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Article Summary: Few remember Frank Crane today, but as a syndicated columnist he became one of America’s most popular and oft-quoted writers. Earlier, as a dynamic young Methodist minister in Omaha, he threw himself into local politics with a reformer’s zeal, sharpening his ability to market himself and to communicate effectively with common men and women.

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Photographs / Images: Frank Crane (frontispiece from his book, Some Observations on Books and Libraries in General and on ‘The Sacred Books of the East’ in Particular, 1918); First Methodist Episcopal Church, Omaha (exterior and interior views); masthead of The Guidon, First Methodist’s periodical; Edward Rosewater, editor and publisher of the Omaha Bee; Omaha Mayor George P Bemis; itinerant evangelist Benjamin Fay Mills; Gilbert M Hitchcock of the Omaha World-Herald; inset excerpt from Crane’s column, Omaha Bee, November 24, 1912; inset excerpt of an Omaha Morning World-Herald article about a visit Crane was to make to Omaha, May 15, 1913; “General” Charles T Kelly addressing Kelly’s Industrial Army in Council Bluffs, Iowa, April 1894
FROM THE PULPIT TO THE PRESS

Frank Crane’s Omaha 1892-1896

BY PAUL EMARY PUTZ

The crowd that gathered at Omaha’s train depot in early 1896 to say farewell to Methodist pastor Frank Crane and his wife Ellie could not have envisioned the heights of fame to which their beloved minister would ascend.¹ A thirty-one-year-old Crane had moved to Omaha from Bloomington, Illinois, in the fall of 1892, assuming leadership of First Methodist Church.² His success in Omaha caused his Methodist star to rise, and in 1896 Crane accepted the pastorate of prestigious Trinity Church in Chicago—and with it, the largest salary of any Methodist minister in the city.³ A plum Chicago pulpit was one thing, and would have been expected by his Omaha admirers. Attaining international fame and a readership in the millions as a syndicated newspaper columnist was quite another. By the time of his death in 1928 Crane had left the pulpit behind, in the process becoming one of America’s most-read and most-quoted (and perhaps most-criticized) writers.⁴

Crane held a soft spot for Omaha long after he departed. Reminiscing on his pastoral career in 1922, Crane called his time in Omaha “the happiest of all my ministry.”⁵ His appreciation for Omaha was indeed well-founded, for in the Gate City Crane began to experiment with the writing form that became his ticket to success: the short, snappy take on current events or on human nature that he later dubbed his “preachments” or “four minute essays.”⁶

Looking at Crane’s three and-a-half years in the city—from September 1892 until February 1896—opens a window into a fascinating time in Omaha’s history and also helps to explain how Crane developed the skills needed to become a writer of national renown.⁷ As Crane sought to extend the local influence of his Omaha pulpit in the name of Christian reform, he sharpened his ability to market himself and to communicate effectively with common men and women. The success Crane achieved in gathering an interested audience in Omaha became the first move towards his transition from the pulpit to the press—a transition that not only helps us to understand the career of Frank Crane, but also helps to explain how liberal Protestant ideas were made accessible for mass consumption beyond the bounds of the church in the early twentieth century.

Crane’s entrance into Omaha came in the midst of troubled economic times. Beginning in 1890 with a disastrous year in Nebraska for crops and accelerating with the nationwide panic of 1893, the hard times remained for the entirety of Crane’s pastorate.⁸ Responses to the crisis varied, but across the country—and particularly in the Midwest and West—a sense that something must be done gained popular support. Omaha’s First Methodist Church needed reform as well. In 1889 the congregation had undertaken the construction of a brand new edifice, a costly endeavor that placed the church under a heavy burden of debt.⁹ Church leadership deemed the project necessary for two reasons. First, the 1892 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was slated to be held in Omaha. Only an impressive new building would plant the proper impression in the minds of Omaha’s visitors. Second, as an early historian of Omaha Methodism put it, “Omaha was much in need of a prominent church building, centrally located and of an attractive design.”¹⁰ Like Protestant leaders in numerous American cities in the 1880s and 1890s, Omaha’s Methodist leaders viewed the urban landscape as a dangerous place in need of spiritual renewal.¹¹ An attractive church building could serve as a base of operations as Omaha’s Methodists joined with fellow Protestants in their efforts to win souls to Christ, fight vice, and tame the city.

The beautiful new red-brick building, completed in 1891, met the high expectations of Omaha’s Methodists. A writer for the Omaha
World-Herald viewed the building as a sign of Methodism’s newfound sense of respectability and responsibility. No longer were Methodists a “kind of half civilized sort of people, who were attempting to shout and amen themselves into the kingdom.” That notion would be easily dispelled, the author declared, with a trip “to the great brick edifice on Twentieth and Davenport.” Prior to Crane’s arrival, however, the prestigious building was not living up to its potential. The pastor from 1889 until 1892, Phillip S. Merrill, was a dull speaker whose lengthy discourses “tend to tire instead of interesting an audience.” First Methodist needed a charismatic leader who could galvanize Omaha’s Methodist population (the largest of any Protestant denomination in the city), keeping the pews filled and the debt under control. With the hiring of Frank Crane, Omaha’s Methodists had their man. 

Crane’s winsome personality, his “well proportioned and athletic” five-foot eleven-inch frame, and his distinct, clear sermons proved popular. By the end of his first year more than 100 new members had joined First Methodist, putting their total at 453. In 1894 membership reached 523, and in the year of Crane’s departure in 1896 it stood at 560. One newspaper report roughly a year after his arrival claimed that his sermons regularly attracted 1,500 people. The Methodists’ presiding elder of the Omaha District, J. B. Maxfield, extolled Crane’s “glorious achievements” in 1894. Upon Crane’s departure in 1896, Maxfield offered even more effusive praise. He described the pre-Crane days as “so overcast with gloom, thick with dark clouds that betokened everything.” Crane’s arrival, however, “was to the fortunes of this church as a sunburst in the presages of darkness and storm.”

Interior of First Methodist Episcopal Church, circa 1942. The sanctuary could seat 1,200 people. NSHS RG3882-10-32-02
Crane’s efforts did indeed put First Methodist in the forefront in Omaha. Membership went up, the debt went down, and Crane worked to modernize the church in other ways. Although Crane’s talent and penchant for publicity—a theme that will be explored later—was certainly a driving force behind his success, it is also important to note that Crane did not accomplish his goals single-handedly. He benefited from the efforts of prominent lay members like lawyer Ralph Breckenridge and businessman Erastus Benson. He also had the good fortune to preside over First Methodist during the three years that Elijah Halford lived in Omaha. The former editor of the Indianapolis Journal and President Benjamin Harrison’s executive secretary, Halford took up residence in Omaha in 1893, “galloping into Omaha after the fashion of Mohammed, with a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other,” the San Francisco Call declared. Halford established a popular adult Bible class at First Methodist, leading it until his departure in 1895.

Even more crucial than the activities of prominent laymen were the efforts of the women of First Methodist. In the 1890s, as in nearly every decade of American history, women made up a greater proportion of Protestant church membership than men. Yet they lacked access to the male-dominated forms of churchly power and were constrained by the dominant notion in American society that women were designed especially for the domestic “sphere” of private home life. Women in the postbellum era nevertheless managed to extend their public influence through organizations like the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, often framing their efforts as a natural extension of the domestic sphere to which they were suited. During Crane’s tenure, this public domesticizing tendency received expression in the creation of the Department of Women’s Work. The department was organized around sixteen neighborhood-based divisions dispersed throughout the city. Each division focused its efforts on four broad activities: visiting the sick, helping the needy, reaching out to unchurched families, and promoting Christian sisterhood. Frank Crane may have been the towering symbol of First Methodist Church’s renewed vibrancy, but the women who toiled in obscurity for the sake of the church were the boots on the ground, indispensable to his reputation.

While Crane should by no means be seen as a solitary conquering hero, his involvement in at least four developments during his time in Omaha deserves further attention: his creation of Chautauqua College, his innovative fundraising techniques, his sensational public campaigns against Omaha’s mayor and against the industrial armies of Coxey and Kelly, and his invention (perhaps “branding” is a better term) of the “Pulpit Editorial.” In all four of these areas Crane framed his efforts as crusades for the betterment of his church and city. Yet in the long run they seemed to have a greater impact on Crane’s eventual career as a writer than on the city of Omaha.

Crane launched Chautauqua College in 1893, the first of its kind in Omaha. The College was connected to the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC) reading program, created in 1878 to encourage “self-culture at home.” According to historian James Eckman, participants in CLSC often banded together in local circles for weekly meetings and mutual encouragement on their path toward intellectual improvement. Crane strongly encouraged his church members to join the Chautauqua College, and he opened the doors of First Methodist for the weekly meetings. In his view, the CLSC reading program—which featured five books written and selected by trusted experts, as well as The Chautauquan, a monthly magazine devoted to the program—would serve to “broaden you, cultivate you and make your life more worth living.” In an age of sparse college attendance, the Chautauqua College provided a means through which middle-class men and women could learn from the latest and greatest in modern intellectual thought, presented in an easily accessible manner.
Along with weekly discussions of the readings, Crane brought in prominent guest speakers, such as William Jennings Bryan, professor and social gospeler George Herron, and photographer Frank Carpenter. Although the speakers generally skewed Protestant, Crane attempted to bring in Jewish and Catholic speakers as well. Careful to note to his congregation that "our religion is the helpfulest and purest of all," Crane nevertheless thought it useful to "have with us speakers of all shades of faith." The program became a hit in Omaha, widening the scope of First Methodist's outreach and adding to Crane's reputation as a modernizer. But broadening the reach of First Methodist was only useful if First Methodist kept the lights on and the bills paid. Crane understood this imperative, and he proved to be an innovative—and perhaps overbearing—fundraiser.

The degree of difficulty for achieving financial stability was already high when Crane entered Omaha. In his first year in Omaha the church narrowly avoided defaulting on a payment due on their new building. Crane made things even more difficult when he eliminated First Methodist's pew-rent system in early 1894. Under the pew-rent system, wealthy congregants purchased the best seats in the front of the church for their own use. Naturally this caused criticism, particularly in an age with an increasing awareness of wealth inequality and an understanding by many of the unfairness of America's economic system. Yet churches often felt they had little recourse. The money donated by the wealthy for the privilege of a front-row seat heavily subsidized the costs of building and running the church, making up for the considerably smaller sums that could be given by less fortunate congregants.

To make up for the loss of pew-rent revenue, Crane instituted a system of monthly subscriptions. Calculating that the church needed $200 a month to pay for all expenses, he attempted to secure monthly pledges from congregants that added up to $200. In his efforts to raise the necessary funds Crane depended heavily upon The Guidon. The short-lived periodical (it was launched by Crane and ceased publication soon after he departed) had two purposes. First, it served as a centralized form of communication for the members of First Methodist, keeping them up-to-date on meeting times, church-sponsored activities, new members, and other relevant information. Second, it was a tool for raising money. The masthead made this second purpose quite clear: printed each Saturday above the title was the periodical's motto, "The Greatest Is Love. The Tenth Is The Lord’s."

In the pages of The Guidon Crane constantly dealt with the dual problems of convincing his congregants to pledge enough money to cover monthly expenses and ensuring that congregants
followed through on their pledges. He created a club of sorts called the “Tenth List,” made up of members who had agreed to tithe (or give a tenth of their income to the church).39 To encourage others to join, he printed the names of “Tenth List” members, with the none-too-subtle marketing ploy that it was “becoming more and more popular among our people.”40

Along with encouragement by example, Crane used more direct tactics. In October 1894 he noted that the church members had only committed to giving $165 per month. “Can you, who read this, possibly increase your subscription?” he implored.41 In January 1895 the situation had gotten worse. “Some have decreased their subscriptions, and others have stopped their regular subscription,” Crane wrote. “This is no more or less than suicide.”42 Two months later, the problems persisted. “How shall this church escape defeat and disaster if its membership neglect the punctual discharge of their financial obligations?” he asked. Cautioning that members should avoid the excuse of “hard times,” he ended his plea with a warning that “God is not going to hold him guiltless who trifles with these serious obligations.”43

Crane complemented his shrill rhetoric and dire warnings with more creative tactics, including literary parody. Riffing on Coin’s Financial School, the wildly popular free-silver pamphlet that became a sensation in 1894, Crane wrote a story in March 1895 titled “Coin’s Financial Church School.” While the original featured a man named Professor Coin teaching bankers and businessmen about the benefits of bimetallism, Crane’s version had a man named “Gould Coin” (a play on the name of the famous railroad magnate Jay Gould) teaching First Methodist board members about church finances. Not surprisingly, Gould Coin reiterated familiar Crane-approved themes about generous monthly subscriptions as the proper way to supply funding for the church.44

By the summer of 1895 Crane devoted less space in The Guidon to financial matters. This may have been because they had been resolved to his satisfaction, or it may have been the result of Crane’s shifting focus towards Chicago, the city to which he would move in February 1896. Whatever the case, the constant pressure that Crane applied to the members of First Methodist seemed to put the church in better financial condition than when he arrived. The Omaha World-Herald credited Crane with “reducing the debt until now but a comparatively small portion, funded at a low rate of interest, remains.”45

While Crane received occasional attention from the press for the successful results of his fundraising, the press usually did not devote attention to his tactics. One exception came from the Omaha Bee. In November 1895 the Bee reported on a lecture Crane gave to the Omaha Ministerial Union. Crane’s discussion, titled “Church Finances,” criticized the lax giving practices of American Protestants. He referred longingly to the “Jewish law that one-tenth of the income of each individual should
be reserved for the support of the church." With an implicit anti-Catholic bias, Crane decried that Protestant churches had to rely on voluntary giving to meet their financial needs—unlike the Catholic Church, which supposedly coerced its members into giving. Edward Rosewater, the Jewish editor of the *Bee*, did not let Crane’s message go without a series of pointed rhetorical questions. “Would Mr. Crane have us go back to the era of state supported churches?” Rosewater asked. “Would he have the church-goer rated for the contribution box just as he is rated for the tax gatherer? If the free-will income of the churches is inadequate, is it the fault of the preachers or of the laymen?”

Rosewater’s dig at Crane would not have been surprising. The feisty Republican editor regularly took swipes at ministers, particularly when he detected a hint of hypocrisy. But Rosewater had another motivation for his criticism. Well before November 1895 Frank Crane had thrown himself wholeheartedly into local politics, making a name for himself to the consternation of Rosewater and the Rosewater-backed mayor, George P. Bemis.

When Crane arrived in Omaha in 1892, the city had a long-standing and well-deserved reputation as a wide-open town. Gambling, prostitution, and alcohol—the unholy trinity of nineteenth-century vice—flourished, particularly in the lower downtown area of the third ward where the notorious “burnt district” was located. Yet Omaha also had a history of reform and protest against such vices.

One of the first shots fired came in 1881, when the Nebraska legislature passed the Slocumb Law. Among other regulations, the Slocumb Law made it illegal to sell liquor on Sunday or election days, and it instituted a license system that required the payment of a $1,000 fee for the privilege of legally selling alcohol in Omaha. Then in 1887, due in part to concern over lax enforcement of the laws against vice, the Nebraska legislature changed the way that Omaha’s police force was selected. The new law wrested the power to appoint police from Omaha’s city council, and instead gave it to a five-member governor-appointed Board of Fire and Police Commissioners (Omaha’s mayor was given one spot on this board).

Despite these reforms, dealing with Omaha’s vice remained a perennial issue throughout the 1890s (and beyond). Thus, when Crane entered the scene in 1892 he came into a city that had plenty of precedent for clean-up campaigns. Furthermore, on a national level urban reform efforts were never more prominent than in the years from 1892 to 1895. During this time New York’s Presbyterian minister Charles Parkhurst engineered a temporarily successful campaign against corruption and vice in New York City, and Chicago launched a reform campaign of its own in the wake of William Stead’s blistering expose, *If Christ Came to Chicago*.

Drawing on sources both local and national, Crane soon found a way to put his name on the Omaha map. His path to notoriety followed in the wake of a revival led by Benjamin Fay Mills in December 1892. Mills, a revivalist who tended to eschew strident emotional appeals in favor of a more sedate approach, nevertheless lambasted Omaha for openly flaunting vice. Mills had cause for complaint, for despite a Nebraska law that outlawed gambling, Mayor George Bemis (elected in 1891) had instituted a system in which some gambling houses were allowed to operate in the open so long as they paid a monthly fine of $150 and subjected themselves to regular police surveillance. Bemis regulated Omaha’s prostitution (which was technically illegal) in a similar way: each month, prostitutes and their landlords reported to the police court, where they were fined and then sent on their way.

For Mills and for many Protestant leaders in Omaha, this system blatantly violated both Nebraska’s laws and God’s laws. Chastened by Mills’s critique and inspired to action, in the last few months of 1893 Omaha’s ministerial union, led by First Baptist pastor W. P. Hellings, began a petition campaign urging the enforcement
of Omaha’s laws. In particular, the petitioners targeted the selling of liquor on Sunday, the open operation and licensing of gambling houses, and the open operation and licensing of prostitution. They asked Omaha’s officials—including the mayor, city council, and police chief—to carry out their duties and shut down the houses of ill-repute.

On February 17, 1893, the anti-vice petition, reportedly measuring 115 feet long and including 4,000 signatures, was presented to Omaha’s city council. The council quickly dispatched it to the mayor and the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners (BFPC), noting that those entities held the power to enforce laws. Before the council meeting adjourned, however, Mayor George Bemis—who happened to be in attendance—took the would-be reformers to task. He agreed that the selling of liquor on Sunday should be stopped, if it was happening. But he defended licensing gambling houses. This tactic was more effective, he argued, than banning them outright (as mandated by Nebraska law) and forcing them to flourish in dark places. He also argued that a crackdown on prostitution would merely drive the women out of the burnt district and into the rest of the city. Bemis then turned the tables on the reformers, placing the blame for the proliferation of vice at the door of the church. “Instead of building fine churches on the hills, build a home, a mission in the burnt district, and let the society women go there and take the social outcasts by the hand,” he declared. “What the churches need is more life.”

The anti-vice petitioners did not take kindly to Bemis’s advice. In March 1893 they presented their petition once again, this time to the BFPC (as mayor of Omaha, Bemis was one of the five members of the BFPC). During the meeting Bemis painted the petitioners as fanatical, claiming that they wanted to “exterminate every saloon keeper, bartender, gambler and prostitute.” Although the BFPC elected not to take any action on the anti-vice petition, Bemis clearly felt the pressure. “I am not in favor of adopting the extreme and fanatical views advocated by some of the representatives of the anti-vice crusade,” he declared, “neither am I in favor of turning the city over to the violators of law or morals.” Trying to position himself as the compassionate and practical middle-ground between two extremes, Bemis marched forward with his policy of vice regulation.

As these developments unfolded in the first few months of 1893, Frank Crane kept a low profile. He clearly supported the anti-vice efforts, but he was not yet prominently identified with the movement. That changed in April when the Methodist Ministerial Association of Omaha and Council Bluffs met. Their two topics for discussion reflected the recent controversy between Bemis and the anti-vice reformers: prostitution and what to do about the burnt district. While some Methodist ministers supported Bemis’s view that driving prostitutes out of the district would not solve the problem nor help the women reform, Crane would have none of it. Prostitutes, he argued, did not belong in society or the church at all. In fact, their sin was “unpardonable.” He also lambasted the elected city officials for opting to regulate prostitution instead of enforcing the laws, and he argued that “without legal suasion moral suasion will never be a success.”

The public outcry over Crane’s harsh words played right into Bemis’s hands. Here was evidence that the mayor’s critics truly were fanatical. Immediately, prominent Episcopalian minister John Williams wrote to the World-Herald calling Crane’s comments “utterly alien to the letter and spirit of Christianity.” That Sunday Crane took to the pulpit in front of a packed house to explain his remarks. Backtracking somewhat, he explained that he meant only to say that the church should not exalt reformed sinners. Rather, prostitutes should come back to the church with humility. Although he went easier on the prostitutes, he intensified his criticism of the mayor. “If a man is elected to do a thing he either ought to do it or give up the job—or keep cool when plain people tell him he is a failure,” Crane said. He concluded by dismissing accusations that ministers should stay out of city politics. “The Christian pulpit has no holier task than to ply the lash on such wicked policy,” he declared.

Despite Crane’s criticism, or perhaps because of it, Bemis managed to retain his seat as mayor in the November 1893 election. But the battle was not over. Late in December district judge Cunningham Scott presided over a gambling trial. At issue was an injunction filed by Charles Pierson, owner of the Denver Saloon (and an associate of Omaha’s future political boss Tom Dennison), against a man who lost $1,000 when gambling at the Denver. In retaliation, the man “squealed” to the police, leading them to issue search warrants for Pierson’s establishment. Judge Scott was to determine whether or not to support Pierson by upholding the injunction.

During the proceedings Mayor Bemis took the stand, testifying regarding the details of the city’s regulatory policy. Nothing new came out of Bemis’s testimony: he informed Scott about the
city ordinance that decreed that gambling houses would be fined $150 per month, and he explained that police regularly checked on the open gambling houses to ensure that they were being run in an orderly fashion. This was too much for Scott. “Mayor Bemis, is there not a statute making gambling a crime in this state?” he asked. When Bemis answered in the affirmative, Scott lashed out, asking, “[i]s it any less a crime for a man to steal a horse in an orderly manner than otherwise, and what is the difference between an orderly commission of a horse theft and running an orderly gambling house?”69 The next day, Scott overturned the injunction, ruling that Nebraska’s law outlawing gambling superseded the city ordinance providing for its regulation. Unwilling to stop there, he also called for Bemis’s removal. “The chief executive of the city, who has violated his sworn duty, should be impeached,” he said, “and branded as an impeached scoundrel in office.”70

As the excitement over Scott’s incendiary statement grew, Crane cashed in on the public interest with a New Year’s Eve sermon titled, “With Hell Are We At Agreement.”71 His sermon was truly a tour-de-force of indignation. He blasted gambling house owners, elected officials who did not enforce the law, and apathetic church members. Nearly eighty years before Richard Nixon, he called on the silent majority to mobilize. “The public opinion of thieves, criminals, sports and evil-minded businessmen want [the license system]. But there is another public, sirs, than this: a public that does not make so much noise, but is none the less alive.”72 He declared that licensed gambling amounted to discrimination against the poor (who could not afford to pay for the right to commit crime), and he ridiculed the idea that Omaha was not as bad as other cities. In the end, he called for action: “But do you think God is dead? Are we incapable of doing a thing because it is right . . . The pulpit is one place where you shall hear the voice of God . . . In the name of that God to whom the citizens of this place have erected this house of worship, I lay upon you the solemn duty of impeaching every official who has protected crime.”73

With Crane and Scott leading the charge, Bemis once again felt the heat. The mayor probably did not help his cause by making Crane the focus of his annual message, given on January 3 before the Omaha city council. Calling Crane “a preacher who relies upon sensations rather than truth and Christ’s teachings to build up his church,” he defended his gambling regulation plan as compliant with Nebraska law. He also reminded his listeners of Crane’s harsh comments about prostitutes the previous spring, once again claiming for himself the compassionate high ground.74

Omaha’s newspapers had a field day with the renewed controversy between Crane and Bemis. As an ardent Bemis supporter the Bee took aim at Crane, a “minister who delivers hand-me-down sermons seeking notoriety and popularity by advertising a political harangue from the pulpit.”75 Meanwhile, the Democratic World-Herald and its editor Gilbert Hitchcock lined up on Crane’s side, declaring that his “reputation in this community places him far above the reach of the . . . arrows of the Omaha Bee.”76 Crane milked the attention, using “neatly printed placards dangling from the bell ropes on every motor car in Omaha” to advertise “in flaming red characters” that he would deliver an anti-Bemis sequel on January 7.77 True to his word, Crane came out firing—both at Bemis and at the citizens of Omaha, whom he said were complicit for allowing the gambling regulation system to continue. As for Rosewater’s accusations, Crane declared that “the religion of Jesus Christ . . . is a sensational religion.”78 The following week, Crane hammered home his theme from the pulpit once again: “The establishment of the burnt district was illegal, the present policy of monthly fines is illegal,
and the whole thing from first to last is carried on in defiance of common honesty, the sentiments of decent people and the laws of the sovereign state of Nebraska.”

Throughout January and February of 1894 the Crane-and-Scott-led attack on Bemis received considerable attention from Bemis and the press, and it re-energized the flagging anti-vice campaign first launched during the Benjamin Fay Mills revival. Bemis took the blows especially hard. For the next year he made it a habit to pepper his public speeches with shots at Crane and Scott. Appropriate venues for Bemis’s barbs included the opening ceremony for a dental society, the opening ceremonies for baseball season, and even a meeting of the Boys and Girls National Home and Employment Association.

During the latter speech, given before a group of adolescents, he went into a lengthy digression about true Christianity. Crane and Scott, he said, “have none of the true Christianity . . . They would like to take the fallen women out into Jefferson Square pour kerosene oil on them and burn them to the stake.” By the end of his speech, committee member Rev. John Williams—one of Crane’s more strident critics among Omaha’s clergy—felt compelled to ask dryly if Crane should be allowed to give a rebuttal.

Thanks in part to Crane’s and Scott’s public efforts, the Omaha city council launched impeachment proceedings against Bemis in July 1894. The impeachment effort ultimately failed, but that it occurred at all owed something to Crane’s ability to use his pulpit to marshal publicity to the anti-vice cause. Although larger political forces and personal rivalries unrelated to Crane were also involved in the push for impeachment, Bemis clearly considered Crane one of the main instigators. According to a newspaper report, during impeachment testimony he “bewailed the fact that the attention of Rev. Frank Crane and other preachers had been called to him and induced to persecute him.” Bemis had good reason for his accusations: three of the six impeachment charges brought against him were related to the concerns over gambling highlighted by Crane and the anti-vice crusaders.

Crane’s campaign against Bemis made him a household name in Omaha. But even before his sensational anti-Bemis sermons Crane had developed a habit of addressing controversial issues from the pulpit and a penchant for drawing publicity to his opinions. The issues of labor and economics, both hot topics of conversation in the 1890s, provided Crane with particularly useful material. With the economic crisis reaching its peak in 1893, Crane tended to express sympathy for working class men and women. In one sermon in 1893, for example, he declared that “[o]ur social system is not just” and argued that “the day of competition is passing; that of cooperation is at hand.” At times, he seemed to side with social gospelers like Grinnell (Iowa) professor George Herron, who believed that salvation was not merely individual but also collective, and that America’s economic system needed to be built upon the foundation of brotherhood rather than on competition and greed. Yet unlike Herron, Crane believed that the economic order could only be made more cooperative and fair through the long, slow process of changing the ideals of individuals. Passing laws would not do; only a “campaign of education” that encouraged the transformation of “the hearts of individual men” would suffice.

Thus, despite advocating an economic future in which the “vast powers of wealth” would be made “responsible to the people,” Crane remained committed to the primacy of the individual as the agent of societal transformation. His middle ground position on America’s economic system was reflective of his view on labor, as Crane seemed to vacillate between support for labor’s cause and criticism of labor’s tactics. Crane’s inconsistencies came to a head in April 1894 when Kelly’s Industrial Army, following Coxey on the march to Washington to demand unemployment relief, passed through Omaha. In a scathing editorial for the Omaha Christian Advocate, Crane denounced Kelly’s march as impractical and harmful to the laborers it purported to help. Omaha’s labor leaders quickly responded, condemning Crane for “using the columns of an alleged religious publication to abuse the cause of labor.” In response Crane defended himself partly on social gospel grounds, arguing that “the true cause of industrial suffering” was “the false economics” of the business world. That problem, he argued, would be overcome not by demanding short-term unemployment relief, but by “advocating the ideas of justice, co-operation and brotherhood as the basis of the business world of the future instead of the power, competition and hate as has been the case in the past.” Unsurprisingly, Crane’s working-class critics were unmoved.

While Crane did not convince labor leaders of the wisdom of his advice, the Bemis and Kelly incidents nevertheless show that by 1895 Crane had demonstrated considerable skill in attracting
attention to his ideas. But he was not satisfied. He
needed a more consistent way to get his opinions
into the heads and hearts of Omaha’s citizens. In
June 1895 he came up with a solution: the creation
of “Pulpit Editorials.” The editorials were short
addresses given before Crane’s Sunday evening
sermon and intended to be “an editorial statement
of the attitude of Christian manhood toward
present day topics.”95 They covered a wide range
of issues: free silver, the Nebraska state fair, trusts,
the “new woman,” strikes, Sunday excursions,
prominent individuals, new books, and more.96
To attract a wide audience Crane arranged for the
topics of upcoming Pulpit Editorials to be printed
in the Friday editions of the Guidon and the Omaha
World-Herald. On occasion summaries of his Pulpit
Editorials were also printed by the World-Herald.97

Thanks to the attention his Pulpit Editorials
received from the daily press, Crane grew increas-
ingly fascinated with the power of the newspaper.
In September 1895 he discussed for the first time
a theme that would become a staple of his later
work: the notion that newspapers were “the very
best extant medium for reaching the people.” In
Crane’s view, “[p]ulpits are good, and also are
books; the quarterly review influences few, the
monthly a few more, the weekly religious period-
icals still more, but best of all is the newspaper.”98
Crane’s use of the word influence is telling, for
in his view societal transformation could only
occur when “the influence of Jesus Christ spreads
through the hearts of men.”99 Such an influence
did not necessarily spread via an instantaneous
conversion experience, but rather occurred
gradually as people learned to think the right thoughts and hold the right ideas. The example and efforts of Christian men and women were crucial to achieve the sort of Christian influence that Crane had in mind. “Man is the only teacher,” Crane wrote in 1894. “It is not the Bible upon your pulpit … but the preacher and the people who are teaching the masses what to think of Christ.”100

Crane's fascination with the newspaper, then, came in part because he viewed it as a vehicle through which Christians could influence the greatest number of people. Crane’s notions were not necessarily unique. A similar impulse lay behind the attempt made by Charles Sheldon, pastor and author of the wildly popular novel In His Steps, to run the Topeka Daily Capital “as Jesus would” for a week in 1900.101 But where Sheldon focused his efforts on Christianizing the entire newspaper, Crane had the less ambitious goal of Christianizing a newspaper column or two.

When Crane moved to Chicago in 1896 he continued his pulpit editorials, gaining attention at a national level thanks to his more prominent city.102 Not everyone was impressed with his innovation, of course, particularly when they disagreed with his opinions. For example, Crane’s ardent supporter in Omaha, the World-Herald, changed its tune when Crane began to speak out in 1896 against Democratic presidential nominee (and former World-Herald editor) William Jennings Bryan. A World-Herald writer reminded readers that Crane was “the minister who does not want reformed women mingling with the members of his congregation” and suggested that Crane stop discussing politics and start discussing the gospel.103 Two years later the World-Herald again fumed at Crane, this time for his prayer at a peace jubilee in Chicago. The jubilee, held to celebrate the end of the Spanish-American War, was a jubilee in Chicago. The jubilee, held to celebrate the end of the Spanish-American War, was a jubilee in Chicago. The jubilee, held to celebrate the end of the Spanish-American War, was a jubilee in Chicago.

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Crane's taste for controversy was a strategic choice. He realized that a boldly expressed opinion in plain language got people talking, and that before he could exert influence he had to gain the attention of an audience. After he moved away from Omaha, however, the question of who was doing the influencing became more difficult to decipher. What had begun in Omaha as a paternalistic attempt to mold the reader or listener towards right opinions became more and more a means of merely stimulating thought, of giving the reader something interesting to ponder, of providing a service.105 Crane’s words became a commodity to be marketed, sold, and consumed in whatever manner the reader wished—particularly after 1909, when Crane gave up his pulpit for good and launched his career as a syndicated newspaper columnist.106 His columns were similar to his old Pulpit Editorials, with an important difference: Crane’s newspaper columns focused much less on helping the audience develop a Christian perspective, and much more on sentimental messages of inspiration and advice that would help readers succeed in life. Although Crane still believed that he exerted a moral or spiritual influence through his writing, he recognized that his writing was heavily influenced by the wishes of the popular audience that he wanted to reach. As Crane put it in 1922, “I . . . give the world what it wants. I give it ideas and words . . . because it orders them and pays for them . . . I am a business man. I am a merchant of ideas. I am a craftsman with words.”107

For Omaha’s residents it may have been surprising to see Crane, the ardent critic of corruption and vice, become an author known in the 1910s and 1920s for his overflowing optimism and sunny aphorisms. “You can have the success of satisfaction as certainly as two and two make four,” Crane wrote in one of his typical advice pieces.

“All you have to do is find the cosmic laws of the spirit and keep them . . . You cannot fail, if you know how to live.”108 His columns proved so popular that they were collected and reprinted in no less than eleven books between 1911 and 1920, with the capstone being the ten-volume Four Minute Essays collection.109 Crane’s simplistic positive outlook, his blatant commercialism, and his prolific production did not go unchallenged. Perhaps Crane’s former foes in Omaha took pleasure in seeing his essays constantly scorned by the “smart set” literary figures of his time, including H. L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis (who created a hapless character in his novel Babbitt based partly on Crane).110 Mencken in particular disdained the shallowness of Crane’s writing, describing it as “canned sagacity” and “boiled-mutton ‘philosophy’” that possessed “not a weakness for ideas that are stale and obvious, but a distrust of all ideas whatsoever.”111

But even if some aspects of Crane’s fame and success would have been surprising to his former Omaha acquaintances, in many ways his work...
as a columnist was an extension of the skills that he developed during his time in Omaha. His innovative fundraising tactics for First Methodist were a precursor to his ability to sell himself and his writings; his focus on reaching the “common man” shared a similar impulse with his Chautauqua project; his realization that controversy produced publicity, and that people liked simple, clearly-articulated opinions on current events emerged from his involvement in the anti-vice campaign and his pulpit editorials. Indeed, for Crane his writing career was nothing less than the natural extension of his time in the pulpit. “I do not consider that I have resigned from the ministry, or that I have gone out of the pulpit,” he wrote in 1922. “I have simply moved on to a larger charge.”

Ironically, Crane’s journey from the pulpit to newspaper celebrity had been predicted in 1897. Taking aim at one of Crane’s pulpit editorials in 1897, a writer for the World-Herald made this sarcastic suggestion: “[a] man who knows so much about newspaper work as Rev. Frank Crane is wasting his valuable time in talking to a few hundred twice a week when he might talk to 150,000 every day.” By 1922 it was clear that the World-Herald’s estimates were far too low: Crane’s editorials appeared in fifty newspapers, reaching fifteen million readers. When Crane died in 1928, Clinton Brainard, an executive in the publishing industry, hailed him as the most-read author in all of history.

There is more that can be said about Crane’s place in American religion and culture as he became a prominent figure in the 1910s and 1920s. In particular, Crane’s transition from the pulpit to the press highlights the role that early-twentieth-century daily newspapers played in disseminating and popularizing “sacred” ideas and sentiments associated with liberal Protestantism in “secular” realms outside of church control. Crane also serves as an entry point through which one could analyze the religious aspects of the development of middlebrow culture in the early twentieth century. And Crane would be an excellent representative figure to examine the way that the “business principles” of mass consumer capitalism came to be sacralized in the 1920s United States. Those questions lie beyond the scope of this paper, however. It is enough to note that Crane’s prolific future was forged, at least in part, in Omaha during the tumultuous 1890s. Crane may not have made a lasting impact on Omaha—the anti-vice campaigns continued long after he departed—but Omaha certainly transformed Crane.

NOTES

3 Minutes of the Fifty-Eighth Session of the Rock River Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1857), 117.
4 Examples of Crane’s popularity abound. In 1927 Church Business listed Crane as one of the twelve ablest preachers— even though Crane had not served in a pulpit since 1909. See “Pick 12 Pulpit Leaders,” New York Times, July 10, 1927, 7. A book of famous quotations in 1917 included thirty-one quotes from Crane, placing him alongside figures like Thomas Paine, Alfred Tennyson, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. See C. F. Schutz, Wit and Wisdom (Milwaukee, WI: 1917). A newspaper article on Crane in 1917 claimed that “In the history of newspaperdom no editorial service so widespread has heretofore been known.” See “The Story of Dr. Frank Crane,” Evening Star (Washington DC), Dec. 10, 1917, 10. In a memorial service after his death, C. T. Brainard compared Crane to Socrates and commented that no author had ever had as many readers. See “Memorial for Dr. Crane,” New York Times, Jan. 7, 1929, 11. Crane’s popularity was also recognized by critics like H. L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis. For specific criticism of Crane, see below.
6 Crane, “Personal—And Indiscreet,” 19. Crane was most famous for his syndicated newspaper columns, but he also wrote a few books and had pieces published in numerous magazines. His columns often received a second run since they were usually compiled into book form every year or two.
7 To my knowledge Frank Crane has never been the subject of critical scholarly inquiry, although his newspaper columns are often cited as examples of popular American thought in the 1920s.
9 “Rev. Frank Crane Leaves,” Omaha World-Herald Jan. 20, 1896, 1. For a brief account of the initial planning and construction of the church, see James Haynes, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Omaha and Suburbs (Omaha Printing Co., 1895), 26-29.
10 Haynes, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 26.
12 “Omaha Methodist’s Pride,” Omaha World-Herald, Oct. 9, 1892, 7. Of course, there were some Methodists who preferred to attempt to “shout and amen themselves into the kingdom,” including some in Omaha. Many of these old-time Methodists identified with the holiness movement. In the 1890s they began breaking away from the Methodist church due to its increasing sense of prestige, respectability, and resistance to the more expressive holiness worship and devotional styles. For an example related to Omaha, see Paul Putz, “A Church for the
People and a Priest for the Common Man: Charles W. Savidge, Omaha's Eccentric Reformer,” Nebraska History 94 (Summer 2013): 54-73.

[11] Haynes, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 96. Haynes also wrote that at the new place of worship, “the pews might and should have been kept filled on the Lord’s day,” and that “the mission of this central sanctuary is not fulfilled except it shall induce a house full of attendants at the regular and ordinary Sabbath services,” (94).

[12] The 1890 U.S. Census put Methodists in the lead in Omaha with 1,858 communicants. The Presbyterians were a close second at 1,708. Both were dwarfed by the Catholic population, which totaled 7,675 communicants. See Larsen and Cottrell, The Gate City, 114; H. K. Carroll, The Religious Forces of the United States (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1896), 415.


[19] For example, Crane instituted a formal Christmas service at First Methodist. He explained this decision by arguing that First Methodist “should stand for whatever is distinctive and progressive in our denomination.” See “The Christmas Festival,” The Guidon, Dec. 22, 1894, 3. Crane also began holding monthly communion services. See “Communion,” The Guidon, Feb. 2, 1895, 3. His sermons printed in The Guidon also reveal that he incorporated modernist theological ideas, including de-emphasizing a literal hell and supporting a moderate form of the social gospel.

[20] Brief mentions and descriptions of Breckenridge and Benson can be found in the following early histories of Omaha: Ed. F. Morearty, Omaha Memories: Recollections of Events, Men and Affairs in Omaha, Nebraska, from 1879 to 1917 (Omaha: Swartz Printing Co., 1917), 104-106, 201, 239; Alfred Sorenson, and Affairs in Omaha, Nebraska, from 1879 to 1917 Omaha Memories: Recollections of Events, Men Ed. F. Morearty, Benson can be found in the following early histories of Omaha:


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[27] Description of the department’s organization from The Guidon, Nov. 3, 1894, 6. Nearly every week, The Guidon included details about the work being done by each division. For other church-wide activities in which women took the lead, see “Woman’s Fund,” The Guidon, Nov. 17, 1894, 5; “The Semi-Annual Banquet,” The Guidon, Mar. 30, 1895.


[30] Ibid.


[32] The Chautauqua College,” The Guidon, Oct. 13, 1894, 4. Crane did manage to bring in local rabbi Leo Franklin. Sometimes the Protestant speakers were more controversial than the non-Protestants. For example, George Herron, a fiery early advocate of what became known as the social gospel, gave a lecture in January 1895. After Herron’s lecture, Crane described his views about the gospel as “peculiar,” noting that his ideas were “very stimulative to thought, and perhaps to controversy.” See “The Chautauqua College,” The Guidon, Jan. 12, 1895, 5.

[33] Before the beginning of the college’s second year, the Omaha World-Herald deemed it a “success” and asked Crane to discuss the college. By 1895 two other CLSC societies had been launched in Methodist Churches. J. B. Maxfield also listed the college as one of the positive newspaper developments brought about during Crane’s tenure. See “Chance to Get Knowledge,” Omaha World-Herald, Oct. 15, 1894, 8; “The Church Chautauquas,” Omaha World-Herald, Oct. 20, 1895, 5; “Frank Crane,” The Guidon, Feb. 29, 1896, 7.


One of the most heated anti-vice campaigns in Omaha occurred in 1890, when Nebraska held a statewide vote for prohibition. Most of Omaha’s Protestant clergy mobilized in support of prohibition, but they were soundly defeated. See Patricia C. Gaster, “Bad Grammar and Sensational Style: *The Daily Bumble Bee* and the Fight for Prohibition in 1890,” *Nebraska History* 88 (2007): 26-41.


Journalist Elia Peattie gave a glowing description of Mills and his revival. It was reprinted with contextual notes in Susanne George Bloomfield, ed. *Impertinences: Selected Writings of Elia Peattie, a Journalist in the Gilded Age* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 141-48.


“Chief Seavey At The Bat,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, Feb. 21, 1893, 2.


Ibid.


“Mayor Sparring For Wind,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, Mar. 14, 1893, 1. Bemis cast the deciding vote against a resolution that would have recognized the validity of the anti-vice petition. The day after the vote, Bemis issued a public order to Chief of Police Webb Seavey, directing him to regulate gambling houses, enforce Sunday saloon closings, and confine prostitution to the burnt district. See “Moral House Cleaning,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, Mar. 15, 1893, 8.

Bemis’s strategy also involved comparing Omaha’s vice to that of other cities to show that Omaha was not as bad as others. For another example of Bemis’s focus on claiming the mantle of true Christianity from the clergy-led reformers, see “Charity’s Cry,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, Mar. 20, 1893, 8. In the article, the Bee printed a letter from the Associated Charities asking for money to continue their work among the needy. Bemis had his response published in the Bee right alongside the request. He took the opportunity to highlight his own charitable work, informing the Bee’s readers that he was going to increase his giving to the Associated Charities from $5 a year to $5 a month. He also took the chance to lambast the anti-vice reformers, writing, “It is my belief that poverty is a fruitful source of crime and immorality and that it is the prime cause of a large percentage of the vice which a recent movement was inaugurated to stamp out.”

On Dennison's connection to Pierson, see Menard, 1893, 14; “Judge Scott on Gambling,” Omaha World-Herald, Dec.
did not receive as much coverage as Crane’s.
also denounced Bemis with a sermon that night, but his sermon
97 Rosewater, Bemis’s most prominent backer, was very concerned about the possibility that the anti-vice petitioners would damage Bemis’s election chances. See, for example, “Bemis, Hascall and Bedford,” Omaha Daily Bee, Nov. 3, 1893, 4; “Bemis and the Anti-Vice Protest,” Omaha Daily Bee, Nov. 6, 1893, 4.
100 “Says Bad Things Of Bemis,” Omaha World-Herald, Dec. 24, 1893, 14; The World-Herald offered cautious support for Scott’s stance, arguing that “some action be taken” in the wake of Scott’s comments. See “To Impeach The Mayor,” Omaha World-Herald, Dec. 24, 1893, 12. The Omaha Bee, with Rosewater as a well-known supporter of Bemis (some even thought of Rosewater as Bemis’s puppet master) was firmly behind the mayor.
101 “Attitude Toward Gambling,” Omaha World-Herald, Jan. 1, 1894, 3. Another Omaha pastor, Asa Leard of Knox Presbyterian, also denounced Bemis with a sermon that night, but his sermon did not receive as much coverage as Crane’s.
103 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 “After Bemis With A Stick,” Omaha World-Herald, Jan. 15, 1894, 5; For the Bee’s account of this sermon, see “Frank Crane to Men Only,” Omaha Daily Bee, Jan. 15, 1894, 2.
112 “He Took His Halo and Harp,” Omaha World-Herald, May 17, 1895, 8. See also “For Homeless Boys and Girls,” Omaha Daily Bee, May 17, 1895, 2.
113 “Impeach Mayor Bemis,” Omaha World-Herald, July 3, 1894, 8; “Cinching Him,” Omaha World-Herald, Sept. 21, 1894, 5. Per Omaha law, impeachment proceedings had to be launched by two members of the city council before being turned over to the decision of a panel of judges.
114 “Mayor Bemis is Acquitted,” Omaha World-Herald, Sept. 29, 1894, 8.
116 “Crane Talks About Labor,” Omaha World-Herald, Sept. 4, 1893, 2. Thanks to this sermon, J. W. Edgerton wrote to the World-Herald declaring his support for Crane because Crane was a friend of the laborer and held the “advanced positions” of applied Christianity. See “Politics and Religion,” Omaha World-Herald, Oct. 12, 1893, 4.
119 Frank Crane, Omaha Christian Advocate, Apr. 28, 1894, 8-9.
121 Frank Crane “The Era of the Blatherskite,” Omaha Christian Advocate, Apr. 14, 1894, 8. The Omaha Christian Advocate was an official Methodist periodical. For six months in 1894 (from February through July), Crane served as its editor.
122 “Given to Strong Language,” Omaha World-Herald, Apr. 26, 1894, 1. See Jill M. Jozwiak, “Cross-Class Unity in the Gilded Age: Kelly’s Army in Omaha and Council Bluffs,” (master’s thesis, University of Nebraska-Omaha, 2011) for an excellent overview of Omaha’s response to Kelly’s Army. See also 33-37 for a discussion of the Crane-Bemis January 1894 public battle over gambling and prostitution.
123 “Crane’s Reply to the Union,” Omaha World-Herald, Apr. 30, 1894, 5.
124 Jozwiak, “Cross-Class Unity in the Gilded Age,” 121-123.
125 “Notes,” The Guidon June 15, 1895, 3. Crane originally called the Pulpit Editorials “Pulpit Views of Current News.”
126 The titles for these pulpit editorials can be found in the
weekly editions of The Guidon from July 1895 until February 1896. Occasionally, the text of the pulpit editorials was reprinted in The Guidon as well.

107 See, for example, “Wants A Religious Day,” Omaha World-Herald, June 17, 1895, 5; “New Woman A Necessity,” Omaha World-Herald, July 1, 1895, 5; “Two Men Of Local Interest,” Omaha World-Herald, July 8, 1895, 5. James Haynes commented in History of the Methodist Episcopal Church that Crane’s pulpit editorials have “enough of the sensational to attract large congregations” (p. 98).


112 For example, his opinions were reprinted in the San Francisco Call and the Washington (DC) Times. See “Thoughts From Pulpits,” Washington Times, Apr. 20, 1896, 6; “Religion Thoughts and Progress,” San Francisco Call, Apr. 18, 1896, 8.


114 “Dr. Frank Crane’s Invocation,” Chicago Tribune, Oct. 20, 1898, 2; “What Manner of Man?” Omaha World-Herald, Nov. 21, 1898, 4.

115 See, for example, “Souls Of Men Will People The Stars,” Chicago Sunday Tribune, Feb. 28, 1897, 41. Crane had recently given a controversial lecture, and he explained that his purpose was merely to give food for thought and spur discussion with his ideas, not make them dogmatic.

116 For an explanation from Crane on how he moved from the pulpit to professional editorializing, see Frank Crane, Adventures in Common Sense (New York: William H. Wise & Co., 1916), 13-21.


119 Titles included: Human Confessions (1911), Lame and Lovely (1912), War and World Government (1915), Just Human (1915), Adventures in Common Sense (1916), Christmas and the Year Round (1917), Looking Glass (1917), Lighted Windows (1918), Four Minute Essays (1919), The Business of Living (1920), and Footnotes to Life (1920).


123 Untitled Editorial, Omaha World-Herald, June 15, 1897, 4.


126 On the development of middlebrow culture, see Joan Shelley Rubin, The Making of Middlebrow Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). Rubin mentions Crane in passing as an example of a person who provided “expert testimonial” to legitimize certain books for a middlebrow audience (p. 215). Recent scholarship has begun to probe more deeply into the connection between religion and middlebrow culture. See, for example, Matthew Hedstrom, The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Crane seems to fit in with the liberal “religious middlebrow” culture described by Hedstrom that emerged in the 1920s and was shaped by “mysticism, mind cure, and psychology” (p. 15). While Hedstrom focused attention on the creation of book-reading programs in the 1920s, Crane points to the possibility of religious middlebrow impulses found within the pages of daily newspapers.

127 Bruce Barton, author of The Man Nobody Knows (1925), a book that depicted Jesus as a proponent of modern business principles, is often viewed as the primary example of this development. See Richard M. Fried, The Man Everybody Knew: Bruce Barton and the Making of Modern America (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005). However, Crane often emphasized the same themes as Barton. In fact, in a book published a year before Barton’s bestseller, Crane described Jesus as “my spiritual executive” and heavily emphasized Christianity’s compatibility with modern business practices and principles. See Frank Crane, Why I Am a Christian (New York, William H. Wise & Co., 1924).