

Mislin, David. *Washington Gladden's Church: The Minister Who Made Modern American Protestantism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019. Xiv + 226 pp. \$70.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-4422-6892-0.

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Washington Gladden's Church: The Minister Who Made Modern American Protestantism prudently begins with a preface explaining why readers should care about Washington Gladden and this book about him. David Mislin contends Gladden is worth understanding in greater detail not because of the representation it adds to one's bookshelf (indeed, Mislin notes how scholars have written plenty about Gladden and white Protestant ministers of his ilk), but rather because the same issues shaping Gladden's rise to national prominence as a pastor, lecturer, editor, and public intellectual continue to matter today (viii). In this way, Mislin asserts, "Gladden serves as a model reformer who worked within existing institutions and brought significant changes to them" (ix). In short, *Washington Gladden's Church* can be informative and, perhaps, instructive to those interested in understanding the history of a "religious left," Protestant liberalism, social gospel movements, or, more generally, Christian approaches to injustice and reform. This brief preface is a wise addition to a monograph that could be too easily overlooked by readers unfamiliar with one of the most popular ministers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Organized in eight thematic chapters with a preface and afterword, *Washington Gladden's Church* advances chronologically through Gladden's life while also exploring different aspects of his identity. From "Observer" to "Journalist," "Pastor," "Reformer," and, finally "Critic," Gladden's life unfolds as an example of a prominent historical figure whose career changed and developed slowly over time. Experts in progressive Christianity will recognize this organizational scheme as a contribution to current literature on Gladden while other readers, ranging from historians of other fields to students to general readers, will enjoy a judiciously organized narrative avoiding specialized disagreements in text. As such, Mislin offers an accessible and useful representation of a liberal minister who became popular by convincing Americans that Christianity must change in order to speak to the pressing social, economic, and religious issues animating the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.

Using Gladden as a prism through which to understand "modern American Protestantism," Mislin effectively juggles a myriad of influences on Gladden. From Owego, New York, to Columbus, Ohio, Mislin draws attention to local norms and concerns and the roles they played in shaping Gladden's understanding of himself and his Christianity. North Adams, Massachusetts, for example, provided Gladden with a pastoral environment where "he could influence the civic life of the town more broadly" and "take on the role of a public intellectual" (42). Similarly, Mislin notes, when Gladden worked as a journalist, the commute from the *Independent's* Manhattan office

to affordable housing in Brooklyn made economic disparities and social inequalities difficult for Gladden to ignore (62). Quite helpfully, Mislin consistently frames these local cultural and social contexts within a larger national historical context. Each chapter, and thus each era of Gladden's life, are historicized within the Civil War, Reconstruction, or the Gilded Age to balance local, regional, and national influences without drawing attention to any one alone. Understandably, Mislin emphasizes the role of significant ministers and their contributions to Gladden's intellectual and theological positions. Familiar figures, such as Henry Ward Beecher, Theodore Tilton, and Horace Bushnell, receive attention to place Gladden within larger trends of liberal Protestant theology, but Mislin is careful to draw out Gladden's distinctions. Most interestingly of all, Mislin highlights the role friends and acquaintances played in shaping Gladden's most popular theological positions. This authorial decision draws attention to several women planting intellectual seeds in young Gladden's thoughts, women who never reaped personal benefits from their theological innovations yet subtly and artfully pushed their friend toward the liberal theology he popularized.

Washington Gladden's Church is written for undergraduates and a general audience. Each chapter is written with accessible language and ends with a concluding paragraph that summarizes main events and ideas. Endnotes are sparse, directing readers to primary sources, but also, at times, to paradigmatic secondary literature in American History (e.g., Heather Cox Richardson, Nell Irvin Painter, Jackson Lears) and American Religious History (e.g., Kathryn Gin Lum, Joshua Paddison, Ronit Stahl). For this reason, it is well suited for undergraduate U.S. history survey courses by encouraging students to engage primary sources and the larger historical narrative Mislin and his conversation partners have constructed about the figures, events, and ideas of the era. Advanced undergraduates and graduate students may take these considerations further by assessing the methodological concerns Mislin raises in the preface about which sources historians use—or do not use—to craft their narratives. For a general audience, *Washington Gladden's Church* invites readers to reflect upon and discuss a number of relevant theological, political, social, and cultural concerns brought to the fore through Washington Gladden's life, including the contours of a historic "religious left" movement and the shadow it left over the second half of the twentieth century. Undergraduates and general readers alike will find value in Mislin's presentation of Gladden as a significant yet flawed individual who developed his theology over time through a kaleidoscope of experiences, questioning and challenging the status quo while also possessing biases and limitations hindering his application of progressive Christianity. By the end, instructors and book club facilitators may enjoy discussing the points Mislin raises at the outset of the book, especially the assertion "the problems of the early twenty-first century are the same problems that Gladden faced over a century ago" (viii). Even though Mislin thinks so—describing Gladden as "a template for a religious center-left" (ix)—*Washington Gladden's Church* so thoroughly historicizes Gladden that some readers may find his Christianity unrelatable or difficult to digest as a popular expression of American Christianity then or now.

Unfortunately, and ironically, the cost of this monograph may present a barrier to widespread adoption in undergraduate courses. The book's price point will make it difficult for the most economically disadvantaged students to have access to this story of a theologian who confronted economic inequality, corporate corruption, and widespread greed. Fortunately, historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era have access to Professor Mislin's insight and *Washington Gladden's Church* to bring this message home.