converts to the People's Party.<sup>43</sup> Revivalism and evangelicalism lent their arguments greater urgency.<sup>44</sup>

Several decades of Western radicalism provided the context for Populist thought;<sup>45</sup> revivalism and evangelicalism provided an effective means of communicating with and uniting the public. Evangelical, revivalistic language stirred emotions and motivated the populace. When used to frame discussions of social problems and combined with the social upheaval occurring at the time, it made immediate reform seem all the more critical. Producerism, the idea that farmers (as producers) were the basis of the nation's strength and therefore deserved to reap the full rewards of their labor, was paired with the notion of brotherhood as yet another way to unite the party's constituents. And utopianism was used both as a source of inspiration and as an abstract goal for the party to work toward. To Gibson, the utopia of the People's Party was the kingdom of

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<sup>41</sup> "Our National Platform," *Wealth Makers*, June 28, 1894, p. 7 [repr. *Omaha Platform of 1892*]; and Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (1982; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), p. 174-175.

<sup>42</sup> Kazin, p. 39.

<sup>43</sup> Kazin, p. 32-33.

<sup>44</sup> Robert C. McMath, Jr. *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (1992; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 52.

<sup>45</sup> Chester McArthur Destler, "Western Radicalism, 1865-1901: Concepts and Origins," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Dec. 1944), p. 352 [accessed via JSTOR 14 July 2008].



God, but to most Populists utopia simply represented a return to fair economic competition via the elimination of monopolies and political corruption.<sup>46</sup>

Gibson also identified with the People's Party's emphasis on the importance of education. He was a firm believer in universal, lifelong education,<sup>47</sup> and was especially interested in the ways education could advance social reform. Although the Farmer's Alliance and the People's Party had launched a massive educational campaign throughout 1891 and 1892 to inform farmers of the issues at hand,<sup>48</sup> Gibson believed that the People's Party had been defeated in 1892 because it had not devoted enough time and energy to educating the populace.<sup>49</sup> During his time as editor, he supported the efforts of the Farmers' Alliance's Bureau of Education and worked to maximize the power of the reform press to arouse the interest of the people.<sup>50</sup>

The "new thought of America," Gibson asserted, was in the West, and change always came "from below, where pressure creates warmth and fire."<sup>51</sup> Education was all that was needed to awaken the people and reveal to them the "constructive legislation" that would solve society's problems.<sup>52</sup> Gibson stated that in his own editorial work, he would "convert men to the truth" by appealing to "individual interest and conscience:" he

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Hofstadter has asserted that the utopia imagined by the People's Party was "in the past, not the future." See Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 62. However, both Gibson and the People's Party clearly conceived of the Populist utopia as a something that was achievable in the near future.

<sup>47</sup> George Howard Gibson, *The People's Hour: And Other Themes* (Chicago: The Englewood Publishing House, 1909), p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> McMath, p. 143-150.

<sup>49</sup> George Howard Gibson, "It Was Ignorance Defeated Us," *Alliance-Independent*, November 15, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Gibson, "It Was Ignorance Defeated Us," *Alliance-Independent*, November 15, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> George Howard Gibson, "One of the Leading Universities," *Alliance-Independent*, March 8, 1894, p. 5;

George Howard Gibson, "Not Many Great Are Called," *Alliance-Independent*, January 25, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> George Howard Gibson, "The Future of the Populist Movement," *Alliance-Independent*, January 4, 1894, p. 4.

would present the facts, reveal injustice, discuss remedies, and (most importantly) make the “practical wisdom of the [Omaha] platform so clear that every Populist will be intensely proud of it, and able to make strongest use of it.”<sup>53</sup> He also made his interest in examining social problems from the perspective of social Christianity clear.<sup>54</sup> He stated that he was working with a new, “clarified vision” of the Christian law of love and justice. Subscriptions were offered to ministers at half price (as Gibson hoped to engage the community’s “moral teachers and preachers” in a discussion of moral and social questions.)<sup>55</sup>

In a paper entitled “The Future of the Populist Movement,” which Gibson presented on January 2, 1894 at a meeting of the Nebraska chapter of the Reform Press Association in Hastings, Nebraska,<sup>56</sup> he discussed his belief in the importance of education, the pivotal role of the reform press, and in the People’s Party as the “long lost ‘gospel to the poor’.”<sup>57</sup> He saw the People’s Party as evidence that there was truth and progress in the world, and asserted that the Omaha Platform was a “grander platform than

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<sup>53</sup> Gibson, “It Was Ignorance Defeated Us,” *Alliance-Independent*, November 15, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *Alliance-Independent*, November 15, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Gibson, Untitled, *Alliance-Independent*, November 15, 1893, p. 4. In this brief piece Gibson also stated that he might even “preach to the preachers.”

<sup>56</sup> Clifford Ernest Bowman, “The Populist Press of Nebraska, 1888-1896,” (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1936), microfilm, p. 146. This was the third annual meeting of the Nebraska Reform Press Association, which was sometimes referred to as the “Nebraska Independent Press Association.” Although it was technically an organization for all members of the reform press, in Nebraska it was often used to promote strengthening of independent papers for the sake of the People’s Party. There is no evidence that Gibson attended any of the earlier Nebraska Reform Press Association meetings, but he did attend the national meeting of the Reform Press Association in Kansas City, Missouri on February 22 and 23, 1895. Bowman, p. 149.

<sup>57</sup> George Howard Gibson, ““The Future of the Populist Movement,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 4, 1894, p. 4. The “gospel to the poor” is a reference to Luke 4:18 which states: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.” Luke 4:18 [King James Version].

was ever before by any political party conceived and formulated.”<sup>58</sup> He stated that the world was entering its “last great battle” and that while Populism was the cause of justice and humanity, the “irresistible moral forces” of the world would not be with the People’s Party until the populace was made to understand the principles, purpose, and remedies of the party.<sup>59</sup> The reform press, he argued, was therefore vital to the advancement of progress in general and to the People’s Party specifically.

Gibson held that the differences in the viewpoints of the various reform papers were not fundamental, and believed that they ought to unite in an effort to “appeal to men’s consciences.”<sup>60</sup> He thought that as a whole the press needed to pay greater attention to the fact that questions regarding monetary, land, and railroad monopolies were inherently moral questions.<sup>61</sup> The press should work to show the world that no man could be called a true Christian unless he devoted his life to the search for social justice.<sup>62</sup> Gibson believed that in many ways the Nebraska Populists were leading the way for the Populists of other states,<sup>63</sup> and he worked hard not only to make his newspaper an example for other reform papers to follow, but also to extend the People Party’s “gospel” to workers of every sort.

Not long after assuming the position of editor, Gibson changed the name of the paper from the *Alliance-Independent* to the *Wealth Makers*. He believed the new name was more representative of the comprehensive aims of the People’s Party.<sup>64</sup> In

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<sup>58</sup> Gibson, “The Future of the Populist Movement,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 4, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Gibson, “The Future of the Populist Movement,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 4, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Gibson, “The Future of the Populist Movement,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 4, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Gibson, “The Future of the Populist Movement,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 4, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> Gibson, “The Future of the Populist Movement,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 4, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> George Howard Gibson, “The State Conference,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 11, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Concerning Our New Name,” *Wealth Makers*, March 15, 1894, p. 4.

accordance with the Omaha Platform, he declared the interests of rural and urban labor to be one and the same, and asserted that the paper had the “equal interest of every worker at heart.”<sup>65</sup> He hoped to use the paper to unite workers of all kinds in the work to create the kingdom of God on earth, but he underestimated the differences between the cultures and goals of rural and urban labor.

Most Populists were from rural, evangelical Protestant backgrounds while urban laborers of the period were typically foreign-born and either Roman Catholic or Lutheran. It was only in cities such as Chicago that the Populists managed any substantial union with urban labor.<sup>66</sup> Yet brotherhood and cooperation among all producers was something Gibson had hoped for at least as early as his time with the *New Republic*.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, his inducements for prohibitionists to broaden out and join the Farmer’s Alliance to create an “Industrial Army,” a “party of wealth-producers,” was what led to him “losing caste” in the Prohibition Party.<sup>68</sup> In the People’s Party, however, Gibson believed he had found an organization that had the potential to create a Christian and socially-just brotherhood of all types of workers. Throughout his time as editor of the *Wealth Makers*, he worked to bring this dream to fruition.

One of the most significant contributors to Gibson’s ideology during his time with the *Wealth Makers* and throughout the 1890s was the Reverend George Davis Herron.

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<sup>65</sup> Gibson, “Concerning Our New Name,” *Wealth Makers*, March 15, 1894, p. 4; “Our National Platform,” *Wealth Makers*, June 28, 1894, p. 7 [repr. *Omaha Platform of 1892*].

<sup>66</sup> Kazin, p. 43. Much of the People’s Party’s short-term success in uniting with urban labor in Chicago was due to the efforts of Henry Demarest Lloyd. See Richard Digby-Junger, *The Gilded Age Journalist as Advocate: Henry Demarest Lloyd and ‘Wealth Against Commonwealth’* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1989), p. 358-363.

<sup>67</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Our Salutation,” *New Republic*, November 20, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> George Howard Gibson, “The Industrial Party,” *New Republic*, December 12, 1890, p. 2; George Howard Gibson, “Our Friends the Prohibitionists,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 25, 1894, p. 4.

Herron bore a striking resemblance to one of Gibson's first spiritual and intellectual mentors: the Reverend Charles Eugene Bentley. Herron first gained renown in June of 1890 when he gave an address entitled "The Message of Jesus to Men of Wealth" before the Minnesota Congregational Club.<sup>69</sup> In the address, Herron argued that the question of whether or not each man was the keeper of his fellowmen was the central question of human existence.<sup>70</sup> He denounced individualism, the "law of self-interest," as the source of "all social and private woes" and declared that true Christians sacrificed on behalf of others.<sup>71</sup> There was no such thing as ethics without religion, nor was there a secular realm of life—God's authority, he asserted, applied to all aspects of life and His love contained the solution to every social problem.<sup>72</sup> Herron did not believe that civilization, industrial technology, or the State could save the world from its problems.<sup>73</sup> The State was only as righteous as the people, and unless the people became true Christians the State would not be "born again" and could not bring forth the kingdom of God.<sup>74</sup> Many of the early Social Gospelers were making similar arguments during the final decade of the nineteenth century, but Gibson had a particular affinity for Herron's fiery and uncompromising point of view.

Following the address, Herron received many requests to speak and preach throughout the nation. In 1891 he accepted a position as minister of the First

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<sup>69</sup> The address was referred to in *The Dawn* and was subsequently printed as a tract (with an introduction written by Reverend Josiah Strong), and in book form under the title *The Christian Society*. See "News of the Movement," *The Dawn*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (June 1890), p. 92-93; Rev. George D. Herron, *Message of Jesus to Men of Wealth* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1891); George D. Herron, *The Christian Society* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895).

<sup>70</sup> Herron, *Message of Jesus to Men of Wealth*, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Herron, *Message of Jesus to Men of Wealth*, p. 18-19, 22, 24.

<sup>72</sup> Herron, *Message of Jesus to Men of Wealth*, p. 12, 25, 28-29.

<sup>73</sup> Herron, *Message of Jesus to Men of Wealth*, p. 9, 10-11, 14, 16.

<sup>74</sup> Herron, *Message of Jesus to Men of Wealth*, p. 14-16.

Congregational Church of Burlington, Iowa, and in September of 1893 he was offered the newly created position of E. D. Rand Chair of Applied Christianity at Iowa College in Grinnell, Iowa.<sup>75</sup> For the next seven years Herron was in nearly constant demand throughout the nation as a public speaker.<sup>76</sup> His lectures at Iowa College focused on the philosophy of Christianity, Christian Sociology, and the kingdom of God.<sup>77</sup> Among the department's invited guest speakers were Richard T. Ely, Josiah Strong, and John R. Commons, and included on the booklist for the study of Christian Sociology were the works of Ely, Strong, Washington Gladden, John Ruskin, and Laurence Gronlund.<sup>78</sup>

Gibson first mentioned Herron to his readers in early March of 1894, and offered a more complete introduction of Herron on March 29, 1894.<sup>79</sup> In this introduction he referenced "The Message of Jesus to Men of Wealth," advertised Herron's latest book, and predicted that Herron would be persecuted "for righteousness sake, as Luther was."<sup>80</sup> In another brief editorial, Gibson proclaimed Herron "the foremost philosopher and moral teacher of the world."<sup>81</sup> He repeated these declarations with increasing frequency following the address Herron delivered at the University of Nebraska in June of 1894.

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<sup>75</sup> Robert M. Crunden, "George D. Herron in the 1890's: A New Frame of Reference for the Study of the Progressive Era," *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (1973), p. 10-11; J. Stitt Wilson, "Prof. George D. Herron, D. D.: A Biographical Sketch," *The Social Crusader: A Messenger of Brotherhood and Social Justice*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January, 1901), p. 89-91; James Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 171. Iowa College is now known as Grinnell College.

<sup>76</sup> J. Stitt Wilson, p. 11; Dombrowski, p. 171.

<sup>77</sup> "Department of Applied Christianity," (Grinnell, Iowa: Iowa College, 1893-1894 and 1894-1895). There are several such pamphlets within the George D. Herron Collection at Grinnell College's Archives and Special Collections, Burling Library. See Box 1, Section A.

<sup>78</sup> "Department of Applied Christianity," (Grinnell, Iowa: Iowa College, 1893-1894 and 1894-1895). There are several such pamphlets within the George D. Herron Collection at Grinnell College's Archives and Special Collections, Burling Library. See Box 1, Section A.

<sup>79</sup> George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *Alliance-Independent*, March 1, 1894, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, "A Man With a Mission," *Wealth Makers*, March 29, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> Gibson, "A Man With a Mission," *Wealth Makers*, March 29, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> George Howard Gibson, "Glad Tidings for the Poor," *Wealth Makers*, April 12, 1894, p. 4.

In early 1894, University of Nebraska Chancellor James Canfield invited Herron to give a commencement oration on the subject of the Christian State.<sup>82</sup> Gibson announced the address nearly a week in advance, telling readers that Herron saw “in the political uprising in the west [*sic*] a force that is making for righteousness.”<sup>83</sup> Gibson equated Herron’s idea of the Christian State with the kingdom of God and with the ultimate goal of the People’s Party, stating that “the Christian State is what the Populists are working for.”<sup>84</sup> On June 13, 1894 Herron delivered his address, “The Christian State, or A New Political Vision.” It caused a great deal of controversy.

In the address, Herron posited that society was on the verge of a revolution that would lead to the establishment of the kingdom of God.<sup>85</sup> More and more people were becoming aware of the fact that humanity was a single “body” rather than merely a collection of individuals. The people were embracing brotherhood and once it became clear that the political system would not conform to their will (which Herron also viewed as the will of God), the people would abandon the current system in favor of a more Christian one. Herron argued that the Church increasingly stood for “respectability and property” rather than “sacrifice and association;” therefore the kingdom of God would not be realized via the Church: it would be “politically rather than ecclesiastically

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<sup>82</sup> Canfield was sympathetic not only to Herron’s ideas, but to the People’s Party as well. See Diary of James H. Canfield, February 1, 1894, April 4, 1894, June 17, 1894, June 19, 1894, June 24, 1894, June 27, 1894, Office of the Chancellor, James H. Canfield Correspondence (1891-1895); Personal Diary (1891-1894), Love Library, Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska, Lincoln. See also “Distinguished Men Who Are Populists,” *Lincoln Weekly Herald*, July 7, 1894, p. 4; Chancellor James H. Canfield, “No Over-Production of Educated Men,” *The Kingdom*, June 22, 1894, p. 155.

<sup>83</sup> George Howard Gibson, “A New Political Vision,” *Wealth Makers*, June 7, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Brother Editors, Take Notice,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> George D. Herron, “The Great Oration,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 1, 8. A full transcription of “The Great Oration” is also available via my site: *Editing Populism: George H. Gibson and Applied Christianity in Gilded Age Nebraska*, <<http://segonku.unl.edu/~mtiedje/newspaper%20trans/WealthMakers/ep.news.wealthmakers.1894-6-21.p1and8.html>> [accessed 17 July 2010].

organized.”<sup>86</sup> The people, he believed, were in great need of “political shepherds” to guide them to a political movement that was founded upon democracy, “the mutual dependence of all men,” and “the fellowship of sacrifice.”<sup>87</sup> This movement would lead to national repentance via a “political revival of the righteousness of Christ” and would allow the state to be “born again” as the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God.<sup>88</sup> Much of Herron’s language and many of his arguments indicate that, at the time of his oration, he viewed Populism as just the sort of political movement that was necessary to the establishment of the Christian State and to the realization of the kingdom of God on earth.

Herron believed that America had a divine purpose: it was created by God to serve not only as a witness to Christ’s power and wisdom, but also as an example to the rest of the world. Personal salvation depended upon political salvation, and political salvation could only be achieved through a “true” realization of both Christianity and democracy. Throughout his address, Herron framed many of his arguments in the same terminology used by the People’s Party. He affirmed the public’s right to all natural resources and denounced the “over-production of middle men,” “social parasites,” the “class of exchangers,” and land and transportation speculation as “destroyers of human life.”<sup>89</sup> He viewed the nation’s social and economic troubles as the inevitable result of an epic contest in which either Christianity or the principle of competition would ultimately

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<sup>86</sup> Herron, “The Great Oration,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 1, 8.

<sup>87</sup> Herron, “The Great Oration,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 1, 8.

<sup>88</sup> Herron, “The Great Oration,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 1, 8.

<sup>89</sup> Herron, “The Great Oration,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 1, 8.



“come to an end.”<sup>90</sup> Collectivism, which Herron interpreted as “the association of men in an economic commonwealth,” would require sacrifice.<sup>91</sup> Sometimes this sacrifice would take place on behalf of one’s fellow man, and sometimes it would require one to accept persecution for following Christ’s teachings. Although Herron argued that there was no similarity between the fundamental changes he called for and the principles of anarchy, he was certain that the teachers of Christ’s “true” word would be classed with anarchists and other social outcasts for daring to speak the truth. Yet, he asserted, no liberties would be taken away from the individual by collectivism that would not be returned to him one hundred times as a result of “the liberty which association would give.”<sup>92</sup> Production was “communion with God” and collectivized, Christianized production was God’s will.

Gibson’s enthusiasm for Herron’s ideas was obvious. Herron was a regularly featured subject in the *Wealth Makers* from the time Gibson first mentioned him in early March of 1894 until the time Gibson left the paper in January of 1896. The controversy surrounding Herron’s commencement address motivated Gibson to offer extensive coverage of Herron’s ideas for more than two weeks. The *Wealth Makers* printed the most complete version of the address known to exist (although Herron estimated that it only contained about half of what he actually stated during the course of his one and a half hour-long speech).<sup>93</sup> Herron supplied Gibson with this “very full abstract” of the

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<sup>90</sup> Herron, “The Great Oration,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 1, 8.

<sup>91</sup> Herron, “The Great Oration,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 1, 8.

<sup>92</sup> Herron, “The Great Oration,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 1, 8.

<sup>93</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Brother Editors, Take Notice,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 4. Herron later wrote a book that expanded upon the themes present in his oration. See George D. Herron, *The Christian State: A Political Vision of Christ* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1895).

commencement address in the days after the ceremony.<sup>94</sup> He also corresponded with Gibson at least once prior to the date of the address, explaining that he hoped to give the nascent social and political forces in the West a vision that would unite and “morally exalt” them.<sup>95</sup> Unfortunately, no correspondence between Gibson and Herron could be located. Gibson’s correspondence is not known to have been preserved and while there are three major collections of Herron’s papers, his personal correspondence is virtually non-existent within these collections.<sup>96</sup> But given Herron’s persistent interest and involvement in Gibson’s reform ventures, it is highly likely that the two men corresponded regularly beginning at least as early as June of 1894 and continuing into the first decades of the twentieth century.

Gibson was attracted to Herron’s ideas from the moment he first encountered them. He referred to Herron alternately as a great moral and religious philosopher, “God’s mightiest servant,” one of the world’s greatest minds, and the “leader of the age.”<sup>97</sup> Like many at the time (including Herron himself), Gibson saw Herron as more than just a man who was doing his best to follow Christ’s example: he saw in Herron a man who had been chosen by God to deliver the true gospel to the world and work for the creation of the Christian State. For this, Gibson believed that Herron was destined to

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<sup>94</sup> Gibson, “Brother Editors, Take Notice,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> Gibson, “Brother Editors, Take Notice,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> It is believed that Herron destroyed (or asked his family to destroy) most of the correspondence he considered private, which would likely have been a significant portion given the controversy surrounding his ideas, his divorce, and his affiliation with the Socialist Party. See the George D. Herron Papers, Grinnell College Libraries, Department of Special Collections, Grinnell, Iowa; the George D. Herron Papers, 1905-1922, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University, New York and the George Davis Herron Papers, 1916-1927, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, California.

<sup>97</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Glad Tidings for the Poor,” *Wealth Makers*, April 12, 1894, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, “A New Political Vision,” *Wealth Makers*, June 7, 1894, p. 4; Gibson, “Brother Editors, Take Notice,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, “The Leader of the Age,” *Wealth Makers*, December 20, 1894, p. 4.

suffer at the hands of the public and sacrifice his standing in both the Church and the academic world.<sup>98</sup> From the time that he was a young man, Gibson was drawn not only to religious teachings that recognized the connections between the social, political, and spiritual spheres, but also to those who articulated these connections in passionate, uncompromising language. This was just as true for his relationship with the Reverend George Herron as it was for his relationship with the Reverend Charles Bentley.<sup>99</sup> The fact that Herron was persecuted and forced to “sacrifice” on behalf of his ideas only made him more appealing to Gibson.

Most of Gibson’s editorial coverage of Herron’s address was devoted to rearticulation and praise of his ideas—particularly his conception of the Christian State. Gibson also dedicated several editorials to defending Herron from attacks by local ministers and newspapers as well as from Governor Crouse’s denunciations (which were issued at the commencement ceremony directly after Herron spoke).<sup>100</sup> Gibson even wrote a summation and defense of Herron’s address for the June 29, 1894 edition of *The Kingdom* (which Herron was an associate editor for).<sup>101</sup> In the article Gibson noted

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<sup>98</sup> Crunden, p. 103-104. Further evidence that Herron also believed that this was his destiny can be found in his letter of resignation from Iowa College (now Grinnell College). See the George D. Herron Papers, Grinnell College Libraries, Department of Special Collections, Grinnell, Iowa.

<sup>99</sup> Lawrence F. Prescott, *1896: The Great Campaign, or, Political Struggles of Parties, Leaders, and Issues* (Loyal Publishing Co. Publishers, 1896), p. 255 [accessed via Google Books 20 November 2008]; James Penny Boyd, *Parties, Problems and Leaders of 1896: An Impartial Presentation of Living National Questions* (James Penny Boyd, Publishers’ Union, 1896), p. 594 [accessed via Google Books 20 November 2008].

<sup>100</sup> See George Howard Gibson, “The Reproach of Christ,” *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, “God Pity the Rich!,” *Wealth Makers*, June 28, 1894, p. 4.; George Howard Gibson, “The Wounded Buzzard,” *Wealth Makers*, June 28, 1894, p. 4.; T.E. Douglass, Jr., “Christianity Applied,” *Wealth Makers*, June 28, 1894, p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Dr. Herron at Lincoln,” *The Kingdom*, June 29, 1894, p. 171-172. *The Kingdom* was born out of the “Kingdom movement,” a largely educational social Christianity movement that was particularly active in the early 1890s and was centered upon Iowa College in Grinnell, Iowa (now Grinnell College). The Minnesota-based denominational paper *The Northwestern Congregationalist* was

that the city of Lincoln was divided yet lively as a result of Herron's speech: the selfish were angry and afraid while the unselfish and suffering heard Herron's words as "the most attractive sounds that the world contains."<sup>102</sup> A number of Gibson's editorials confirm that he experienced the latter reaction to Herron's address; they also testify to the impact Herron had on the development of Gibson's ideology.

Analysis of Gibson's editorials and Herron's commencement address illustrate some of the specific ways Herron influenced Gibson. A collection of Gibson's editorials emphasizing Christianity and social reform prior to the time he first mentioned Herron to readers (in March of 1894) was examined via thorough reading, use of the word cloud generator Wordle, and use of the textual analysis digital tool TokenX.<sup>103</sup> A close reading of Gibson's editorials reveals that his ideology before he encountered Herron was passionate yet quite general, containing very few specific theological moorings. Gibson expressed deep concern over what he viewed as a lack of justice and brotherhood in the world. Financial and political monopolies were destroying society and threatening the people's salvation.<sup>104</sup> The Church, he argued, was doing nothing to try to ascertain the

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converted into *The Kingdom* after a symposium organized by Iowa College President George A. Gates. For more information on the Kingdom movement, see Robert T. Handy, "George D. Herron and the Kingdom Movement," *Church History*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (June 1950): p. 97-115 [accessed via JSTOR 12 March 2007]. Gibson read *The Kingdom* regularly and described it to his readers as "not infallible," but still "the best religious paper they can find anywhere." See George Howard Gibson, "The Kingdom, Human, Divine," *Wealth Makers*, May 17, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>102</sup> Gibson, "Dr. Herron at Lincoln," *The Kingdom*, June 29, 1894, p. 172.

<sup>103</sup> Wordle is an open-source digital tool, created by Jonathan Feinberg, which allows users to create word cloud visualizations based upon the frequency of words in a given text. Words used most often appear larger in size, and can be made to appear brighter in color. For more information, see: <<http://www.wordle.net/>>. TokenX is a digital tool that can be used to analyze and visualize patterns present in text. It was created by Brian L. Pytlík Zillig, Associate Professor and Digital Initiatives Librarian at the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

<sup>104</sup> George Howard Gibson, "Consider Carefully These Truths," *Alliance-Independent*, November 15, 1893, p. 4.

true causes of “evil” in the world.<sup>105</sup> The treatment of “money, railroad, land and other monopoly questions” as secular (rather than moral) questions was contributing greatly to poverty and suffering, and was therefore also preventing the nation from being truly Christian.<sup>106</sup> He believed that if the Christian law of love could replace individualism and be applied to daily social interactions (including politics) injustice would be eliminated. Throughout the first year of his time as editor of the *Wealth Makers* Gibson thought that the best way this could be achieved was through fundamental structural change implemented via the political system—the planks of the Omaha Platform of 1892 needed to be enacted by the People’s Party as soon as possible.

Gibson expressed absolute confidence in the ability of the principles of the People’s Party to promote the “cause of justice, the cause of humanity.”<sup>107</sup> He believed that the Omaha Platform was the great hope of the world, the very key to social and individual salvation. Although he later virulently asserted that the “money question” (also called the “silver question” or “silver issue”) was the least important of all the platform’s planks,<sup>108</sup> prior to the influence of Herron Gibson utilized language that focused on the role of financial issues in social problems. This is readily apparent in the word cloud generated with the aforementioned collection of Gibson’s pre-Herron editorials (see figure 1). Emphasis on financial matters is obvious: Gibson’s frequent

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<sup>105</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Justice, Love, and Charity,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 11, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>106</sup> George Howard Gibson, “The Future of the Populist Movement,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 4, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> Gibson, “The Future of the Populist Movement,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 4, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>108</sup> Gibson, “The Future of the Populist Movement,” *Alliance-Independent*, January 4, 1894, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, “A Snare of the Enemy,” *Alliance-Independent*, November 30, 1893, p. 4. Gibson maintained this stance throughout his time as editor. See George Howard Gibson, “Speaking of Log-Rolling,” *Wealth Makers*, March 28, 1895, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, “Comparing Their Importance,” *Wealth Makers*, March 28, 1895, p. 4.

discussion of “money,” the “market,” “business,” and “profit” makes these words appear larger in the word cloud. He also continually stressed the need for immediate action (using the word “must” nearly as often as the word “money”). A close reading of each of these editorials reveals that Gibson was focused on championing what he perceived to be the cause of the people: gaining all workers a proper share of the product of their labors. Screen captures of analyses performed using TokenX’s keyword in context function concisely illustrate other aspects of Gibson’s early ideology.

Gibson viewed the business world as selfish, corrupt, and out of control. He believed that large corporations and individual businessmen were to blame for the nation’s economic troubles as well as for the poverty and desperation of the people (see figure 2). Like many Populists Gibson believed that nationalization of the banking industry, railroads, telegraph lines, and public ownership of all natural resources would not only make the country more just, but also more Christian.<sup>109</sup> He saw the search for profit as selfishness manifested, yet maintained that each worker should have control of the full value of their labor and be able to market that labor (see figures 3, 4, 5, and 6). The people, he asserted, were hungry but were beginning to recognize their power (see figure 7). Both religion and morality were behind their cause, which was taking political form, but due to the fact that the nation was on “the verge of moral, political and material ruin”<sup>110</sup> reform needed to come swiftly (see figures 8, 9, 10, and 11).

Until he encountered Herron’s ideas Gibson was primarily concerned with how business and financial monopolies were harming society by preventing “industrial

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<sup>109</sup> George Howard Gibson, “The Great Social Problem,” *Alliance-Independent*, February 15, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>110</sup> “Our National Platform,” *Wealth Makers*, June 28, 1894, p. 7 [repr. *Omaha Platform of 1892*].

democracy and human brotherhood,”<sup>111</sup> and he often relied upon Old Testament anti-usury Scripture to justify his arguments. After he became acquainted with Herron, Gibson remained concerned about how large corporations and the silver issue impacted society and still believed that the Omaha Platform was vital to social justice, but his ideas about the need for fundamental structural change were increasingly linked to the Social Gospel concept of the kingdom of God. After adopting Herron as an intellectual and spiritual mentor, Gibson’s ideology became tied to more specific theological justifications and his passion for the Omaha Platform became truly religious. The platform was no longer merely a series of reforms that the People’s Party needed to enact to remedy social injustice and restore Christian mores to cultural dominance—it was God’s will, the very pathway to the kingdom of God on earth. A word cloud of Herron’s commencement address reveals some of the most basic (yet essential) ideas Herron passed on to Gibson that led to this conversion.

The most pronounced feature of the word cloud of Herron’s address is the nearly equal emphasis upon the words “social,” “people,” “political,” “state,” and “Christ” (see figure 12). Herron was one of a number of early Social Gospelers who recognized that society, religion, and politics interact with and influence one another. Implicit in his discussion of the links between the social and the political realms and the teachings of Jesus Christ is an acknowledgment of the connections between individual and social salvation (one of the theological underpinnings of the Social Gospel movement). The full realization of this idea eventually led the Social Gospelers to their fundamental assertion

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<sup>111</sup> George Howard Gibson, “The Cause of the Common People,” *Alliance-Independent*, November 15, 1893, p. 4.

that the Church needed to pay greater attention to the ways the social environment impacts individuals. The idea is present in Herron's address in a primitive form. The notion of the kingdom of God as something tangible and achievable in earthly form is also present, although Herron mostly refers to it in his address as the "Christian State" rather than the kingdom of God.<sup>112</sup> Even though Herron does not specifically reference the Omaha Platform as the pathway to the Christian State, his use of Populist terminology and statements regarding the need for a political movement to bring about a "political revival of the righteousness of Christ"<sup>113</sup> and the rebirth of the nation were interpreted by Gibson as an endorsement of the Omaha Platform and a welcome challenge to make the People's Party into just the sort of movement his new mentor desired.

After being introduced to Herron's ideas, Gibson referred to the demands of the Omaha Platform as "God's demands" and averred that God was with the People's Party's "movement to break the yolk of monopoly."<sup>114</sup> When he spoke out in defense of the Omaha Platform he maintained that he was speaking not merely on behalf of his own beliefs, but for "the people, the people's party [*sic*] and the people's platform."<sup>115</sup> In his mind, the members of the People's Party were just as certain of the need for their role in the creation of the Christian State as he was. If the people were faithful to the Omaha Platform, Gibson was certain that the People's Party could not fail in its efforts to win elections, secure political offices, and institute the reforms necessary to eliminate all

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<sup>112</sup> Herron, "The Great Oration," *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 1, 8. In the address Herron sometimes used the phrase "Christian State" interchangeably with the "kingdom of God."

<sup>113</sup> Herron, "The Great Oration," *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 1, 8.

<sup>114</sup> Herron, "The Great Oration," *Wealth Makers*, June 21, 1894, p. 1, 8; George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *Wealth Makers*, May 30, 1895, p. 4.

<sup>115</sup> George Howard Gibson, "To Err is Human," *Wealth Makers*, May 16, 1895, p. 4.



forms of injustice and bring about the kingdom of God.<sup>116</sup> The intensity of Gibson's idealism and devotion, and his certainty regarding the larger purpose of the planks of the Omaha Platform made him unwilling to compromise religiously or politically. As the People's Party debated the importance of the silver issue and the possibility of fusion with the Democratic Party, Gibson's faith in the efficacy of realizing the kingdom of God via the political system would be tested.

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<sup>116</sup> Gibson, "To Err is Human," *Wealth Makers*, May 16, 1895, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *Wealth Makers*, May 9, 1895, p. 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### INDUSTRIAL SACRIFICE AND THE CHRISTIAN COMMONWEALTH COLONY

But the man who so enthrones the social interest takes hold of infinite power, and can drive before him all evil and build out of social strife and desolation a new world. The man who sacrifices or pours out in loving offering his labor for the equal good of others, awakens answering love in them, and so lays foundations which are eternal and ever-growing, while harmonies finer than the music of the morning stars are breathed down on the moral world from every sphere of the universe. The social spirit is the spirit of the whole, and he who receives it becomes in spirit the son of God.

—George Howard Gibson

Gibson had been interested in cooperative colonies since at least as early as his time with the *New Republic*, and had followed several cooperative ventures throughout his time with the *Wealth Makers*.<sup>1</sup> In early February of 1894, at the time he changed the paper's name from the *Alliance-Independent* to the *Wealth Makers*, he purchased the paper with his employees and operated it as a cooperative venture.<sup>2</sup> In October of 1894 Gibson also began working with others in Lincoln to establish and manage the Christian Corporation.<sup>3</sup> The corporation eventually brought together more than a dozen local families who contributed the use of their land and their labor to the group and met regularly to discuss both religion and reform. The corporation was a prominently featured subject in the *Wealth Makers* until the time that Gibson left the paper, and likely

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<sup>1</sup> George Howard Gibson, "The Co-Operative Specific," *New Republic*, November 28, 1890, p. 2; George Howard Gibson, "Show This to Your Neighbors," *Wealth Makers*, August 15, 1895, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *Wealth Makers*, October 18, 1894, p. 4; George Howard Gibson, Untitled, *Wealth Makers*, December 20, 1894, p. 1; George Howard Gibson, "The Cooperators' Conference Report," *Wealth Makers*, December 17, 1895, p. 5; George Howard Gibson, "The Co-Operators' Department," February 7, 1895, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> George Howard Gibson, "To Our Friends and Patrons," *Wealth Makers*, February 15, 1894, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> George Howard Gibson, "The New Kind of Corporation," *Wealth Makers*, October 25, 1894, p. 4.

contributed greatly to his increased interest in founding a large-scale cooperative colony. But it was not until November of 1895 that Gibson came into contact with other Social Gospelers who were serious about the potential of communes to bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

From at least September of 1895, Gibson was seriously considering retiring from editorial work to devote himself completely to the management of the Christian Corporation.<sup>4</sup> In November of 1895 the Reverend John Chipman of Florida sent a letter to the editor of *The Kingdom*. In this letter, entitled “A Proposition,” Chipman espoused faith in the Social Gospel concept of the kingdom of God and proposed that it could be achieved by bringing a small group of Christ’s followers together, sharing possessions, deeding the land to Christ, and making “one little corner” of the kingdom “visible on earth.”<sup>5</sup> A series of response letters followed, each of which was published in *The Kingdom*. Some argued that the communism proposed by Chipman was “impracticable,” or even if it were practicable wondered why anyone would wish to grant others the power to dictate how their possessions and labor should be used.<sup>6</sup> Chipman responded that others had indeed succeeded in their attempts to practice communism, citing the Oneida Colony, the Shakers (Quakers or Religious Society of Friends), and the Mormons.<sup>7</sup> Chipman stated that he was prepared to try and “die doing so.”<sup>8</sup> Gibson wrote in with a

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<sup>4</sup> George Howard Gibson, “The Christian Corporation,” *Wealth Makers*, September 5, 1895, p. 4. He officially sought to sell the paper in December of 1895. See Letter, J. Hyatt, December 23, 1895 and December 24, 1895, *Farmers’ Alliance Papers*, Roll 2, Frames 1708-1709; 1711.

<sup>5</sup> John Chipman, “A Proposition,” *The Kingdom*, November 29, 1895, p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> C. S. Jobes, “Is Communism Practicable?,” *The Kingdom*, December 13, 1895, p. 555; J. H. Arnold, “Is It Practicable?,” *The Kingdom*, December 27, 1895, p. 591; W. Harper, “Communitic Societies Unwise,” *The Kingdom*, January 10, 1896, p. 623.

<sup>7</sup> John Chipman, “Mr. Chipman’s Reply,” *The Kingdom*, December 27, 1895, p. 591.

<sup>8</sup> Chipman, “Mr. Chipman’s Reply,” *The Kingdom*, December 27, 1895, p. 591.

brief history of communes in the United States, arguing that “no undertaking ruled by Christ has or can come to naught.”<sup>9</sup> Addressing Chipman, Gibson stated: “We are ready, as fast as our scattered property can be sold, to take hold of this plan, which has for ten months been our plan, and will locate with him in the best place to serve one another and the world.”<sup>10</sup> The debate regarding the practicability and efficacy of cooperative communes reappeared in *The Kingdom* several more times, but Gibson’s mind was already made up. He and Chipman began to correspond immediately to determine where the colony should be established.<sup>11</sup>

After considering purchasing land in northeastern Alabama and eastern Tennessee and touring land in southern Florida, Chipman recommended they purchase land in northwestern Georgia.<sup>12</sup> The property consisted of approximately 1,000 acres of an exhausted cotton plantation in Muscogee County, Georgia (roughly twelve miles east of Columbus, Georgia).<sup>13</sup> By this time the plan for the colony had attracted the attention of two other leaders: William C. Damon, one of the founders of a prohibitionist community in Andrews, North Carolina called the Willard Co-Operative Colony, and Ralph Albertson, a member of the Willard Colony and young Congregationalist pastor from

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<sup>9</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Communism Again,” *The Kingdom*, January 27, 1896, p. 643.

<sup>10</sup> Gibson, “Communism Again,” *The Kingdom*, January 27, 1896, p. 643.

<sup>11</sup> George D. Herron to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 7, 1896, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI; George Howard Gibson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 13, 1896, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI; George Howard Gibson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 15, 1896, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI; George Howard Gibson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 25, 1896, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

<sup>12</sup> George Howard Gibson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, February 8, 1896, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

<sup>13</sup> John O. Fish, “The Christian Commonwealth Colony: A Georgia Experiment, 1896-1900,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* (Summer 1973), p. 213-224; James Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 137.

Ohio.<sup>14</sup> Damon and Albertson's ideology was in agreement with that of Gibson and Chipman: they all believed that individual salvation was tied to social salvation and that a "Christ-filled" society (based upon socialist principles) was necessary to transform society into the kingdom of God.<sup>15</sup> Chipman made the initial payment of \$1,000, the colony paid another \$1,000, and the balance owed (\$2,000) was guaranteed by the Right Relationship League, a corporation that had recently been begun out of Chicago for the express purpose of aiding newly-founded cooperative communities.<sup>16</sup>

The Christian Commonwealth Colony's new members began arriving just before Thanksgiving of 1896, with many members of the first group consisting of colonists from the Willard Co-Operative Colony (which had dissolved after failing to meet its mortgage).<sup>17</sup> Members of the Lincoln Christian Corporation and Gibson and his family (which by this time consisted of Gibson, his wife, his son, and his mother-in-law) moved to the colony the day before Christmas in 1896.<sup>18</sup> Another group from Lincoln, Nebraska arrived in August of 1897.<sup>19</sup> The other members of the colony came primarily from

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<sup>14</sup> Dombrowski, p. 134.

<sup>15</sup> Ralph Albertson, "Selfish Socialism," *The Kingdom*, July 24, 1896, p. 226; Fish, p. 214. Chipman and Damon's correspondence could not be located, and Albertson's correspondence does not contain any letters to or from any of the Christian Commonwealth Colony's founders during this early period. The only two letters between Albertson and Gibson that are known to have been preserved are from April and May of 1904. See George Howard Gibson to Ralph Albertson, April 19, 1904, Ralph Albertson Papers, MS 1752, Box 1, Folder 81, Yale University, New Haven, CT; George Howard Gibson to Ralph Albertson, May 10, 1904, Ralph Albertson Papers, MS 1752, Box 1, Folder 81, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

<sup>16</sup> Fish, p. 215; Dombrowski, p. 137; Ralph Albertson's Right Relationship League membership card, Ralph Albertson Papers, MS 1752, Box 2, Folder 169, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

<sup>17</sup> Fish, p. 215; Dombrowski, p. 137.

<sup>18</sup> Dombrowski, p. 137. Gibson's son, George Howard Gibson, Jr., was born in Lincoln, Nebraska on February 20, 1894. His step-mother, Abbie N. Gibson, died in Lincoln on September 2, 1896. It is not known precisely when Gibson's mother-in-law, Sophia Swan, began to live with the family. See United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Chicago Ward 32, Cook, Illinois, Roll T624\_278, p. 2A, Enumeration District 1387, Image 995, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1910* [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008]; Death Notice, Abbie N. Gibson, *Nebraska State Journal*, September 1896.

<sup>19</sup> Fish, p. 215; Dombrowski, p. 137.

Ohio, Florida, Washington, California, and Massachusetts. They were all Protestant, but were from a wide range of denominations. Throughout its three year and eight month existence the colony attracted other would-be members, but not all embraced the ideal of brotherhood to the extent that the founding colonists did.

The colonists were each asked (but not required) to “use, hold, or dispose” of all personal property and use labor and income “according to the dictates of love.”<sup>20</sup> In exchange for this they received housing, food, and education for both themselves and their children. Various departments were organized and directors of labor appointed to keep track of the number of hours each colonist worked.<sup>21</sup> The colony at first survived primarily off of its agricultural pursuits, but gradually expanded into raising livestock, logging, tending and harvest a large fruit orchard, and manufacturing towels.<sup>22</sup> However, it was not until the colony began publishing the periodical *The Social Gospel* that it obtained a reliable source of income (and even then the colony continued to experience significant difficulties). *The Social Gospel* was published from February of 1898 to July of 1901, and Gibson served as one of its editors. The magazine was meant to be a means to propagate the ideology of the colony, attract new members, and raise financial support. It achieved some success in this, but was primarily used to describe the daily activities of the colony. A series of photographs, taken by a member of the Damon family, were even published to advertise the colony’s lifestyle. Yet there were some even within the colony who did not approve of the way colony affairs were being managed.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Social Gospel*, January 1899, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> *The Social Gospel*, March 1898, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> *The Social Gospel*, August 1898, p. 25-26.

Conflict erupted over the colony's "open door policy." This policy allowed anyone to enter the colony, from doctors, electrical engineers, college professors, and ministers to drifters and tramps.<sup>23</sup> Some came to the colony with no possessions or funds to contribute, and others refused to work. There were also roughly a dozen colonists who, by 1899, were deeply concerned with the financial and material situation of the colony and wanted to depart—with their share of the colony's assets. They sued for the appointment of a receivership over the colony, but lost.<sup>24</sup> Many of the so-called "troublemakers" were subsequently asked to leave the colony.<sup>25</sup> This led the Right Relationship League to demand that the colony resume responsibility for the balance of its mortgage owed (as expelling colony members was not in line with the league's ideology). The colony's troubles were compounded greatly by the outbreak of an epidemic of typhoid fever in the summer of 1899.<sup>26</sup> Many colonists fled north to receive medical treatment and never returned. By the spring of 1900, the publication of *The Social Gospel* had to be relocated to the state of New York, and by June of 1900 the colony dissolved.<sup>27</sup> The ideal of brotherhood seemed to have been slowly eroded from within the colony. Gibson's hopes of realizing the kingdom of God on earth by providing a living example were dashed. He believed the colony had failed because its members did not try hard enough to apply the Christian law of love,<sup>28</sup> but he did not give up hope.

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<sup>23</sup> Paul D. Bolster, "Christian Socialism Comes to Georgia: The Christian Commonwealth Colony," *Georgia Review*, (Spring 1972), p. 62.

<sup>24</sup> "No Receiver for Colony," *Columbus Enquirer-Sun*, June 8, 1899, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> "Brewer, too, Has Been Fined," *Columbus Enquirer-Sun*, June 14, 1899, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Fish, p. 222-223.

<sup>27</sup> Peter J. Drake, "The Miller's Wheel and Houses of the Holy: An Archaeology of the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries at Fort Benning," *Muscogiana: Journal of the Muscogee Genealogical Society* (Spring 2007), p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> George Howard Gibson, "Why Commonwealth Failed," *The Commons* (July 1901), p. 5-6.

He continued to preach the Social Gospel and search for a way to achieve the kingdom of God.



## CONCLUSION

### WHAT MORE OF LOVE? THE UNFULFILLED MISSION OF THE CHURCHES

What more of love must be preached and practiced to Christianize the social order?

The unfulfilled mission of the churches is to educate individuals morally so as to bind them together in every kind of studied helpfulness, for utmost service. Evil can be shown to be evil. Evil can be overcome with good. There is enough of actual good for all within reach of all. "Let us keep our Heavenly Father in the midst" and prove what organized love can do to meet all human needs.

—George Howard Gibson

There are very few details available about Gibson's life in the years after the failure of the Christian Commonwealth Colony, but it is clear that he never lost his zeal for reform or his faith that Christian love and human brotherhood could eradicate injustice and transform society. He did, however, lose confidence in the notion that there was a definite path to the kingdom of God. His experience as a reformer and interaction with other reformers led him into the Social Gospel movement, but also exposed him to the difficulties of attempting to initiate fundamental social change. During his time with the Nebraska Prohibition Party, the People's Party, and the Christian Commonwealth Colony Gibson acquired the typical Social Gospeler emphasis upon broad reform, refined the theological justifications for his ideology, and became open to experimentation with new ideas and reform strategies. He also grew more critical of the Church and less willing to compromise with regard to his religious and political beliefs. His time with the People's Party convinced him that while some sort of organization of the people was necessary to change, reform via the political system would never lead to the kingdom of

God. The Christian Commonwealth Colony was an attempt to “show all men how to be saved” by providing the world with a practical example of what could be achieved if the people would come together in voluntary association and brotherhood and do their best to implement the Christian law of love.<sup>1</sup> After the colony failed, Gibson continued to write, learn, and search for a way to help organize the people and lead them toward realization of the kingdom of God.

By at least as early as December of 1900 Gibson was living in Elgin, Illinois and planning to co-edit a monthly magazine entitled *Social Ideals* with Carl D. Thompson.<sup>2</sup> Thompson was the former pastor of Elgin’s Prospect Street Congregational Church, and a devout Christian Socialist.<sup>3</sup> It appears that *Social Ideals* was a small publication with very limited readership. No copies of the magazine are known to have been preserved but in April of 1901, the Christian Socialist publication *The Social Crusader* reprinted a brief piece from *Social Ideals* entitled “Who Are the Spiritually Minded?”<sup>4</sup> Although there is no way to be certain that this article was written by Gibson, many of the

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<sup>1</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Why Commonwealth Failed,” *The Commons* (July 1901), p. 5-6. Gibson maintained an interest in cooperative communities throughout the remainder of his life. See George Howard Gibson to Mrs. Caro Lloyd Withington, September 28, 1906, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

<sup>2</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Prosperity Closely Investigated,” *The Social Gospel*, (December 1900), p. 20-22.

<sup>3</sup> *The Social Crusader: A Messenger of Brotherhood and Social Justice*, Vol. 3, Issue 1 (January 1901), p. 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> *The Social Crusader* was edited and managed by Franklin H. Wentworth, a close friend of George D. Herron. In May of 1901 Herron married Miss Carrie Rand, the daughter of Mrs. E. D. Rand—the woman who had endowed Iowa College (now Grinnell College) with the funds to create Herron’s position as E. D. Rand Chair of Applied Christianity. Mrs. E. D. Rand also gave Herron and her daughter a thirty-five acre farm near Metuchen, New Jersey as a wedding present. The farm was used by Herron and his fellow “social crusaders” as a meeting place. See “Prof. Herron is Married; Miss Rand Becomes the Wife of the Socialist,” *New York Times*, May 28, 1901, p. 3; Robert M. Crunden, “George D. Herron in the 1890’s: A New Frame of Reference for the Study of the Progressive Era,” *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (1973), p. 10-11; J. Stitt Wilson, “Prof. George D. Herron, D. D.: A Biographical Sketch,” *The Social Crusader: A Messenger of Brotherhood and Social Justice*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January, 1901), p. 89-91.

arguments it contains are couched in terms very similar to those he used during his time with the *Wealth Makers* and when writing for *The Social Gospel*. The article addressed the question of whether or not socialists, “single-taxers” (a reference to supporters of Henry George’s ideas), and social reformers neglected spiritual matters and paid too much attention to the material world.<sup>5</sup> The author of the article asserted that because God is present in every aspect of the universe, the spiritually-minded person could not “confine his relationship to one part of life to the exclusion of another.”<sup>6</sup> Those working on behalf of social reform “to create right relations among men in their material affairs, to establish and maintain justice, equity, righteousness in social and industrial affairs” were working just as much for the “final spiritual glorification of the world” as those who spent most of their time worshipping God.<sup>7</sup> The article concluded that social reformers—those who “protest against the injustices of the material world and seek to put them right”—are, in essence, both spiritually and morally superior to those who do not.<sup>8</sup> In the years immediately following the dissolution of the Christian Commonwealth Colony, Gibson seemed to need to believe this in order to maintain his sense of self-worth.

Due to the fact that no copies of *Social Ideals* appear to have been preserved, it is difficult to state with certainty when Gibson ceased editing the magazine and left the city of Elgin. But from at least 1903 to 1905 he was doing some freelance writing and had several essays and poems published by a variety of periodicals. The topics of his work were diverse, and testify to the fact that Gibson remained a steadfast believer in the value

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<sup>5</sup> “Who Are the Spiritually Minded?,” in *The Social Crusader*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (April 1901), p. 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> “Who Are the Spiritually Minded?,” p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> “Who Are the Spiritually Minded?,” p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> “Who Are the Spiritually Minded?,” p. 14.

of self-education. In November of 1903 Gibson's essay "The Universe Interrogated" appeared in *Mind*, a magazine of "science, philosophy, religion, psychology, and metaphysics" that was published by the Alliance Publishing Company.<sup>9</sup> In the essay Gibson discussed prevailing cosmological theories regarding the formation of galaxies and planets, including frequent references to the latest scientific discoveries of the time.<sup>10</sup> His conclusion that all knowledge is "the sum of all knowledge of God" provides an indication why he pursued such diverse subjects of study: Gibson viewed the acquisition of any knowledge as an acquisition of greater knowledge of God.

In December of 1903 and February of 1905 Gibson had essays published in the *Machinists' Monthly Journal*, the official organ of the International Association of Machinists labor union. Both were an attempt to further the reach of the Social Gospel. "Masters and Men" commented on the right of factory workers to the full value of their labor.<sup>11</sup> Gibson argued that the individualism of the nineteenth century "will not do for the twentieth," and still believed that tensions between workers and capitalists would crescendo in a great social awakening.<sup>12</sup> "Extend School Work" was a call for improved educational methods and a widening of the scope of learning in the public education system so that each member of society could make "his natural, individual contribution to

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<sup>9</sup> George Howard Gibson, "The Universe Interrogated," *Mind*, Vol. 12, No. 8 (November 1903), p. 568-575. The Alliance Publishing Company was owned by a cooperative utopian corporation called the Upland Farms Alliance in the state of New York. This company had no official affiliation with the Farmers' Alliance.

<sup>10</sup> Gibson, "The Universe Interrogated," *Mind*, p. 568-575.

<sup>11</sup> George Howard Gibson, "Masters and Men," in *Machinists' Monthly Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 12 (December 1903), p. 1042-1043.

<sup>12</sup> Gibson, "Masters and Men," *Machinists' Monthly Journal*, p. 1043.

the sum of human kindness.”<sup>13</sup> Remnants of Gibson’s vision for the Christian Commonwealth Colony’s library and educational programs are obvious in his suggestions that the public schools becomes centers of “intellectual and social life,” and contribute to a larger Progressive effort to make all people “intelligent, cultivated, and with few exceptions worthy citizens.”<sup>14</sup> One of Gibson’s poems, “The Brotherhood Forces,” indicates that he still believed the masses were motivated to social action and that “fellowship [could] swallow up faction.”<sup>15</sup> In his mind, the “people’s hour” had not yet passed.

Traces of Gibson’s writings dwindle beyond 1905. In the fall of 1913 he authored another essay on cosmological theories entitled “The Answer of the Universe.”<sup>16</sup> It is quite similar to his 1903 work “The Universe Interrogated” (and even includes use of some of the same phrases). Gibson focused primarily on the idea (still little more than a theory at the time) that the universe is continuously changing, “progressing” as he called it.<sup>17</sup> He remained interested in the notion that all knowledge could help humanity “discover cosmic truth,” and repeated his 1903 declaration that all knowledge is “the sum of all knowledge of God.”<sup>18</sup> With a good measure of the idealism he possessed as a young man, the 59 year old Gibson asserted that no matter how the universe comes to an end, it can all be considered progress when viewed as part of the larger context of God’s

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<sup>13</sup> George Howard Gibson, “Extend School Work,” in *Machinists’ Monthly Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (February 1905), p. 119-120. This essay also appeared in another industrial union periodical. See “Extend School Work,” in *The Car Worker*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (August 1905), p. 7-9.

<sup>14</sup> Gibson, “Extend School Work,” *Machinists’ Monthly Journal*, p. 120.

<sup>15</sup> George Howard Gibson, “The Brotherhood Forces,” in *The Blacksmith’s Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 9 (September 1905), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> George Howard Gibson, “The Answer of the Universe,” in *Popular Astronomy*, Vol. 21, No. 7 (August-September 1913), p. 397-403.

<sup>17</sup> Gibson, “The Answer of the Universe,” *Popular Astronomy*, p. 397-398.

<sup>18</sup> Gibson, “The Answer of the Universe,” *Popular Astronomy*, p. 398, 403.

plan.<sup>19</sup> Regarding humanity, Gibson concluded: “He is not a machine, to be scrapped. He need not be as the beasts that perish. His intellect is at home in the eternities.”<sup>20</sup>

Gibson’s name also appears in 1913 on a list of the Illinois members of the Brothers of the Book, a somewhat cult-like organization of “kindred spirits” (“idealists, poets, dreamers, bards, artists, collectors, players, and craftsmen”) who were devoted to the love of all things literary.<sup>21</sup> By at least 1906, but perhaps as early as 1904, Gibson was living in Chicago.<sup>22</sup> The 1910 federal census shows him living in Cook County with his wife, son, and two boarders.<sup>23</sup> His occupation is listed as “proofreader, daily paper.”<sup>24</sup> The 1920 federal census entry for Gibson is nearly identical (although by then the family did not have any boarders and George H. Gibson, Jr. is listed as an editor of a magazine).<sup>25</sup> A 1910 listing for Gibson in a Chicago city directory states that he worked as a proofreader for the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>26</sup> For a man who had lived his life in constant pursuit of an organization to reform society and unite men in brotherhood, working as a

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<sup>19</sup> Gibson, “The Answer of the Universe,” *Popular Astronomy*, p. 403.

<sup>20</sup> Gibson, “The Answer of the Universe,” *Popular Astronomy*, p. 403.

<sup>21</sup> *Yearbook of the Brothers of the Book* (Chicago: Brothers of the Book, 1913), p. 18, 22, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Ralph Albertson to Mrs. Caro Lloyd Withington, September 4, 1906, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI. For possible evidence that Gibson lived in Chicago in 1904 see George Howard Gibson to Ralph Albertson, April 19, 1904 and May 10, 1904, Ralph Albertson Papers, MS 1752, Box 1, Folder 81, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Gibson wrote these two letters to Albertson on stationery from *Boyce’s Weekly*, a worker’s rights newspaper published out of Chicago by William D. Boyce. It is unclear if Gibson worked for the paper in some capacity at the time. The April letter indicates that his mother-in-law, Sophia Swan, was living with Gibson and his wife and son.

<sup>23</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, 1910: Chicago Ward 32, Cook, Illinois, Roll T624\_278, p. 2A, Enumeration District 1387, Image 995, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1910 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008].

<sup>24</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, 1910: Chicago Ward 32, Cook, Illinois, Roll T624\_278, p. 2A, Enumeration District 1387, Image 995, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1910 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008].

<sup>25</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, 1920: Chicago Ward 32, Cook (Chicago), Illinois, Roll T625\_349, p. 3A, Enumeration District 1972, Image 1130, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1920 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008].

<sup>26</sup> Reuben H. Donnelly, *The Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago* (Chicago: The Chicago Directory Co., 1910).

proofreader in his final years may have been disappointing. But there is evidence that although Gibson's profession no longer enabled him to express his passion for social justice, he maintained both his connections to the reform world and his identity as a Social Gospeler.

Sometime in 1920 Gibson and his family moved from Chicago to Yonkers, New York.<sup>27</sup> Gibson continued to be employed as a proofreader, working for the *Yonkers Herald*.<sup>28</sup> On February 6, 1921 Gibson, his wife, and his son all became members of the Broadway Tabernacle Church (now the Broadway United Church of Christ).<sup>29</sup> The church was Congregationalist and known for its liberal views on social issues. There is no record of the Gibson family's participation in the church aside from the basic information listed in the church's membership book. However, in March of 1927 Gibson referenced the fact that he belonged to the church in connection to his belief in the tangibility of the kingdom of God, using both facts as a sort of self-recommendation in a series of letters he sent out to "seventy or more forward-looking and forward-moving men and women."<sup>30</sup> He sent a copy of one of the letters to Graham Taylor, founder of the Chicago Commons (a settlement house modeled after Jane Addams' and Ellen Gates Starr's Hull House). Gibson, by that time 73 years old, stated that he had written a 65 page thesis entitled "The Realm of Love" on the subject of how local churches "can and

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<sup>27</sup> Richmond Directory Co., *Richmond's Twenty-First Annual Directory of Yonkers, Westchester County, New York* (Yonkers, New York: Richmond Directory Co., 1920).

<sup>28</sup> George H. Gibson, Jr. is still listed as an editor, working in New York City rather than in Yonkers.

<sup>29</sup> Broadway Tabernacle Church, membership book (member numbers 5878, 5879, 5880), New York, New York, February 6, 1921.

<sup>30</sup> George Howard Gibson to Graham Taylor, March 12, 1927, Graham Taylor Papers, 1820-1975, Series 3: Incoming Correspondence, 1873-1940, Box 15, Folder 772, Midwest Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Roger and Julie Baskes Department of Special Collections, Chicago, IL.

must” begin working to save individuals from selfishness.<sup>31</sup> He was requesting a response to the question of “how to save the professed disciples of Christ the whole week through,” and hoped to be able to reprint at least a paragraph of Taylor’s response.<sup>32</sup> There is no record of Taylor sending a reply.<sup>33</sup> He did, however, correspond with a host of other social reformers, including the Social Gospellers Washington Gladden, George D. Herron, and Charles Sheldon (whom Gibson also likely sent letters to).<sup>34</sup>

Gibson died on June 26, 1928 in Cook County, Illinois.<sup>35</sup> He and his family were still living in Yonkers at the time<sup>36</sup> so it is likely that he was only visiting the area, perhaps traveling to Chicago to see an old friend and discuss the latest reform ideas. It appears that his body remained in Chicago for a time: his wife and son obtained a dismissal from the Broadway Tabernacle Church to the Baptist Church of the Redeemer in Yonkers on October 3, 1928 and Gibson’s body was buried at Mount Hope Cemetery in Yonkers on October 21, 1928.<sup>37</sup> His wife continued to live in Yonkers until at least

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<sup>31</sup> George Howard Gibson to Graham Taylor, March 12, 1927, Graham Taylor Papers, 1820-1975, Series 3: Incoming Correspondence, 1873-1940, Box 15, Folder 772, Midwest Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Roger and Julie Baskes Department of Special Collections, Chicago, IL.

<sup>32</sup> George Howard Gibson to Graham Taylor, March 12, 1927, Graham Taylor Papers, 1820-1975, Series 3: Incoming Correspondence, 1873-1940, Box 15, Folder 772, Midwest Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Roger and Julie Baskes Department of Special Collections, Chicago, IL.

<sup>33</sup> Graham Taylor Papers, 1820-1975, Series 2: Outgoing Correspondence, 1873-1938, Boxes 6-11, Midwest Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Roger and Julie Baskes Department of Special Collections, Chicago, IL.

<sup>34</sup> Graham Taylor Papers, 1820-1975, Series 2: Outgoing Correspondence, 1873-1938, Boxes 6-11, Midwest Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Roger and Julie Baskes Department of Special Collections, Chicago, IL.

<sup>35</sup> Illinois State Archives Death Index, pre-1916, [accessed 30 June 2008 via <<http://www.ilsos.gov/GenealogyMWeb/deathsrch.html>>].

<sup>36</sup> Richmond Directory Co., *Richmond’s Twenty-Ninth Annual Directory of Yonkers, Westchester County, New York* (Yonkers, New York: Richmond Directory Co., 1928).

<sup>37</sup> Broadway Tabernacle Church, membership book (member numbers 5878, 5879, 5880), New York, New York, October 3, 1928; Mount Hope Cemetery, Burial Records, George H. Gibson, Yonkers, New York. Gibson’s body remains at the cemetery to this day, in section 81, lot 230, row 1, grave 2.



1930; George H. Gibson, Jr. remained in the family home as late as 1939.<sup>38</sup> Even in his old age—decades after his career as a reformer had supposedly ended—Gibson continued to search for a path to the kingdom of God. An excerpt from his final thesis, “The Realm of Love,” restates the basic beliefs he held since his time as editor of the *Wealth Makers*:

Thought deepens into conviction that love must not be limited to the family, or to the few. Every church, community, and natural group of interdependent individuals needs to search out and make clear the common good. The follower of Christ must reject the customary governing assumption that it is wise to get all one can from others. Six days out of seven, getting as much and giving as little as possible is the rule, the prevailing practices. So without faith in God are we, so self-centered in buying and selling, in commanding instead of giving service, that we cut ourselves off from love, from the love of men and from the love of God. The unfulfilled mission of the churches is to educate individuals morally so as to bind them together in every kind of studied helpfulness, for utmost service. Evil can be shown to be evil. Evil can be overcome with good. There is enough of actual good for all within reach of all. “Let us keep our Heavenly Father in the midst” and prove what organized love can do to meet all human needs.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*: Yonkers, Westchester, New York, Roll 1667, p. 9B, Enumeration District 26, image 515.0, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930 [accessed via ancestry.com 16 July 2008]; Richmond Directory Co., *Richmond's Thirty-First Annual Directory of Yonkers, Westchester County, New York* (Yonkers, New York: Richmond Directory Co., 1930); Richmond Directory Co., *Richmond's Fortieth Annual Directory of Yonkers, Westchester County, New York* (Yonkers, New York: Richmond Directory Co., 1939).

<sup>39</sup> George Howard Gibson to Graham Taylor, March 12, 1927, Graham Taylor Papers, 1820-1975, Series 3: Incoming Correspondence, 1873-1940, Box 15, Folder 772, Midwest Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Roger and Julie Baskes Department of Special Collections, Chicago, IL.



```

<text>
<w>Welcome</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>TokenX:</w>
<w>Please</w>
<w>select</w>
<w>a</w>
<w>file</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>analyze.</w>
</text>

```

**begin**

1. Choose file

**visualize**

1. Normal view
2. Word cloud view
3. Highlight words
4. Keyword in context
5. Replace words with blocks
6. Highlight punctuation and non-words

**analyze**

### TokenX: a text visualization, analysis, and play tool

File: "http://segonku.unl.edu/~mtiedje/xml\_docs/ep.xml\_docs.news.wealthmakers.corpuspreherraon.txt"

Choose keyword:

... panics and periods of **business** depression. They are ...  
... men in all their **business** relations, by the ...  
... all selfishness in the **business** world? Wealth gained ...  
... unselfish men to do **business** with—can we? The ...  
... our products. Every **business** which we nationalize we ...  
... we nationalize the banking **business** and the transportation business ...  
... business and the transportation **business** . Well, what ...  
... the twelve periods of **business** paralysis of this century ...  
... panics and periods of **business** depression must follow each ...  
... nationalizing the whole banking **business** , loans, deposits ...  
... would boom the clothing **business** ; the shivering poor ...

**Figure 2.** Screen capture of TokenX keyword in context search for term “business” in a collection of Gibson’s editorials prior to Herron’s influence. (Figures 2 through 11 were all created using TokenX).

<pre> &lt;text&gt; &lt;w&gt;Welcome&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;TokenX&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;Please&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;select&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;a&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;file&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;to&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;analyze.&lt;/w&gt; &lt;/text&gt; </pre> <p><b>begin</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Choose file</li> </ol> <p><b>visualize</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Normal view</li> <li>2. Word cloud view</li> <li>3. Highlight words</li> <li>4. Keyword in context</li> <li>5. Replace words with blocks</li> <li>6. Highlight punctuation and non-words</li> </ol> <p><b>analyze</b></p>	<h3>TokenX: a text visualization, analysis, and play tool</h3> <p>File: "http://segonku.unl.edu/~mtiedje/xml_docs/ep.xml_docs.news.wealthmakers.corpuspreherron.txt"</p> <p>Choose keyword:</p> <input type="text"/> <p><input type="button" value="eXecute"/></p> <p>... , and those who profit by or defend these ...  ... on by the net profit method that labor, ...  ... that is, a profit for their employers; ...  ... earner must earn another profit for him. Hardly ...  ... first have a net profit ; the capitalists must ...  ... more for less, profit , something for nothing ...  ... cannot accept that net profit which is another's loss ...  ... four hundred millions net profit dividends would be saved ...</p>
--	--

Figure 3. Screen capture of TokenX keyword in context search for term “profit” in a collection of Gibson’s editorials prior to Herron’s influence.

```

<text>
<w>Welcome</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>TokenX</w>
<w>Please</w>
<w>select</w>
<w>a</w>
<w>file</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>analyze.</w>
</text>

```

**TokenX**

**begin**

1. Choose file

**visualize**

1. Normal view
2. Word cloud view
3. Highlight words
4. Keyword in context
5. Replace words with blocks
6. Highlight punctuation and non-words

**analyze**

### TokenX: a text visualization, analysis, and play tool

File: "http://segonku.unl.edu/~mtiedje/xml\_docs/ep.xml\_docs.news.wealthmakers.corpuspreherron.txt"

Choose keyword:

... that the products of **labor** are in the hands ...

... net profit method that **labor**, labor products and ...

... method that labor, **labor** products and money do ...

... profits to the whole **labor** cost. The landlords ...

... He who lives without **labor**, upon the labor ...

... labor, upon the **labor** of others, cannot ...

... and exchange gain more **labor** product, more wealth ...

... exchanges, by others' **labor**, may purchase sensuous ...

... the common product of **labor**, is the necessary ...

... resources: and human **labor** and natural resources can ...

... as much land as **labor** needs there is no ...

... greater reward for their **labor**? Is it tariff ...

... which would leave only **labor** cost of transportation between ...

... one could live without **labor**; no one could ...

Figure 4. Screen capture of TokenX keyword in context search for term “labor” in a collection of Gibson’s editorials prior to Herron’s influence.

```

<text>
<w>Welcome</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>TokenX!</w>
<w>Please</w>
<w>select</w>
<w>a</w>
<w>file</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>analyze.</w>
</text>

```

**TokenX**

**begin**

1. Choose file

**visualize**

1. Normal view
2. Word cloud view
3. Highlight words
4. Keyword in context
5. Replace words with blocks
6. Highlight punctuation and non-words

**analyze**

### TokenX: a text visualization, analysis, and play tool

File: "http://segonku.unl.edu/~mtiedje/xml\_docs/ep.xml\_docs.news.wealthmakers.corpuspreherron.txt"

Choose keyword:

... of getting goods to **market** is carried on by ...  
... is put on the **market** without adding one or ...  
... draw out of the **market**, and has given ...  
... of these regularly recurring **market** gluts and stopping of ...  
... pouring goods into the **market** for money, what ...  
... of each upon the **market** equal to the market ...  
... market equal to the **market** value of his product ...  
... in each decade the **market** will be full and ...  
... it all in the **market** each year, the ...  
... each year, the **market** would be emptied and ...  
... needed to empty the **market**, panics and periods ...  
... would provide a sufficient **market** for our food products ...

Figure 5. Screen capture of TokenX keyword in context search for term “market” in a collection of Gibson’s editorials prior to Herron’s influence.

```

<text>
<w>Welcome</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>TokenX!</w>
<w>Please</w>
<w>select</w>
<w>a</w>
<w>file</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>analyze.</w>
</text>

```

**begin**

1. Choose file

**visualize**

1. Normal view
2. Word cloud view
3. Highlight words
4. Keyword in context
5. Replace words with blocks
6. Highlight punctuation and non-words

**analyze**

### TokenX: a text visualization, analysis, and play tool

File: "http://segonku.unl.edu/~mtiedje/xml\_docs/ep.xml\_docs.news.wealthmakers.corpuspreherron.txt"

Choose keyword:

... exchange gain more labor **product** , more wealth than ...

... voluntary, and the **product** must belong to those ...

... share of the common **product** of labor, is ...

... market value of his **product** , and his product ...

... product, and his **product** equal to his legitimate ...

... less for their entire **product** than they must pay ...

... pay for the same **product** as consumers. If ...

... nine-tenths of their yearly **product** , with the money ...

... full value of our **product** would be complete protection ...

**Figure 6.** Screen capture of TokenX keyword in context search for term “product” in a collection of Gibson’s editorials prior to Herron’s influence.

```

<text>
<w>Welcome</w>
<w>0</w>
<w>TokenX!</w>
<w>Please</w>
<w>select</w>
<w>a</w>
<w>file</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>analyze.</w>
</text>

```

### begin

1. Choose file

### visualize

1. Normal view
2. Word cloud view
3. Highlight words
4. Keyword in context
5. Replace words with blocks
6. Highlight punctuation and non-words

### analyze

## TokenX: a text visualization, analysis, and play tool

File: "http://segonku.unl.edu/~mtiedje/xml\_docs/ep.xml\_docs.news.wealthmakers.corpuspreherron.txt"

Choose keyword:

... the rulers of the **people** and the expounders of ...  
... cause of the common **people** is marching on. ...  
... An increasing number of **people** are coming to see ...  
... preaching it; the **people** are practicing it in ...  
... charity to feed 240,000 **people** in that city who ...  
... and hoarded by the **people** whose needs are abundantly ...  
... too, while the **people** who produced all the ...  
... reason is that the **people** as producers and public ...  
... consumers. If 12,000,000 **people** with the money paid ...  
... tender money for the **people** at cost, that ...  
... the hands of the **people** the millions now hungry ...

Figure 7. Screen capture of TokenX keyword in context search for term “people” in a collection of Gibson’s editorials prior to Herron’s influence.



```

<text>
<w>Welcome</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>TokenX!</w>
<w>Please</w>
<w>select</w>
<w>a</w>
<w>file</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>analyze.</w>
</text>

```

**TokenX**

**begin**

1. Choose file

**visualize**

1. Normal view
2. Word cloud view
3. Highlight words
4. Keyword in context
5. Replace words with blocks
6. Highlight punctuation and non-words

**analyze**

### TokenX: a text visualization, analysis, and play tool

File: "http://segonku.unl.edu/~mtiedje/xml\_docs/ep.xml\_docs.news.wealthmakers.corpuspreherron.txt"

Choose keyword:

... the ear of the **moral** teachers and preachers of ...

... reason with them regarding **moral** and social questions and ...

... it raised permanently the **moral** standard of Christendom, ...

... Protestant. The irresistible **moral** forces will all be ...

... enough attention to the **moral** side of our questions ...

... monopoly questions are not **moral** questions, that they ...

... be legalized, the **moral** law condemns monopolists and ...

... are criminals. The **moral** sense of mankind must ...

... can be Christian or **moral** who is not with ...

... nobler, more unselfish **moral** leaders. We must ...

**Figure 8.** Screen capture of TokenX keyword in context search for term “moral” in a collection of Gibson’s editorials prior to Herron’s influence.

```

<text>
<w>Welcome</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>TokenX</w>
<w>Please</w>
<w>select</w>
<w>a</w>
<w>file</w>
<w>to</w>
<w>analyze.</w>
</text>

```

**begin**

1. Choose file

**visualize**

1. Normal view
2. Word cloud view
3. Highlight words
4. Keyword in context
5. Replace words with blocks
6. Highlight punctuation and non-words

**analyze**

### TokenX: a text visualization, analysis, and play tool

File: "http://segonku.unl.edu/~mtiedje/xml\_docs/ep.xml\_docs.news.wealthmakers.corpuspreherron.txt"

Choose keyword:

... and through them the **cause** of the common people ...

... the eternities. Our **cause** is the cause of ...

... Our cause is the **cause** of justice, the ...

... of justice, the **cause** of humanity; and ...

... ; and such a **cause** cannot be crushed down ...

... ) sins are the **cause** of all this infinite ...

... They are the sole **cause** of panics and periods ...

... there is no natural **cause** or reason why steady ...

... ? What is the **cause** of these regularly recurring ...

Figure 9. Screen capture of TokenX keyword in context search for term “cause” in a collection of Gibson’s editorials prior to Herron’s influence.

<pre> &lt;text&gt; &lt;w&gt;Welcome&lt;/w&gt; &lt;/text&gt; &lt;w&gt;TokenX:&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;Please&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;select&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;a&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;file&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;to&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;analyze.&lt;/w&gt; &lt;/text&gt; </pre> <p><b>begin</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Choose file</li> </ol> <p><b>visualize</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Normal view</li> <li>2. Word cloud view</li> <li>3. Highlight words</li> <li>4. Keyword in context</li> <li>5. Replace words with blocks</li> <li>6. Highlight punctuation and non-words</li> </ol> <p><b>analyze</b></p>	<h3>TokenX: a text visualization, analysis, and play tool</h3> <p>File: "http://segonku.unl.edu/~mtiedje/xml_docs/ep.xml_docs.news.wealthmakers.corpuspreherron.txt"</p> <p>Choose keyword:</p> <input type="text"/> <p><input type="button" value="eXecute"/></p> <p>... ever before by any <b>political</b> party conceived and formulated ...</p> <p>... to be religious and <b>political</b> . 'From each according ...</p> <p>... his fellowmen. The <b>political</b> part of the question ...</p> <p>... wisdom must unite our <b>political</b> strength, our voting ...</p>
---	--

Figure 10. Screen capture of TokenX keyword in context search for term “political” in a collection of Gibson’s editorials prior to Herron’s influence.

<pre>&lt;w&gt;file&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;to&lt;/w&gt; &lt;w&gt;analyze.&lt;/w&gt; &lt;/text&gt;</pre> <p><b>begin</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Choose file</li> </ol> <p><b>visualize</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Normal view</li> <li>2. Word cloud view</li> <li>3. Highlight words</li> <li>4. Keyword in context</li> <li>5. Replace words with blocks</li> <li>6. Highlight punctuation and non-words</li> </ol> <p><b>analyze</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Count words in context</li> <li>2. Decontextualize and count</li> <li>3. Word statistics</li> <li>4. Punctuation and non-word statistics</li> </ol>	<p>Choose keyword:</p> <input type="text"/> <p>eXecute</p> <p>... society of the future <b>must</b> be built, must ...  ... must be built, <b>must</b> grow. The populist ...  ... moral sense of mankind <b>must</b> see this if attention ...  ... who work for wages <b>must</b> earn their wages and ...  ... employer the wage earner <b>must</b> earn another profit for ...  ... cost. The landlords <b>must</b> first have a net ...  ... profit; the capitalists <b>must</b> have dividends on their ...  ... and the money loaners <b>must</b> have interest. Rent ...  ... moral leaders. We <b>must</b> be just before we ...  ... . But this creation <b>must</b> be voluntary, and ...  ... , and the product <b>must</b> belong to those whose ...  ... obligation. Its authority <b>must</b> be recognized, and ...  ... and those recognizing it <b>must</b> add together or mutual ...  ... productive forces. It <b>must</b> be each serving all ...  ... Uniting our economic wisdom <b>must</b> unite our political strength ...  ... entire product than they <b>must</b> pay for the same ...  ... periods of business depression <b>must</b> follow each other. ...</p>
---	---

**Figure 11.** Screen capture of TokenX keyword in context search for term “must” in a collection of Gibson’s editorials prior to Herron’s influence.



## DIGITAL HISTORY AS A METHOD OF RESEARCH

A key component of this thesis is the digital project: *Editing Populism: George H. Gibson and Applied Christianity in Gilded Age Nebraska*. *Editing Populism* is a work of digital scholarship with several goals. It seeks to utilize the unique advantages of digital humanities tools as both a method of research and a medium in which to present an historical argument. Digital textual analysis tools are used in combination with “traditional” historical research methods (such as close reading) to explore source material and create visual representations of analysis. The project’s digital archive and historiography section allow readers to investigate evidence and actively reconstruct the development of the argument. The project is available online and has also been zipped down into a set of files that will accompany the copy of this thesis that will be posted onto the University of Nebraska’s Digital Commons.<sup>1</sup>

*Editing Populism* was created for a graduate seminar in digital history with Professor Douglas Seefeldt at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In the seminar, current theories of digital history were explored, a variety of digital tools were experimented with and utilized, and each student developed a digital project. The project was to be devoted to an area of scholarly research that was of particular interest to the student (usually something that was related to thesis or dissertation research) and was to be completed within a single semester’s time, much as a large research paper would be for a traditional graduate seminar.

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<sup>1</sup> The web address for the digital project *Editing Populism* is <http://segonku.unl.edu/~mtiedje>. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Digital Commons can be found at <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/>.

While my thesis utilizes George Howard Gibson as a lens through which to understand the process all Social Gospellers went through in their effort to find an effective means to achieve social reform, it quickly became apparent to me that I could not explore and represent my entire master's thesis in my digital project (due simply to the constraints of working within a single semester's time). So I decided to focus on a particular aspect of my thesis: how Gibson's ideology developed during his time as editor of Nebraska's office Populist paper, the *Wealth Makers*, and how the ideas of George Davis Herron (a renowned and highly controversial Christian socialist of the period) were influential in that process. I knew that in order for my project to be a work of digital history scholarship rather than merely an electronic text archive, I needed to focus upon a central historical question and argument, be more selective and focused in my collection of source material than one would see with a digitization project, utilize "alternative historical, theoretical, and methodological approaches"<sup>2</sup> (something that was achieved not only by presenting my argument in the digital medium but also by using digital tools to both interrogate my sources and visualize themes and patterns), and I needed to enable my readers to examine evidentiary material and form their own interpretations. I should point out here that what I have outlined are characteristics, rather than definitions, of digital history scholarship. Most historians that have experience with digital history ardently argue that there should not be a solid, immutable definition of digital history because such a definition would—by limiting what is considered digital history so early after digital history first emerged—ultimately end up limiting what is recognized as

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Seefeldt and William G. Thomas, "What is Digital History? A Look at Some Exemplar Projects," *Perspectives on History*, Vol. 47, No. 5 (May 2009), p. 40-43.

digital history.

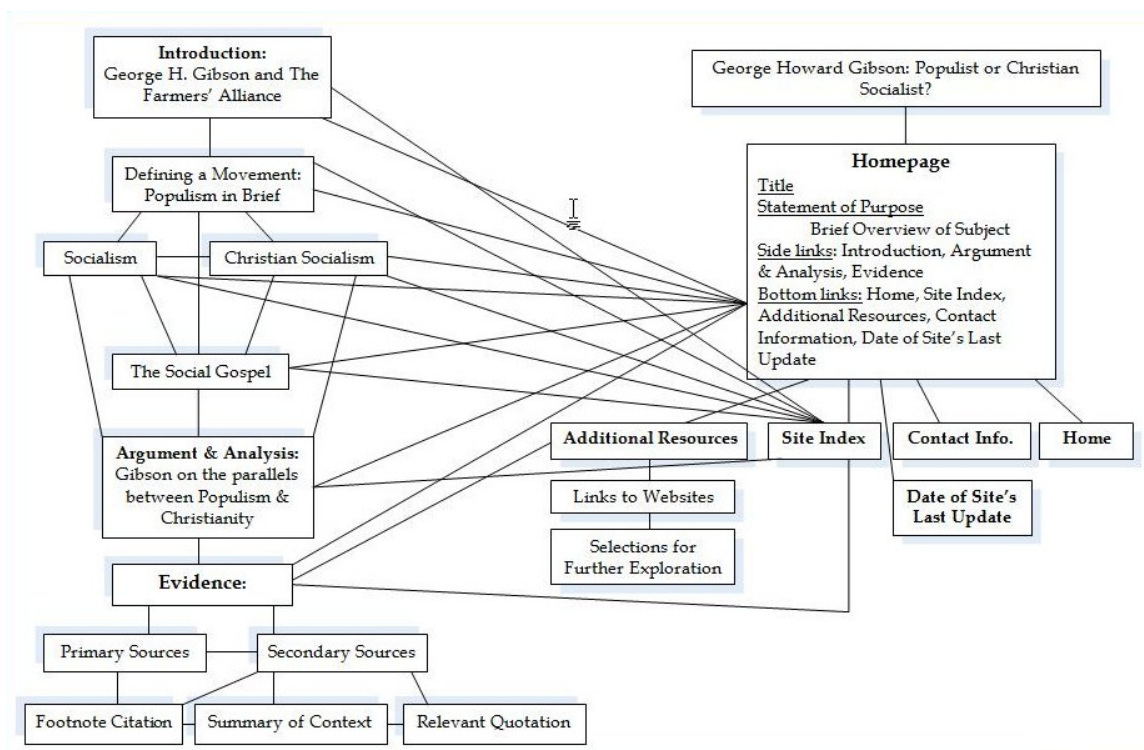


Figure 13. An early conception of how my digital project, *Editing Populism*, would be organized.

Figure 1 is an image of a flow chart, or site map, that I made very early in the development process of my digital project. It was an exercise done in seminar to help us think about how our site would be organized and how we would take advantage of the hypertextuality or “nonlinearity” of the Web to communicate our argument and to connect our argument to our evidence. This visualization highlights some of the unique opportunities and challenges the Web offers historians in constructing their arguments and communicating their findings. One of the main challenges the Web presents is related to site design, structure, and navigation. Ideally, for history done in the digital medium, content and design would inform and reinforce one another. The consideration



of structure, design, and navigation are therefore things that historians need to think about throughout all stages of the development of a work of digital history.

Just as a clear structure is key to all well-designed websites, so too is a clear structure necessary for clarifying the purpose, scope, and central argument of a work of digital scholarship. A well-designed structure should make it easier for users to navigate through all of the information and evidence that is being presented, while keeping the focus on the overarching argument. All of this is quite similar to the ways chapters and subsections help organize the information in a book. But, while the design for the organization of information in the form of a codex, or book, has been in use since the fourth century A.D., historians are just beginning to experiment with ways of organizing information in the digital medium. All historians undertaking a digital work also have to give significant consideration to navigation. Like structure in general, navigation in a digital work should be reader (or “user,” if you prefer) oriented. Navigation should be designed with the purpose of making it apparent to readers “where” they are in the site, where the historical materials they may want to access are, and should enable them to quickly and easily access and return to the argument. Design is also key to the communication of argument in the digital medium.

It can be easy to take for granted the design aspect of books, often because book design is a part of the process of producing scholarship that editors and publishers, rather than scholars, are in charge of. In the digital medium, the historian is not only the author, but also the editor, and, in many cases today, the publisher as well. With digital history, then, the historian must take it upon him or herself to consider how several aspects of

design will impact the way their readers interact with their argument. And with argument being so central to digital history, the question of how to communicate an argument effectively in the digital medium arises.

One of the most exciting and most challenging issues presented to historians by the Web is the issue of hypertextuality or “nonlinearity.” Hypertext is a foundational principle of the Web, and should therefore be a foundational principle of digital historical scholarship as well. Hypertextuality has many implications for doing history in the digital. Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig note that hypertextuality “fractures and decenters traditional master narratives” in ways viewed as beneficial by most digital historians.<sup>3</sup> Readers are free to navigate and access information in whatever ways appeal to them, and the connections between the logic of argument and evidence are immediately available via hyperlinks.

An example of the use of nonlinearity to connect argument and evidence on my site, *Editing Populism*, can be seen in figure 2 below. Figure 2 is a screen capture from my project that illustrates how readers get to choose how they interact with the arguments and information. (Screen captures are images taken by a computer to record data displayed on the computer’s monitor.) It is an image of my selected archive of source material, which mostly consists of newspaper editorials and articles that I have written summaries for. These summaries provide the reader with access not only to a summation of the editorial or article’s content, but also to my argument and, via hyperlinks embedded within the summaries, to a transcription of the actual source. Nearly all of the

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 8.

articles and editorials on my site were transcribed by me, although I did eventually hire an undergraduate, Jessica Dussault, to assist me with the transcription and basic encoding of primary source material.

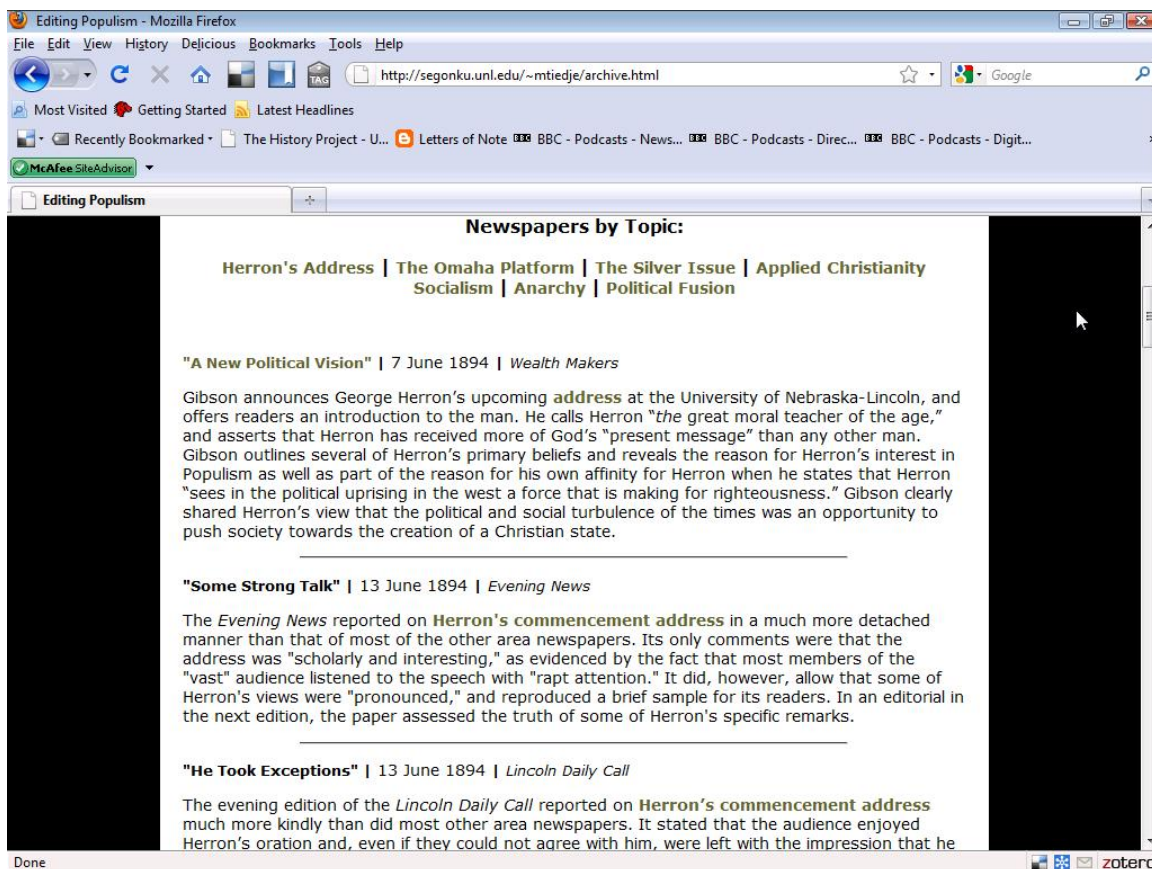
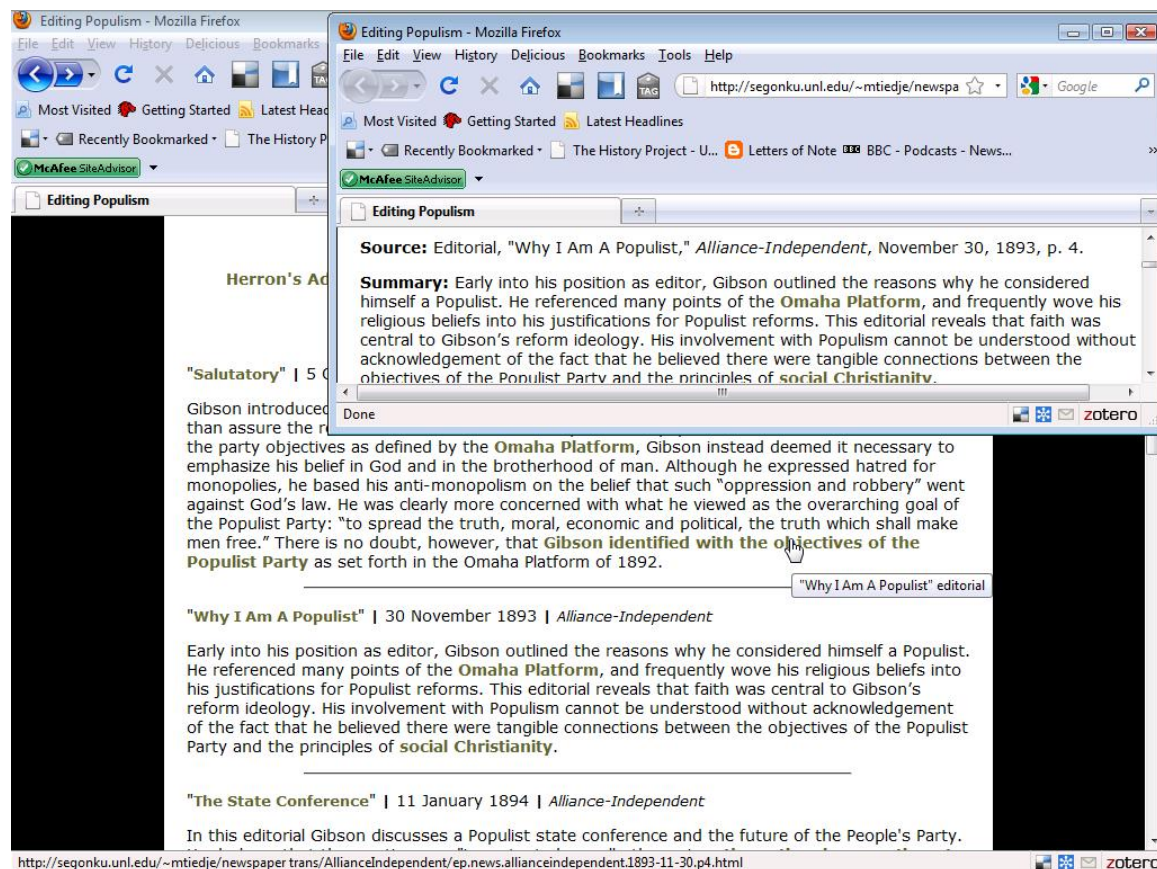


Figure 2. Screen capture of *Editing Populism's* digital archive.

You can see in figure 3 that if readers are curious about the evidence I am basing an argument on, they are free to examine the connection between my argument and my evidence for themselves. In this example I am making an argument in an editorial summary about the similarities Gibson saw between social Christianity and the objectives of the People's Party, and readers can click on the link I have embedded within that summary and read a transcription of the editorial associated with it. This allows readers

to form associations of their own; they are free to examine all of my evidence not only to agree or disagree with me, but they also may come up with alternative interpretations based upon a reading of my argument and an examination of my selected source material.



**Figure 3.** Screen capture illustrating the connection between arguments and evidence in *Editing Populism's* digital archive.

Another thing I had to consider when actually writing for my project were the current theory debates about whether or not historians can engage in long-form writing in the digital medium. Even those who complain that the Web is causing the world's attention span to get shorter and shorter recognize the fact that lengthy passages present problems for those attempting to read them on a computer screen. But this is an area that even within the last several years we have seen technology improve, for example with the

development of higher resolution computer monitors and “electronic ink” that reduce eyestrain, making it easier and more comfortable to read online. Although “chunking” of text on the Web (reducing the amount of text for the purpose of making online reading easier) has been a fairly standard practice, and most agree that scrolling through hundreds of pages of text online is much more difficult than navigating hundreds of pages in a book, people are increasingly reading more lengthy sections of text online—largely as a result of advances in technology like those mentioned above.<sup>4</sup> Still, I tried to keep the length of the text on my site at what I considered “manageable” levels for readers. Theories about the “chunking” of text and the potential for long-form writing in the digital medium are currently in transition with some, such as Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, arguing that the “skepticism toward long-form text on the web may turn out to be transient.”<sup>5</sup> Cohen and Rosenzweig believe that historians must challenge the trend toward “chunking,” otherwise the tolerance for long-form writing on the Web may actually decrease with time.<sup>6</sup>

In our digital history seminar we were introduced to a small sample of digital tools that were of particular relevance to historians. Since then even more have become available, and still more continue to be developed, increasingly with the input and aid of historians and other humanities scholars, a collaboration that is vital if the tools are to become what we, as humanities scholars, need them to be. Two tools that I have found to be particularly useful for my work are word clouds and TokenX. Throughout my research, I used Wordle to create my word clouds. Wordle is an open-source digital tool,

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<sup>4</sup> Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*, p. 124-125.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*, p. 125.

created by Jonathan Feinberg, which allows users to create word cloud visualizations based upon the frequency of words in a given text. Words used most often appear larger in size, and can be made to appear brighter in color. TokenX is a digital tool that can be used to analyze and visualize patterns present in text. It was created by Brian L. Pytlik Zillig, Associate Professor and Digital Initiatives Librarian at the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. While a thorough reading of text reveals some of the same patterns seen with the use of TokenX, these patterns are often more immediately apparent and more easily visualized with the aid of TokenX. I believe that digital textual analysis tools such as TokenX are effective facilitators of historical research that can complement “traditional” (i.e. “non-digital”) research methodologies. Both word clouds and TokenX aided my research and influenced the formulation of my argument. After reading and taking notes on a particular text, I would typically try creating a word cloud with it to see if any patterns I had not noticed via reading and note-taking emerged. I would then experiment with several of TokenX’s functions to see if further patterns became apparent.



the ideas Gibson sought to emphasize in his attempts to sway others to his point of view. Other textual analyses I have done with TokenX and word clouds have supported the fact that Gibson's ideology and theology both became much more specific than before he encountered Herron's ideas. On both my site and in my thesis I endeavored to take advantage of digital tools not only to interrogate my sources, but also to help myself and my readers visualize themes and patterns.

As technology penetrates deeper into everyday life, the academy has an obligation to explore and promote the ways digital technology can advance the cause of scholarship. Digital technology grants historians more than just new ways to store and organize information: it provides new methods to interrogate sources and communicate scholarly arguments. It is imperative that historians be aware of current theories and debates about doing history in the digital. By recognizing the opportunities and challenges the Web offers, by confronting and limiting disadvantages while seizing advantages, and by doing what historians do best: writing history, we can claim our role in the public space of the Web and do history just as well, perhaps even better, in the digital medium than we currently do in print.



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