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Social Survey Reportage: Context, Narrative, and Information Visualization in Early 20th Century American Journalism

Paper Submitted for the Journalism: Theory, Practice, and Criticism special issue “Hybrid Journalism.”

Introduction

Over the past several years, the notion of “data journalism” has gained increasing prominence in professional journalism itself as well as the larger scholarly community. Empirical papers (e.g. DeMaeyer et. al. 2015, Fink and Anderson 2014, Lewis and Usher 2013) and even entire special issues of academic journals (Lewis 2015) have been published to analyze the phenomenon of what Mark Coddington calls: “journalism based on data analysis and the presentation of such analysis” (Coddington 2015). For the purposes of this article, we can usefully see data journalism as a hybrid form of journalistic practice, one that fuses previously separate professional identities and empirical techniques such as quantitative analysis, social science methodology, and information visualization. With a few exceptions however (Anderson 2015, Parasie and Dagiral 2013), there has been little attention paid to the history of data journalism or the manner in which that journalism might interact with larger scientific and political trends in American history.

The pages that follow propose extending this nascent line of genealogical analysis by focusing on early 20th century forms of quantitative information gathering and display, particularly those that emerged in the context of the American “social survey movement” lasting roughly from 1908 through the early 1920s. The practice of an interesting subset of journalism during this time was deeply hybridized, I will show, hovering somewhere between a kind of public relations, social science, and reportorial muckraking. While this form of quantitative journalism-- what I call in this article “social survey reportage”-- was never a dominant authorial practice in the United States (or indeed, anywhere else) I focus on it here because it nicely problematizes some of the dominant tropes surrounding the analysis and practice of data journalism in the present day.

This article proceeds in three parts. After a brief overview of my methodology, I outline the overarching theoretical framework that structures the investigation into the history of quantitative journalism. I then discuss the larger political, social, and intellectual context in which social survey reportage emerged. I conclude with a discussion of the empirical processes of the social surveyors (specifically, a subset of the reformers called the Men and Religion Forward Movement) and their relationship with the institutions of traditional journalism. As I hope to show by examining the hybrid journalism of a previous era, if this practice of proto-data journalism were to return-- as it would in the 1960s-- it would be in a radically different form with a radically

different understanding of the role played by quantitative evidence in setting the appropriate boundaries for reportorial context.

Methods and Framework

This paper is part of a larger project investigating the history quantitative journalism in the United States, a project that analyzes the use of documentary evidence, data and statistics, and so-called “computational thinking” in news reporting from the penny press era to the present day. Insofar as the scope of time discussed is so expansive, the project makes use of a number of different methods, including ethnographic research, content analysis, semi-structured interviews and life histories, and archival work. For the present paper, my methods are confined to content analysis (of the coverage of the social survey movement in early 20th century newspapers) and archival and primary source research. Archives consulted include the Charles Stezle Collected Papers at Columbia University; primary source documents included Messages of the Men and Religion Forward Movement, Volume VII: The Church and the Press, Sociological and Religious Survey of Seventy American Cities, produced by the Bureau of Social Service of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and the The ABCs of Exhibit Planning by the Russell Sage Foundation. A key aspect of the paper also involves a qualitative discourse analysis of the newspaper coverage of the Men and Religion Forward movement (MRFM), which involved analyzing 409 articles about the movement contained in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>) project, along with New York Times coverage of the MRFM during the same time period. Of the 409 articles found which discuss the MRFM, a subset of 132 were further analyzed to tease out larger patterns, themes, and nuances of the news reporting, particularly how the information visualizations and quantitative evidence gathered by the movement were reflected in daily media coverage.

This article, although historical, is not simply a recounting of history for the sake of history; indeed, I hope it can shed significant light on the practices of present day journalism. My investigation into the use of data is ultimately concerned with the relationship between a “journalism of occurrences” and a “journalism of patterns,” both in the present day and over the course of history. I want to argue, here and elsewhere, that the use of particular types of data, embedded within different narrative structures, lead journalists to emphasize the context in which events occur in different ways, and that these differences are meaningful for what they say about our modern age. My project investigates the relationship between occurrences and patterns by documenting the material forms of evidence, larger political structures, and occupational cultures of news that have helped facilitate the emergence of these different visions and practices of reporting. The research pays particular attention to the material bases and

cultures of knowledge generated by historically distinct forms of reporting, with the hope of tying my investigation of journalism to larger academic discourses in the fields of the history of science and science and technology studies (STS).

The focus in this article on the hybrid form of journalism I call “social survey reportage,” then, is not simply a random choice to investigate a particularly odd form of reporting at a particularly odd moment. Emerging at the start of the start of the 20th century, social survey reportage stands athwart a multitude of converging and occasionally conflicting currents, many of which still trouble us a century later. A form of “on the ground empirical evidence,” similar in many ways to our current understanding “big data,” was just coming into vogue. This belief in gathering evidence from the field represented a further obsession with the power of numbers. At the same time, a powerful progressive current was emerging in American cities, a current that saw quantitative data as inevitably and unproblematically leading towards social reform. The status of a variety of knowledge generating occupations were also in flux, with “the professions,” as we know them today, only beginning to emerge; this led to several decades in which the boundaries between journalism, social reform, data gathering, and social science were far less solid than they were for most of the 20th century. Consequently, aspects of survey reportage were scattered across many fields and disciplines in ways that often make little sense to our modern eyes. To the degree they clustered at all, social survey reportage was focused around particular journals, such as the *Survey Graphic*, as well as around social movements, like the Men and Religion Forward Movement, rather than particular fields or occupations. The social survey movement in general, and the Men and Religion Forward Movement in particular, believed in the inherent and unproblematic truth of quantitative data, understood the visual power of graphical representation of statistics, thought that these graphics and data needed to be placed in a popular format in order to reach the people, believed that journalism had become the most powerful moral voice in society, and saw no contradiction between social science, public relations, journalism, and social reform. It should be clear that these are current as well as antiquarian topics. I now turn to an investigation of how this odd hybrid assemblage operated in practice. The story, interestingly enough, begins in London.

Social Survey Reportage in Context

How many people in 1880s London lived in poverty? No one really knew. While the regular decennial census of the United Kingdom contained figures about employment and the distribution of workers into a variety of occupational categories, the quality of the data on work and poverty was poor (Bales 1991, 71). In particular, the census conflated occasional employment with full employment, meaning that a respondent counted as a “worker” even if he or she had not been

regularly employed for many years (*ibid*). Beyond this basic methodological opacity, the question of how to correlate even nominal employment with actual poverty and wealth was a contested question, with the answer usually depending more on the respondent's ideological predispositions than on actual evidence. The political parties in Britain did not collect detailed information about wages and poverty, and official government statistics, such as those used to document the application of the Poor Law, were shoddy and unreliable (Bumler, Bales and Sklar 1991, 18-19).

Thus, without an answer to even the most basic of questions— how many people in London were poor?— answers to the far more socially and politically vexed questions of why some people were poor and what could be done about it were unanswerable through empirical methods. And answering these questions was of vital social and political importance, particularly to an English middle-class which had come of age in the 19th century and was now watching the Victorian economic and social ideals which formed the background nexus to its' general worldview challenged on a number of fronts (McGerr 2005). The consequences of the by now century-old Industrial Revolution were no longer new or hidden; by the 1880s, "economic depression had heightened social tensions [and] political groups that had competed in prosperity descended into conflict." (Bumler, Bales and Sklar 1991, 17). Under pressure from a variety of powerful working class movements, and with the full impact of industrialization upon urban life now difficult to ignore (the 1886 "Black Monday" and 1887 "Bloody Sunday" riots in Trafalgar Square drew particular attention to the so-called "social question" and the "problem of the 'East End'"), general concerns with ameliorating a plethora of perceived social ills would only sharpen. At the same time, a number of historians of social science have pointed to the emergence of a second, seemingly tangential movement that would ultimately compliment this interest in the causes of poverty: an growing obsession with statistics and empiricism as the proper lens for understanding society. "One of the impulses that first drove people to measure economic phenomena was an ethical impulse to understand rapidly evolving modern societies ... it was not primarily a desire to imitate natural scientists that led early [economists] to attempt the measurement of social phenomena, but rather a moral curiosity to more fully understand the world unfolding around them." (Bateman 2001, 57) In an attempt to answer these questions about the incidence poverty and what to do about it, we would see the emergence of a particular hybrid form of journalism I call "social survey reportage."

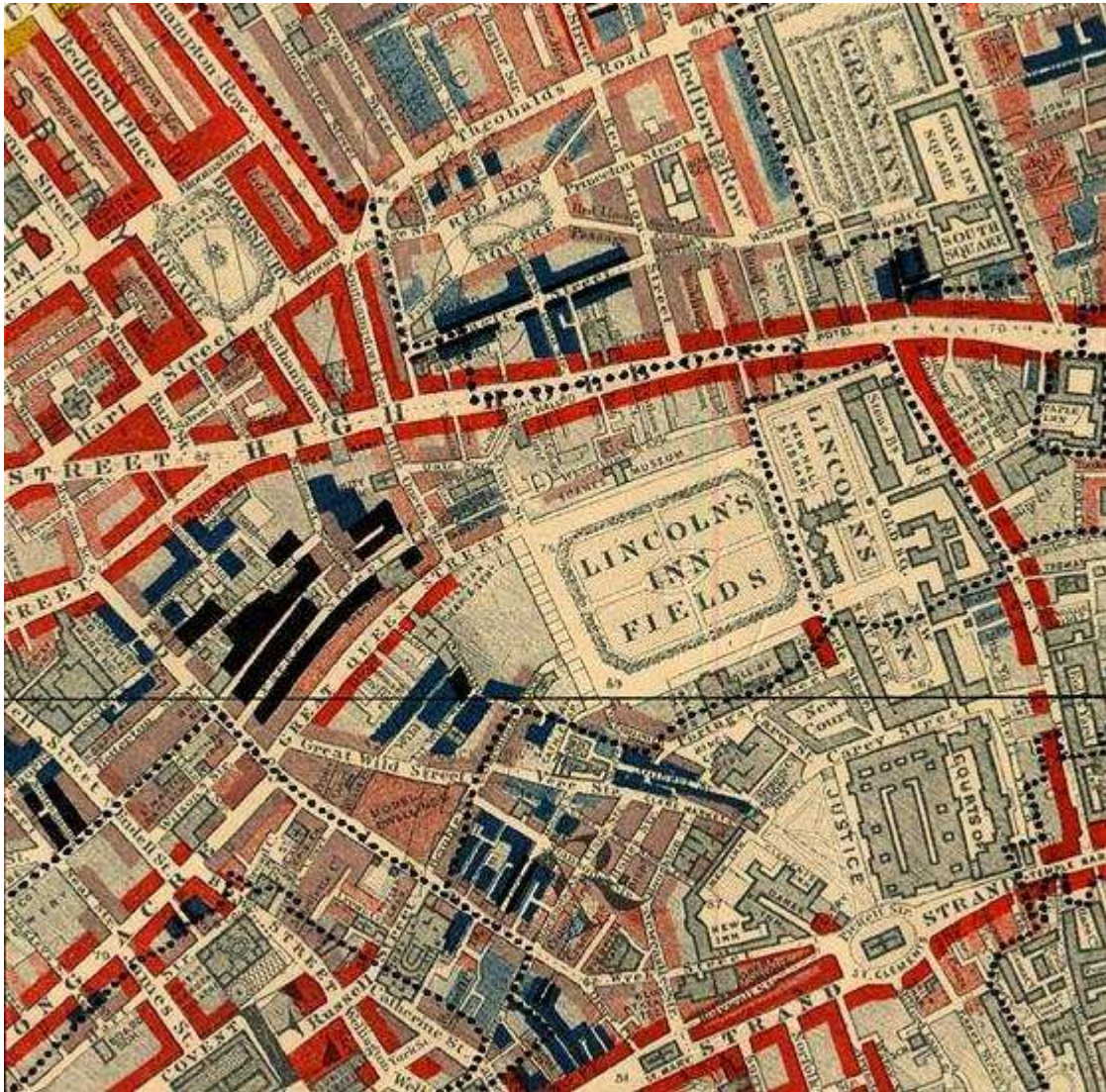
Out of this curious mixture of middle-class guilt, unquantified but troubling urban poverty, heightened class conflict, and a general turn towards empiricism stepped the unlikely figure of Charles Booth. A wealthy industrialist, ship owner, and cautious social reformer, Booth was initially attracted to the question of how to measure poverty via a dispute with British socialist leader H.M. Hyndman, who claimed in 1885 that 25% of all Londoners were impoverished.

Familiar with statistics showing that barely 3% of the population received government relief under the Poor Laws, Booth (among many others) argued strenuously that this could not be the case. But the data, as we have already noted, was faulty and unreliable (Charles Booth's *London* (1969) edited by Albert Fried and Richard Ellman. London, Hutchinson: xxviii). Out of this seemingly simple question about the most basic of economic facts was born Booth's 17-volume *The Life and Labour of the People of London*, and with it, the Social Survey Movement.

The basic idea behind *Life and Labour* seems so obvious to us today that it is important to keep in mind that Booth was seen as an innovator by researchers and reformers who agreed with his results and as a controversial figure by those that did not. How to know how many people lived in poverty in London? Count them, either through first-hand observation and interviews, or through conversations with people who conducted these first-hand observations themselves. There would be no "sampling" used in *Life and Labor*; rather, volunteers and employees would gather as much granular data as possible before venturing basic hypotheses about the presence or absence of poverty.

A second innovation pioneered by these early surveys, and one we will return to, was the use of color-coded maps showing income levels on a block-by-block or even house-by-house basis. This use of visualization was common in studies that considered themselves part of the Social Survey Movement, despite variations in their exact data-gathering methodology.

Fig 2.1: Map from Booth's Life and Labour of the People of London



Booth's Life and Labour would inaugurate a mania for gathering data about urban living conditions, an obsession that intersected with a deep belief that quantifying the existence of poverty would provide reformers with the tools to end it. Historians of science label the wave of empirical projects launched after Booth's original survey "the social survey movement." Most of this research, carried out in the first three decades of the 20th century in Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States, was united by at least a few overlapping methodological characteristics, as described by Bulmer et.al. (1991). Social surveys:

- involved field work and the collection of information firsthand, rather than relying on secondhand information contained in government reports or other already-existing data.

- obtained, or at least attempted to obtain, complete of information, rather than either data samples or information gathered in a haphazard way.
- were usually confined to a single city or town (necessary, in part, because of the desire to gather comprehensive information at a granular level.)
- used individuals, not aggregates, as the level of analysis.
- were quantitative (involved counting).
- were deeply concerned with the policy outcomes that might be generated by the research, and were explicitly normative and reformist in aim.

In essence, to understand the survey, we need to keep in mind that the professional divisions between reform-oriented political movements, empirical social science, muckraking journalism, and state-oriented policy analysis that we take for granted in the early 21st century were far less sharp in the early 20th. We live in an occupational world that these progressive reformers created, particularly in their drive to organize a class of experts under the banner of professionalism. In the early 1900s, however, these distinctions were far from clear. “The survey,” wrote Shelby Harrison of the Russell Sage Foundation in 1930, “is not scientific research alone, nor journalism alone, nor social planning alone, nor any one other type of social or civic endeavor; it is a combination of a number of these” (Harrison 1930).

Although largely forgotten, the social surveys pioneered in England by Booth and his followers had a major impact, both on what would later become “academic” sociology as well as on the progressive movement in general. In part they served as a negative example, within a Whiggish epistemological framework, of the kind of “primitive” social research long since transcended¹ by “real” empirical sociology. But they also influenced a more general public discourse about poverty and statistics. These surveys, in short, launched a methodological movement. They became a fad. And their biggest impact would turn out to be on the religiously-oriented, efficiency-obsessed factions of Progressive-era America—factions that included a particularly interesting, journalism focused social movement known as the Men and Religion Forward Movement (MRFM). The MRFM would move the social survey movement in the direction of conducting a particular form of social survey reportage.

Men and Religion Forward

What, then, was the Men and Religion Forward Movement, and how did it come to concern itself with the kind of empirical study of social problems symbolized by the social survey? And why did it push for a closer relationship with journalistic practice? As an enterprise that today has been

almost entirely forgotten, I want to provide a brief, general history of the MRFM before turning to a specific analysis of the relationship between the movement, urban newspapers, publicity strategies, and the incorporation of quantitative data into journalistic reportage.

The church had been becoming emasculated— weakened by the Victorian cult of domesticity and the increasing valorization of spiritually limp “women’s work.” Such, at least, was the fear expressed by a group of progressive era reformers acting as the advocates of what was quickly termed “muscular Christianity” (Putney 2003). As a discourse which emerged, in part, out of a period of deep uncertainty about the proper relations between the sexes (McGerr 2005) proponents of Muscular Christianity argued that a particularly masculine version of physical fitness could be linked to an authentically Christian moral health, and thus to the health of American institutions in general. Despite decades of outreach and missionary work, along with the founding of men and boys organizations like the Boy Scouts (in 1910) and the YMCA (in 1844), church attendance in 1910 was still running female by a ratio of 2-1 (Putney 2003). For a great many men at the turn of the century, this would not do. “One of the marvels of the Christian religion is the beauty of its womanly virtues,” proclaimed Fred B. Smith, the director of the Religious Work Department for the YMCA, “but Christianity is also essentially masculine, militant, and warlike, and if these elements are not made manifest, men and boys will not be found in increasing numbers as participants in the life of the church.” Harry Arnold, the secretary of the Maine YMCA, agreed with those sentiments, and in 1910 he went to Smith with a plan to launch a “forward crusade,” or massive evangelical effort, to convert or recommit men and boys to the Protestant Church.

What became known as the “Men and Religion Forward” movement lasted from 1911-1912. According to its own reports, it sponsored more than 7,000 meetings involving more than 1.4 million participants. The Men and Religion Forward (MRFM) movement was both locally organized and centrally controlled. Meetings took place in more than 70 American cities, but the primary impetus for the forward crusade lay with a small group of full-time religious organizers, including Smith, Charles Stelzle, and Raymond B. Robbins, who would travel the country to ensure that the local planning went off without a hitch. Despite the participation of Stelzle, who was an active columnist for the labor press and who had, in some quarters, gained a reputation as a radical, the MRFM rested on what Gary Scott Smith has called a “broad evangelical consensus” and often aroused the hostility of organized labor (Smith 2000, 338.) Yet even with these widely trumpeted meetings and seemingly impressive attendance figures, most historians (and even many contemporary observers) have argued that the MRFM was a dismal failure (345). Increases in church attendance were fleeting, the number of men involved in church work continued to decline, and indeed, the entire “social gospel” philosophy upon which the MRFM

rested would become outmoded and forgotten as the Progressive Era drew to an exhausted close in the aftermath of World War One. What makes the Men and Religion Forward Movement interesting for journalism scholars, in other words, is certainly not its' success; what makes it interesting is the manner in which it can be seen as pushing for the emergence of social survey reportage, itself an early example of quantitative journalism.

The Church and the Press: Data Journalism and Information Visualization as Public Relations

The most interesting volume of the Men and Religion Forward publication series has little analog with anything produced by Booth and the Life and Labor Booth survey. It was titled Volume 7, "The Church and the Press." This volume, which today we might read as a public relations handbook, is probably the most truly innovative aspect of the MRFM:

It was by no means unusual for a revival to be well organized ... But the Men and Religion Forward Movement had special features that no previous revival had employed. One of these was an explicit effort to use the press as a means of promoting the event. The Committee of 100 in each city was to have a Publicity Committee, whose work was of "the utmost importance," but whose duties were "not to be limited to advertising". Thus, while the Committee was to prepare traditional advertising for such venues as laundry lists, hotel menus, billboards, street-cars, and stationery, it was also to "furnish varied and live copy" (10– 11) each week to the local newspapers to insure maximal exposure for the Movement. As the actual event approached, the articles fed to the press were to increase and the Committee was to arrange for daily press coverage during the eight days of the revival (Bateman, 59).

The drive to fully integrate press relations into the program of the MRFM most certain stems from Stelzle, who was relentless in his push for more and better copy about church and labor activities. Indeed, in his autobiography "Son of the Bowery," Stelzle relates his first meeting with Ivy Lee, the founder of American public relations describing it as a life-changing experience. But while we can attribute much of the MRFM's understanding of church-press relations to Stelzle individually, this new way of thinking about the relationship between the church and journalism must also be understood in relationship to larger cultural changes in American society as a whole. \The church, long used to seeing itself as the primary national agent of "education and moral uplift," began in the early 20th century to come to terms with the fact that that role was being usurped by the mass media (Rodgers 2010). Although careful to frame its thinking in terms of the equivalent power of the church and the press, (MRFM 5), even to grant the press equal say in the shape of American

morals and public opinion was a major retreat by the clergy. "A most remarkable developing and readjusting of intellectual attitudes and subtle human forces is proceeding under the inspiration and leadership of the press ... the everyday man is aware of new mental attitudes and conscious of new forces shaping his thinking. The press more than any other one force has wrought these atmospheric changes in modern life ... The church see this plainer than ever." (23). Given that, the volume concludes:

Religious workers must aid in a very practical way in the gathering and presenting to newspapers materials of positive news value out of the life of the church. No wise newspaperman discounts the value of much that transpires in the religious world. He simply avows his inability to cover the field. **He must therefore have efficient help.** Not the abstracts of sermons necessarily, but things in the religious world with human interest woven into them; news items that advertise of a community progress and other reading features out of church life ... This kind of cooperation is cordially welcomed by newspaper managers, with the understanding that the reporting minister must take his chance with the rest of the staff on his copy meeting the ordinary vicissitudes of the managers office. **An easy door of efficient publicity service is here opened to the religious worker.** (33)

The door is opened, in short, to public relations in the service of social reform.

What techniques can best serve the church in their attempts to help newspapermen "cover the field"? The Church and the Press helpfully lists several. Emphasize and publicize foreign missionary work, which is always spiced with exoticism and danger (52). Make better use of photographs (53). Highlight large and unusual gatherings of important men, such as the "dinner of a thousand men" promoted by the Men and Religion Forward Movement — dinners which not only include illustrious names, but are also attended by potential future journalistic sources (54). And tremendous emphasis placed is placed the "*power of charts.*"

Another phase of the Men and Religion Forward Movement that caught the interest and approval of the city editor quickly was **the social survey and the summarizing of its findings by means of charts. This is the kind of matter live editors like to go after themselves, and to be scooped by a religious investigator and artists is an experience so unexpected that it is fascinating.** Whenever the church comes upon a civic or social festering place and addresses itself promptly and rationally to the eradication of the evil, it can count upon the cooperation of an unshackled press. Its

purposes, its performances in that direction make welcome copy, for it is a field in which an unafraid newspaper is operating on its own account generally, and is glad to get help.

And herein lies the hinge between public enlightenment and public relations, one possible answer to why a movement would embrace and emphasize its social service work and its distributed data-gathering. In a country newly obsessed with empiricism and facts, where the social survey had become a fad, social surveys made good copy. And not just any data, but data turned into documents in the style of compelling visualizations.

The social survey, after all, was not simply one thing; as Shelby Harrison has already noted. In his description of the illustrious Pittsburgh Survey, touted by the organizer of that survey Paul Kellogg as a model for what a large, well-funded survey ought to look like, Stephen Turner argues that “the survey commended itself as a method of publicity that emblazons [the needs of the urban worker] needs upon the public consciousness without the occurrence of a catastrophe [like the Triangle Shirtwaist fire]. The journalistic means of bringing these real needs to human terms was the case study method (Turner 43).” It is not surprising, in short, that a publicity savvy reform movement like the Men and Religion Forward Movement would embrace data and documentary visualization as a way to reach the press. Ultimately, the MRFM had a dual goal: to map the social world using empirical investigatory techniques and carefully assembled documents, and to convey that social assemblage to the public through the press. In both cases, these tasks were happily subordinated to the ultimate goal of social reform. Between empirical science and good publicity there need be no contradiction.

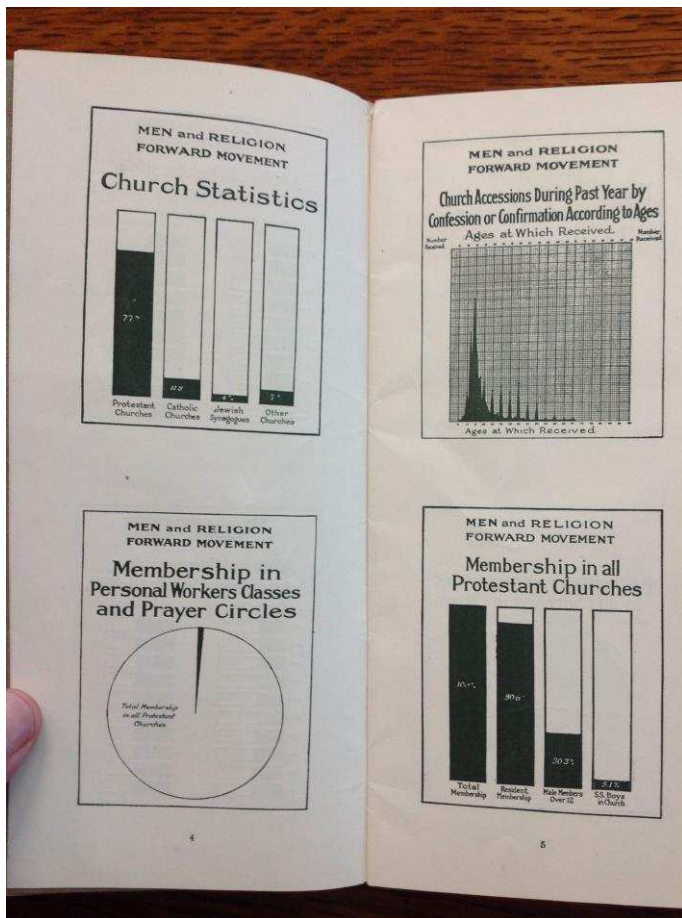
Social Survey Reportage In Action

Extensive data gathering thus occurred during the social service portion of the Men and Religion Forward revival, with volunteers and paid employees questioning local officials and knowledgeable townspeople as to the state of community affairs. Most often this knowledge was stored in paper form, and when it was not immediately available, Stelzle encouraged groups of volunteers to venture into the community, conduct a house by house survey, and gather this data for themselves. The data entry forms and the model block maps used for collection were thus extremely important tools in the Men and Religion Forward Movement’s social survey reportage. In the last instance, the gathered information would be displayed graphically as charts and maps, whose striking visuals would go a long way towards securing needed publicity for the movement.

Our best window into what these charts looked like in 1912 comes from a pamphlet, “Sociological and Religious Survey of Seventy American Cities,” published by the Bureau of

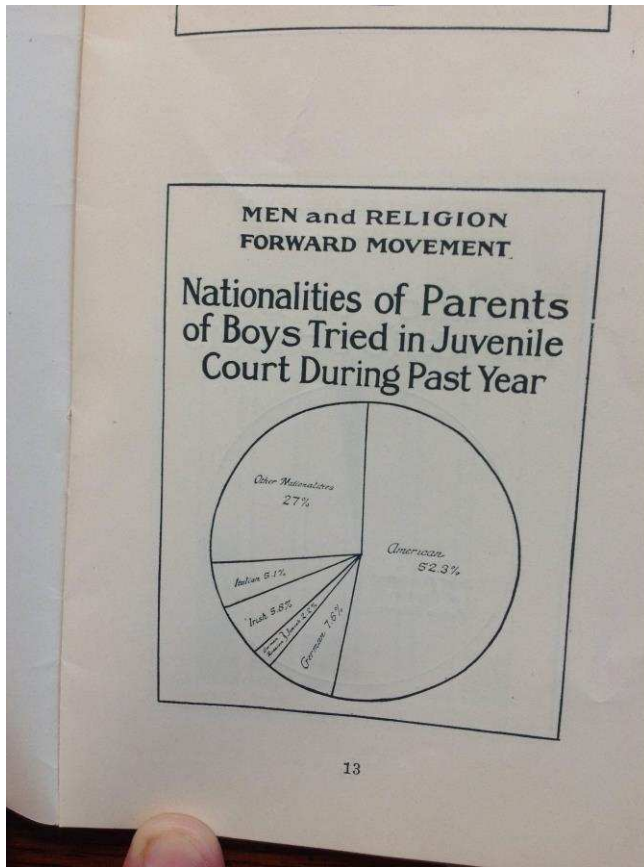
Social Service of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Given the provenance of this pamphlet, we can be fairly sure it was authored by Stelzle, though his name never appears anywhere in the document. The document makes full use of a wide panoply of information display device common at the time— primarily bar graphs, line graphs, pie graphs.

Fig 2.7 Charts Used by the Men and Religion Forward Movement



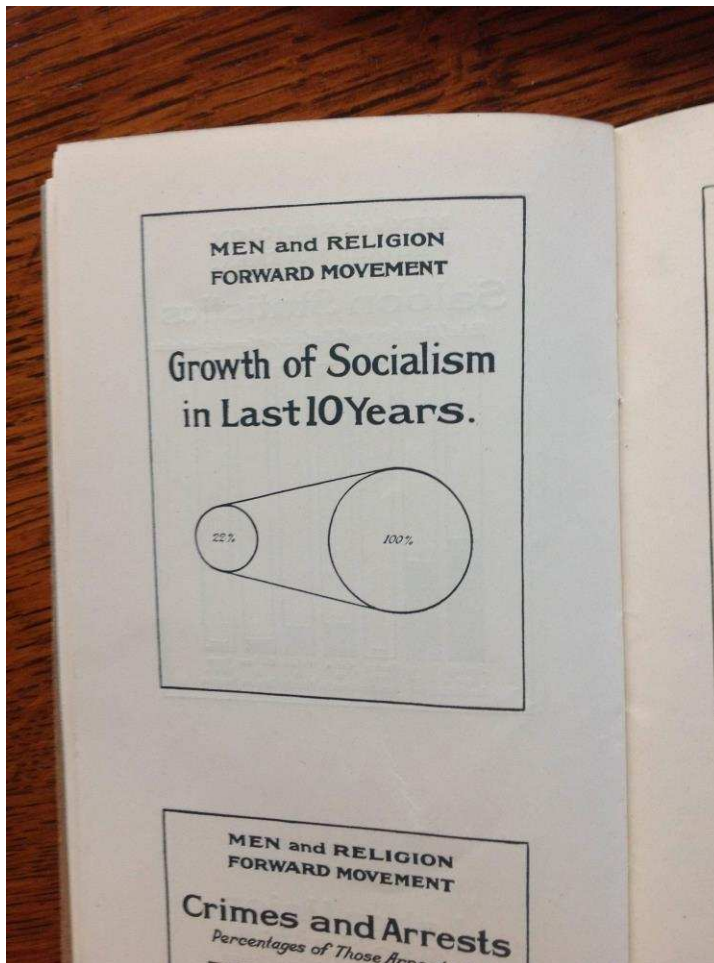
Judging from a 21st century perspective with regard to both the quality and the public value of information displayed, the charts range from interesting to somewhat misleading to entirely unhelpful. In the “interesting” category we might include this example, “Nationalities of Parents of Boys Tried in Juvenile Court During the Past Year,” a pie chart showing that “Americans” (by which I suspect we should assume is meant second generation White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) account for 52.3% of all trials in juvenile court.

Fig. 2.8: "Nationalities of Parents of Boys Tried in Juvenile Court During the Past Year."



When displaying demographic data and the like, these simple pie charts are adequate if not particularly informative. But MRFM information displays seem to have had a harder time when trying to visualize ratios as opposed to percentages, either over time or at a particular moment, as this chart makes clear.

Fig 2.10: "Growth in Socialism."



A modern reader sees the graphic about saloons and churches and immediately imagines that every building in America (100%) is a saloon, while only 32.3% of these saloons are churches; likewise, a quick look at the chart on socialists might lead one to believe that 100% of America is now "socialist." Of course, the first chart means to tell us that for every three saloons there is a single church, while the second shows that the number of self-described socialists in the United States has increased five-fold in the past decade. A final category of visualization is neither misleading nor interesting but can uncharitably be described as fairly useless; for example "Vital Statistics: Death Per 1000 Children Under One Year of Age," which appears to show that this number has remained both small and steady for the past decade.

Apart from the 1912 pamphlet, where else might an interested urban resident encounter the Men and Religion Forward charts, as occasionally misleading or useless as they might be? Perhaps the most interesting data visualization format of the early 20th century was actually not a

publication at all; rather, it was an **event**, known as an **exhibition**. “While the convention center of the congress will be held in Carnegie Hall,” the El Paso Herald reported on April 19, 1912

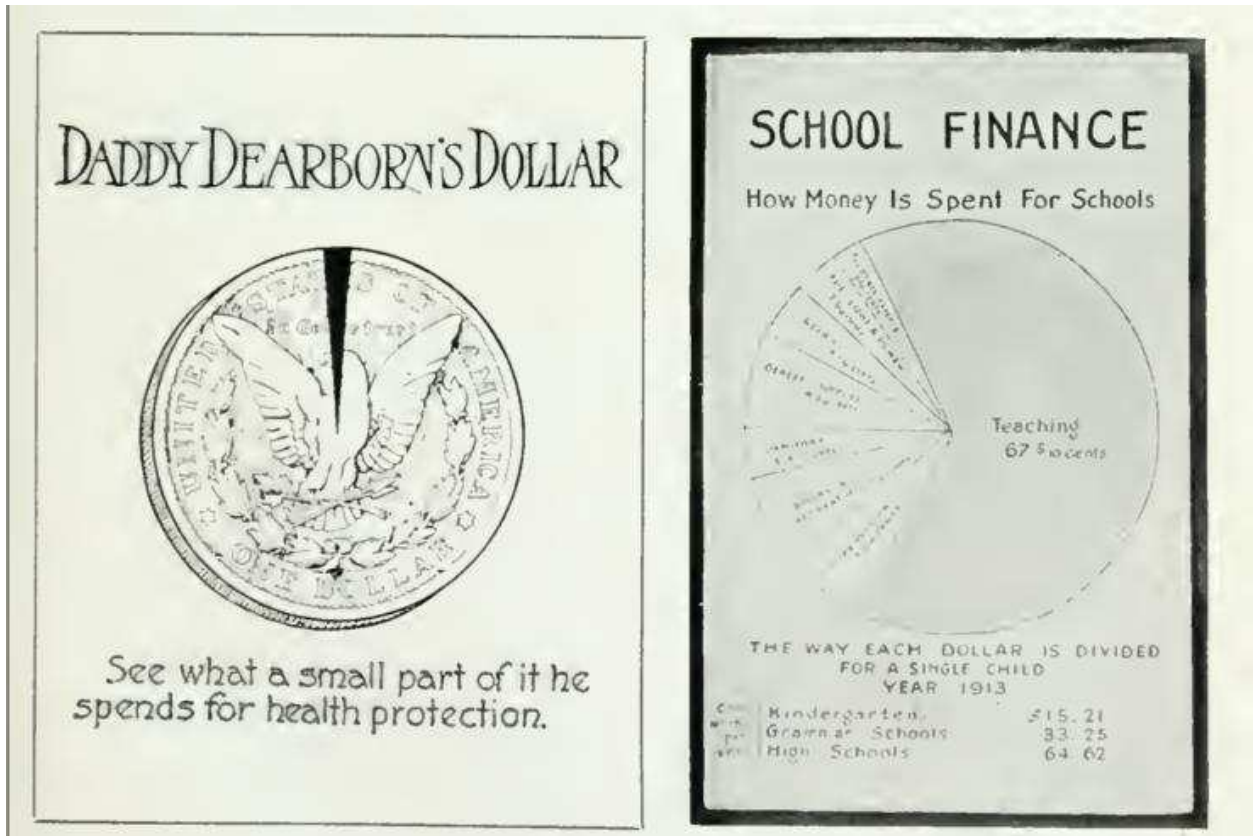
there are four auxiliary centers in four of the most prominent churches in New York in which many of the meetings will be held. There will be a series of special exhibits including moving pictures lantern slides and charts illustrating the conditions revealed by the great social survey which has been made in nearly 190 American cities during the past year. These exhibits show in an indisputable manner evils and abuses of many kinds which religion of a practical kind could largely overcome.

The importance of the social exhibit to the larger social reform movement exemplified by the MRFM is brought home by the fact that a branch of the powerful Russell Sage Foundation geared towards facilitating social survey work was known as the Department of Surveys and Exhibits. In 1918 the Department published a 320 page volume, *The ABCs of Exhibit Planning*, three years after printing an earlier pamphlet that discussed the Springfield survey and exhibition as a model to be replicated by other towns doing social survey work. Included in these lengthy, visually nuanced publications (not only is their use of graphics far ahead of many other publications of the time, but they possess a sharp aesthetic sense which would not be out of place in a modern advertising agency) are discussions of the different types of materials that might be included in an exhibit, along with some considerations of the advantages exhibits possessed over other forms of publicity like pamphlets or news articles. While we cannot say for certain that the Men and Religion Forward exhibits resembled any of the models discussed here, it seems likely that they were at least a part of these larger discourses on the public display of visual information. “Reportage,” in this example, does not mean physical publishing at all. Rather, it refers to the public display of visual information for the benefit of the public.

One interesting aspect of the Russell Sage discussion of exhibits and proper visual materials is the degree to which they actually downplay the use of pie charts and line graphs, encouraging exhibitors to utilize material which seems far closer to advertising. “Statistical charts, spot maps, and other more or less technical forms that are sometimes referred to as ‘graphic material’ are of interest and value to special and limited audiences,” the author of the *ABCs of Exhibit Planning* writes. “The showing of percentages by use of colored circles or bars and of comparative statistics by graphs or hills is a favorite device. Diagrams are not equally attractive media of communication to all. To some they represent a disagreeable form of mental effort; one way of making them appear less technical and indeed less dull to such visitors is to invent variations in which the circles or bars or hills have been replaced by successions of concrete items, such as pictures of dollar signs, pictures of human figures, animals, or other appropriate objects.” (74). An

illustration in the book comparing a simple pie chart with the use of an more arresting “dollar coin” image gives us an idea of the kind if illustrations being advocated by the Russell Sage Foundation.

Fig 2.x: Graphic Chart vs Statistical Graph



Among the non-chart objects included in the Springfield Survey exhibit: three-dimensional models, posters, live “morality plays” (titles include “The Imps and the Children” and “When the Gang Broke Up), a playground, and a motion picture hall. Nevertheless, it seems clear that charts and maps made up a large part of the printed matter used in many social exhibits, which perhaps was why the author of *The ABCs of Exhibit Planning* was to quick to downplay their utility. “Even though they are much used in exhibits intended for popular audiences diagrams are more likely to be technical than popular in form.” Some photographs of the model exhibit in Springfield show the fairly extensive use of both charts and maps, including this one that demonstrates poor sewer conditions on the outskirts of town.

No matter the exact nature of the visual material being used, why bother mounting an exhibit at all? What advantages does the publicity generated through exhibits have over the publicity garnered from newspaper articles and advertisement— which, as we have already seen, formed

a large part of the arsenal of the Men and Religion Forward Movement, and men like Charles Stelzle? The ABCs of Exhibit Planning points out several. (1) Exhibits can attract the attention of people who might not read a newspaper. (2) It is a quick method of information conveyance, and appeals to those people who might only skim the news. (3) An exhibit gains value by the fact that it is presented to multiple people simultaneously; “you have created a sort of group attraction, each visitor feeling the interest of his neighbor and being stimulated to an exchange of talk about the things illustrated.” (4) Exhibitors and social surveyors can do more than vaguely estimate the number of people who are consuming their material, as they are forced to do with newspaper articles. (5) It creates public conversation. (6) Exhibitors can answer visitor questions in person. (7) “By means of this new method of telling your story, through pictures, models, objects and other devices, a new life and new force are given to your propaganda.” (19)

The pages above trace, in some detail, the path of the objects of the Men and Religion Forward Movement in various stages of composition. We began with statistical charts and graphs, which were themselves displayed publicly at various social survey exhibitions in the cities targeted by the MRFM. Alongside these charts and graphs were most likely 3-dimensional models and other forms of visual display like advertising posters. All of these representations arguably had their advantages over newspapers. And yet, the campaign to influence the press was one of the key aspects of the MRFM; indeed, some scholars have argued that its press work was the most original and successful aspect of a movement that was otherwise a failure. In the final part of this paper, I turn to the question of the relationship between the Forward Movement and the Press. Did the social survey reportage practiced by the Men and Religion Forward Movement get picked up by traditional journalism? In other words, how did the journalistic work of the Men and Religion Forward movement play out in the pages of the urban dailies of their target cities?

Media Coverage of the Men and Religion Forward Movement

There is, surprisingly, an already-existing (though unpublished) survey of the coverage of the Men and Religion Forward movement in the press, by Dane S. Claussen (1988). Our findings, however are quite different. Perhaps these differences can be traced back to our methodologies; while I had the luxury of extensive digital access to full-text local newspapers as part of the *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>) project, along with New York Times coverage of the MRFM during the same time period, Claussen’s research is confined to the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* and the *Times*.² While I

² These differences in methods and findings, almost entirely facilitated by advances in digital technology, pose some interesting methodological conundrums that cannot be fully addressed here. The fact remains, however, that I know of very few studies that attempt to replicate pre-1990s content analyses with the current access to digital archives. Such replications, though they might be less “sexy” than the current

analyzed a total of 409 articles, Claussen notes that he discovered a total of 28 articles in the Readers Guide and 14 articles in the Times, less than a tenth of the articles I was able to access. These difference might not mean much if our findings were roughly similar, but indeed, they are not. Claussen argues that

Considering again that MRFM drew more than a million men throughout the U.S., was spearheaded by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and International Sunday School Association, was interdenominational (11 Protestant organizations endorsed it), was relatively uncontroversial, and was executed locally by committees of prominent citizens and mainline Protestant ministers, MRFM received very little national coverage.

Claussen concluded that this "low number of articles" might be attributed to the fact that "major newspapers that ignored it ... must have seen MRFM as a strictly religious event at a time when they weren't covering religious events, or as irrelevant and uninteresting at a time when they had certain definitions and justifications for religious coverage." (21). My analysis, on the other hand, shows that the MRFM was widely covered on a local level, although this coverage was highly episodic, scattered, and often consisted of short stories or press releases a few paragraphs long. Nevertheless, the fact that there were over 400 articles about the Men and Religion Forward movement printed in less than two years would seem to support the MRFM claim that they had collected "six scrapbooks" each "three inches thick, filled with Men and Religion Forward clippings" (a data point that Claussen notes but does not attempt to justify in relation to his findings of minimal coverage.) I found coverage of the MRFM in papers ranging geographically from the New York Times and New York Herald Tribune, to the Washington Herald, the El Paso Herald, and the San Francisco Call. There is no doubt many more articles in papers that have not yet been digitized.

Despite these differences, my results are similar to Claussen's in several other respects. Most important, perhaps, is our finding that the press was willing to "publish MFRM press releases, pamphlets, columns, and other materials verbatim." While there was no way to determine exactly which clippings were directly taken from materials produced by the MFRM publicity committee, it seems likely that the vastly positive coverage (more than 91% of the articles I analyzed were coded positive) was in part related to this wholesale adoption of Men and Religion Forward-produced copy. There were at least several pieces which ran in different papers which were identical (for instance, an Ohio News Herald piece titled "Ministers and Laymen United" is

mania for original research using big data, are of the utmost importance as we attempt to evaluate the relationship between older and newer content analyses.

duplicated in at least two papers, right down to the use of a similar picture), meaning they were mostly likely either printed press releases or articles clipped from various newspaper exchanges. A second similar conclusion emerging from the content analysis relates to Claussen's argument that:

MRFM was the first religious revival to use modern social scientific techniques to research what it wanted to say and how it wanted to help individuals cities, and although it was not the first to use some sort of modern management and marketing techniques, MRFM used them more extensively and more efficiently, and therefore more effectively, than its previous rivals. This means that journalists could easily give the MRFM the benefit of the doubt about what kind of results it would accomplish. Moreover, surely the use of modern theories and methods alone must have impressed journalists.

My own study is directly concerned with how the social scientific techniques, charts and graphs, and how these objects supplied context to particular forms of news reporting." In general, I concluded that the conduct of the social survey was widely discussed in the daily press, as were the data visualization techniques and products produced by the Movement. There were, however, almost no charts printed in the papers themselves, and the few that were picked up marked the exceptions that prove the rule. The actual results the survey were discussed, but rarely, and the exhibit displays were also rarely discussed. In general, the overall coverage was episodic, not thematic. The coverage was almost entirely based on the occurrence of particular events (meetings, presentations, canvass days, etc), and any sort of numerical visualization almost never accompanied the use of numbers. The context that the Men and Religion Forward movement sought to incorporate into discussions of poverty had been shorn away by the time its stories reached the daily press.

Discussions of the social survey occurred in 57 articles about the Men and Religion Forward Movement, or 14% of the total. They ranged from casual mentions to more extensive analyses like this one in the July 29 1911 issue of the Washington Herald:

"One of the first steps in the social service programme to be taken throughout the ninety cities participating is the 'survey.' This will be done by local committees, and will supply a mass of information regarding moral, social, and religious life in the great centers of population in North America, which will be put in shape for charts and exhibits. It's another 'Know-your-city' idea, and the promoters of the movement believe that all the facts that may be known in advance will help the cities apply remedies when the dynamic of those eight-day campaigns be felt locally. It is said by the leaders that the survey will

be the most complete study of social conditions in American cities yet undertaken, barring only the famous Pittsburg survey.”

A second article appearing six months later in another Washington paper, The Washington Times, provides further discussion of the survey: it defines what the survey is, provides a description of the questions asked (what are amusements of working classes, the housing and labor conditions, the number of telephones, the number of automobiles, and so forth). The article is one of the few to mention that answers will be solicited “on blanks provided.” Finally, the article tackles the very purposes of the survey — figures, they argue, “have very real value in furnishing data concerning the comparative standard of living.”

An article in the San Francisco Call from further extends this discussion of the purpose of the survey. “‘Show me’ is its motto,” the article notes:

It sends out a corps of investigators who collect facts and figures about every visible and invisible virtue and vice in every city and then makes a map of that city to show it just what its vices are, where they are and the exact ground they cover. Its institutions for good show on the same map. One glance at that map and any resident of the city will know more about his home town than ever he knew before. Usually his first expression will be a gasp. With concrete evidence of what is wrong, the movement sets out to make things right.

However, nearly all these discussions of the survey failed to include any charts, and the few times Men and Religion Forward charts appeared in the news they largely represented complete failures of data visualization. This article in the New York Sun from March 24, 1912, is typical in its unhelpfulness. The last paragraph attempts to explain the map. Since it is one of the few on-record attempts of a daily newspaper engaging in the translation work necessary to incorporate a statistical graph into a news story, I will quote it at length:

Incorporated in this article is a map of the field that has been covered by the Men and Religion Forward Movement up to the present time. The discs indicating the various States when interpreted are: The black space in the discs, according to the census taken by those interested in this movement, indicate the population; the horizontal lines in the discs represent the worshippers in Protestant churches, while the perpendicular lines represent the worshippers in Roman Catholic churches.

We might assume that this article has been entirely provided by the Men and Religion Forward Movement itself, right down to the map. Far more typical of news coverage of the statistics is an article from Washington Times entitled "Would Place Blame." "Saloons are responsible for much of the poverty and misery of the poor in Washington," it notes. "The committee has prepared charts for exhibition in the eight day campaign. These, according to members of the committee, show a direct connection between the number of saloons and living conditions, and they believe the charts will be conclusive argument for the regulation of the liquor traffic in the District. Such exhibits, leaders of the movement say, have done much to stir the civic consciousness and lead men to think of means to better their social conditions." In general, the results of the surveys were rarely discussed at all, and to to degree they were it was almost always in the context of the survey exhibits I analyzed earlier in the paper. The article quoted above from the Washington Times discusses survey results (ie, saloons cause poverty), notes that they were contained in chat and map form, and that these charts on view at the survey exhibition, and spends a good amount of time talking about what these charts will do to the "public mind." Nevertheless, the charts themselves are not printed, and the statistical results are never interrogated by the newspaper, they are simply reported.

Fig. 2.x: Data Visualization in the Early 20th Century Press



Overall, we should thus conclude that the coverage of the MRFM was fairly regular, though scattered, and usually resulted in a few articles in each of the cities they operated in between 1911 and 1912. The coverage was also highly episodic, rarely incorporated contextual information about poverty, and largely tied to the occurrence of particular discrete events such as public presentations, large meetings, canvass days, and so forth. The stories almost never included charts, graphs, maps, or other visual devices, even in articles where there was an extensive discussion of statistics. The papers that printed them, finally, almost never critically analyzed these statistics. In short, the factual objects so carefully and lovingly assembled by the Men and Religion Forward Movement never truly became objects of journalism. They may have caught the attention of reporters, and they may have prompted the occasional, event-oriented piece of newspaper coverage, but the data assemblage constructed by MRFM out of their canvassing, survey blanks, data sheets, charts, and paper placards were never truly adopted or translated by

turn of the century daily newspaper journalists. To the degree that they were, they were through the refracting lens of the survey exhibit.

What might be some of the reasons for the pattern of coverage explored in this article?, The answers are many and manifold: among the panoply of explanations include technological affordances, historical trends in social science and data visualization, and cultural factors that are deeply tied into the relatively context free nature of journalism at the turn of the 20th century (Fink and Schudson 2013). However, to most productively tease out the exact dynamics at work in the case of the Men and Religion Forward Movement, we must make sure not to project a post 1930s understanding of the “professional press” — and a corresponding methodological bias in which the work of urban dailies can be said to “stand in” for all of journalism and factual reporting more generally-- back onto journalistic processes underway two decades earlier. In 1911, nearly all the easy boundary markers that governed American professional life were on the verge of decomposition and reorientation. The manner in which context was articulated through journalistic work in the early 20th century was in the midst of a massive shift; journalism and sociology, once hybridized and interconnected, were well on their to a definitive parting of ways in the two decades that followed the Progressive Era (Anderson 2014). When social science would be re-imported back into journalism in the 1960s, with the invention of precision journalism and the emergence of data-intensive reporting, both social science and journalism would have changed in profound ways.

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