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## **“A Gauge of Our Faithfulness”: Religion and the Postwar Politics of Immigration Reform**

**By Wendy L. Wall**

On September 30, 1952, Reverend Edgar Chandler, director of field operations for the World Council of Churches’ Refugee Service, mounted the steps of New York City’s federal courthouse and addressed a seven-man panel appointed by President Truman to evaluate the nation’s immigration and naturalization policies. Truman had established the commission just weeks earlier, after Congress overrode his veto of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952. That legislation, popularly known as the McCarran-Walter Act, left largely intact a restrictive immigration regime based on national origins quotas that heavily favored immigrants from Northern and Western Europe. The U.S. had originally adopted the quota system in the 1920s. Truman and many liberals both in and out of Congress believed it was time for it to go.

In his testimony, Chandler recalled the year he had just spent travelling through refugee camps in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Those camps were overflowing with men, women and children who had been displaced by World War II, the first Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Korean War. Others had fled communist regimes in China and Eastern Europe. Chandler reported that the psychology of the refugees and escapees he encountered was “at an all-time low.” The main reason for their “pessimism and almost hopelessness,” he told his audience, was the immigration policies of the U.S., Canada, and Australia—“the whole series of closed doors, beginning with the almost complete closing of our own.” Chandler urged the panel to recommend changes in U.S. immigration policy “that will bring new hope and new life not only

to those who actually may come to this country, but to the whole group of uprooted and needy people throughout the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Chandler was the first of more than 600 witnesses to appear before the Presidential Commission on Immigration and Naturalization. At least one-quarter of those witnesses spoke on behalf of one or more faith-based organizations. Later that first day the commission heard testimony from representatives of the National Council of Churches of Christ, the Protestant Episcopal Church, Catholic Charities, the National Lutheran Council, the Synagogue Council, the American Jewish Committee, and the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith. The day’s most colorful witness was Bishop Homer A. Tomlinson, general overseer of the Church of God (Pentecostal) and self-proclaimed spokesman for some 50 million members of the Pentecostal and Holiness movement around the globe. Tomlinson was running for president on a “peace” platform. Earlier that month the portly pink-cheeked bishop had attracted nationwide attention when he set up a forge in front of an Alabama church and beat a sword into a plowshare. Testifying before the commission, Tomlinson urged Congress to slash the defense budget and use the billions thus saved to invite 60 million Europeans to migrate to the United States. “[T]he Bible says that if we do not take care of our kindred we are worse than infidels,” he declared.<sup>2</sup>

The hearings held by Truman’s Commission on Immigration and Naturalization in September and October of 1952 marked a turning point in the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century U.S. immigration policy—the moment when foes of the restrictive regime ushered in by the 1924

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<sup>1</sup> *Hearings before the President’s Commission on Immigration and Naturalization*, 82<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 4-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Hearings*, pp. 41-43; “Bishop Begins Campaign for Presidency,” *Kingsport Times-News* (14 September 1952): 3; “Beats Sword Into Plowshare,” *Jefferson City Post-Tribune* (15 September 1952): 8. Tomlinson’s enthusiasm for immigrants did not extend to all. Two months after testifying at the commission, he argued that 700,000 Puerto Ricans, roughly one-third of the island’s population, should be encouraged to migrate to Latin America rather than the mainland “because the culture of the Latin countries would be more congenial to the Spanish-speaking islanders. “Mass Emigration Urged,” *New York Times* (25 November, 1952): 6.

Immigration Act coalesced into something resembling a movement. The parade of representatives from denominations and faith-based organizations who testified before the Commission suggests the importance of religious language, issues, and institutions to debates over U.S. immigration policy in postwar America. In the two decades between the end of World War II and passage of the landmark Immigration Act of 1965, an array of Jewish, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant organizations were at the forefront of efforts both to build public support for immigration reform and to shape the contours of that reform.

The presence of religious groups in the coalition pushing for policy change is not news to historians, but such groups have rarely merited more than a sentence or two of recognition. This is surprising since few postwar developments changed the face of American religion or American politics more than the Immigration Act of 1965. By rejecting the system of national origins quotas put in place in the 1920s and replacing it with a system that favored family reunification and skills, the act opened the door to millions of immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. By imposing for the first time a ceiling on immigration from the Western Hemisphere, the act helped to sustain and generate illegal immigration. In both ways, the act forever changed the nation's demographic makeup and politics. It opened the door to millions of Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and adherents of other non-Judeo-Christian faiths. At the same time, since many of the new arrivals—from Korea, Nigeria, China, Ghana, the Philippines, Brazil and elsewhere—were evangelicals, it contributed to what scholars have called the “de-Europeanization of American Christianity” and the “re-evangelization of America.”<sup>3</sup> The act transformed vast arenas of American life, and fueled political debates over issues ranging from national unity and border control to educational policy and religion in the public sphere.

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<sup>3</sup> R. Stephen Warner, *Christian Century* (10 February 2004): 20; and Mark A. Noll, “Where We Are and How We Got Here,” *Christianity Today* (29 September 2006): 42

By taking religion seriously—by focusing on the issues that divided religious Americans, as well as on those that united them—we can gain a deeper understanding of the conflicts and compromises that shaped the policies which still dominate our landscape today. In the 1950s and early 1960s, for instance, many Catholic leaders believed a liberal U.S. immigration policy was theologically warranted. They also saw it as a way of relieving overcrowding in Europe and other parts of the world, and thus preventing political instability and the rise of Communism. Jewish groups spearheaded the effort to dismantle the system of national origins quotas, but they generally worried less about the total number of immigrants allowed into the United States than about the discriminatory symbolism of such quotas. Mainline Protestants—led by missionaries and those who had worked with displaced persons and refugees—also favored substantial reform. Still, some worried that simply opening the nation’s doors to the world’s “surplus” populations would keep the Catholic church from revisiting its position on birth control; others fretted that it might increase Catholicism’s religious and political power within the United States. Fears of Catholic power—together with worries that an influx of non-Protestant immigrants would undermine America’s tradition of “religious freedom”—fueled the opposition of evangelicals to any substantial change in U.S. immigration law.

Policymakers, activists, and journalists who supported reform frequently blurred such distinctions. Rather than highlighting disagreements within or between religious communities, they often invoked a Protestant-Catholic-Jewish consensus as evidence that the vast majority of Americans supported sweeping immigration reform. Thus, attention to religious voices and language can also shed light on the politics of the so-called “liberal consensus”—a concept that has been widely critiqued, yet is still often credited with producing the sweeping policy changes of the 1960s. In recent years, scholars have highlighted the emergence in the late 1940s and

1950s of a “tri-faith” vision of America, a vision promoted not only by Catholics and Jews, but also by an array of government, business, and media elites.<sup>4</sup> To date, historians have paid relatively little attention to the impact of this tri-faith vision on policy debates beyond a few specific arenas like school prayer and civil rights. The debate over immigration policy—particularly as it heated up in the 1950s—shows how some liberals deployed the language of tri-faith agreement for political ends. They attempted to forge a national consensus on the need for legislative reform by suggesting that a religious consensus already existed.

A close look at the immigration debate also suggests that scholars may have underestimated both the issues and prejudices that continued to divide religious groups even during the heyday of the “Judeo-Christian consensus.” Most Catholic, Jewish, and mainline Protestant leaders favored a dramatic revision of the nation’s immigration laws but, as previously noted, their emphases and policy prescriptions weren’t always aligned. Moreover, their efforts to mobilize the faithful—through publications, religious schools, the pulpit, and church-sanctioned gatherings—sometimes backfired. Many clergy and congregants wrote their politicians urging reform, but others lambasted the “liberal” positions taken by their denominational leaders. This suggests that immigration policy was the kind of wedge issue identified by David Hollinger as driving mainline Protestants into the evangelical camp.<sup>5</sup>

In exploring the intersection of religion and immigration reform, this essay argues for a fuller understanding of the place of religion in postwar policy debates. Scholars have devoted extensive attention to the connection between religion and a handful of policy issues, most

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the ‘American Way’: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America’s Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> David A. Hollinger, “After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American Encounter with Diversity,” *Journal of American History* (June 2011): 21-48.

notably anti-Communism, civil rights, abortion, and such obvious church-state issues as school funding and school prayer. The connection between religion and many other postwar policy concerns—poverty, health care, the environment, and disarmament, to name a few—are just beginning to attract attention. Exploring the role of religious organizations, issues, and language in these less-obvious arenas will enrich our understanding of both politics and religion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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On June 25, 1952, President Harry S. Truman vetoed the McCarran-Walter bill. That bill, which had been passed by Congress some two weeks earlier, represented the first major attempt to overhaul U.S. immigration policy since the 1920s. Supporters of the legislation argued that it codified existing policy, while eliminating instances of racial and gender discrimination and tightening national security provisions. Opponents, however, were outraged that the bill simply reaffirmed the system of national origins quotas that Congress had put in place in 1924.<sup>6</sup> In his veto message, Truman acknowledged that the bill contained some progressive provisions. Nevertheless, he argued, by retaining the national origins quota system, the bill “discriminates, deliberately and intentionally, against many of the peoples of the world.” Retention of this system irritated American allies and insulted American citizens. More fundamentally, Truman declared, “It repudiates our basic religious concepts, our belief in the brotherhood of man.” He

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<sup>6</sup> The national origins quota system imposed in the 1920s limited immigration to the U.S. from non-Asian nations in the Eastern Hemisphere to 2 percent of the foreign-born from that nation counted in the 1890 census. The McCarran-Walter Act retained the notion of national origins quotas, although it redistributed quotas according to the “national origins” of the white population in the 1920 census. The bill also gave the husbands of U.S. citizens the same non-quota status long assigned to wives, ended Asian exclusion, and removed racial barriers to naturalization. At the same time, it allowed only token Asian immigration and curbed immigration from the West Indies.

was “sure that with a little more time and a little more discussion in this country, the public conscience and the good sense of the American people will assert themselves.”<sup>7</sup>

Congress easily overrode the president’s veto, so a few months later Truman took steps to spur the “public conscience.” In the final months of his administration, he established the immigration commission and charged it with recommending ways to bring the nation’s laws “into line with our national ideals and our foreign policy.”<sup>8</sup> Truman chose the commission’s seven members with particular attention to two issues: all of those appointed supported an overhaul of U.S. immigration policy; and while all were white and male, they collectively represented a range of faith traditions. The commission’s chairman, Philip B. Perlman, was the first Jew to serve as Solicitor General. Other members included Monsignor John O’Grady, secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Charities; Clarence E. Pickett, honorary secretary of the American Friends Service Committee; and Reverend Thaddeus F. Gullixson, president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in St. Paul. This attention to religious diversity in part reflected the important role that faith-based organizations had played in postwar efforts to resettle displaced persons and refugees. It also reflected a White House desire to project a national moral consensus on the immigration issue.

When the Commission issued its final report, *Whom We Shall Welcome*, it implied the existence of just such a consensus. The report synthesized the results of 30 days of hearings held in eleven cities around the country. The nation’s immigration laws, the report’s authors declared, were “a gauge of our faithfulness to the high moral and spiritual principles of our founding fathers—to whom all people, as the children of God, were the most important resources of a free

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<sup>7</sup> Harry S. Truman, “Veto of Bill to Revise the Laws Relating to Immigration, Naturalization, and Nationality” (25 June 1952), available through the American Presidency Project at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14175&st=immigration&st1=> .

<sup>8</sup> Commission on Immigration and Naturalization, *Whom We Shall Welcome* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1953), p. 273.

nation.” It condemned the national origins quota system as discriminatory and archaic, and recommended replacing that system with one that allocated visas on the basis of preferences including the right of asylum, the reunion of families, U.S. labor needs, and the “special needs of the free world.” The report also called for raising the annual ceiling on quota immigration by about 60 percent.<sup>9</sup> Although these proposals were not immediately adopted—significant policy change took another twelve years—the report immediately became “the benchmark for reform efforts.”<sup>10</sup>

The Commission’s report was based on testimony from 634 witnesses, including labor and business leaders; social scientists; and the heads of civic, patriotic and veterans’ organizations. Still, the Commission repeatedly emphasized and highlighted consensus among Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish groups. The report’s third paragraph noted that “all the major religious faiths of America” had urged the president to appoint the commission. Another section cited “indisputable evidence” that Americans were “moving toward agreement” on the need for immigration reform; that evidence was the fact that “leading Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish organizations criticized [the McCarran-Walter Act] for similar reasons; and that, in some places, a single representative was authorized to speak for many lay and religious organizations of different denominations.” The Commission also invoked tri-faith agreement to reinforce its arguments that “American immigration law is as much a part of our foreign policy as a foreign treaty,” and that the United States “could safely absorb some 250,000 immigrants a year.”<sup>11</sup>

News coverage by sympathetic journalists both during and after the commission’s hearings also tended to stress agreement among religious groups. The *New York Times*

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<sup>9</sup> *Whom We Shall Welcome*, pp 263-266. Many immigrants—including alien wives of American citizens, migrants from the Western Hemisphere, and some refugees and displaced persons—fell outside of the quota system.

<sup>10</sup> Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* p. 318.

<sup>11</sup> *Whom We Shall Welcome*, pp. xi, 9, 49-50, and 80.



headlined an article on the hearings in St. Paul, Minnesota, “3 Faiths Ask Easing of the M’Carran Law.” A week later the paper reported on seven Georgia clergymen who had told the commission that the McCarran-Walter Act was “America’s ‘Iron Curtain.’” These clergymen, the paper added, “represented the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths.” An article in the *New Republic* noted that “spokesmen for Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish groups” had addressed the commission and stressed that “the substance of testimony seldom varied.”<sup>12</sup>

This emphasis on a broad tri-faith consensus was a moral counterweight, likely intended to divert public attention from the fact that both Houses of Congress had just passed the McCarran-Walter Act by overwhelming majorities.<sup>13</sup> In fact, such invocations of interfaith agreement elided disagreements both within and between faith communities over the specifics of immigration reform. This essay highlights two such disagreements: a controversy within the Catholic Church over tactics, and a strategic and substantive difference between Catholics, Jews, mainline Protestants, and evangelicals that likely had a more far-reaching effect on immigration reform.

During the debate that preceded passage of the McCarran-Walter Act, the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC)—the forerunner to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops—came out in support of the legislation, a move that aided passage of the bill by undermining the opposition of other religious groups. The organization’s official support of the bill resulted from a strategic decision made by NCWC staffers who concluded that alternative legislation had no chance of passage and that the McCarran-Walter bill was preferable to the

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<sup>12</sup> “3 Faiths Ask Easing of the M’Carran Law,” *New York Times*, 11 October 1952, p. 15; “M’Caran Act Assailed: 7 Georgia Clergymen Attack It as America’s ‘Iron Curtain,’” *New York Times*, 18 October 1952, p. 19; Tom Fitzsimmons, “The Nation Talks Back to McCarran,” *New Republic*, 12 January 1953, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> The House overrode Truman’s veto by a vote of 278-113. The vote in the Senate was 57-26.

status quo.<sup>14</sup> Although many bishops supported the move, it sparked a firestorm of protest within the Church. Some bishops, clerics, and lay leaders, argued that the bill turned Americans of Southern and Eastern European descent into second-class citizens, aided communists by hurting the U.S. image abroad, and violated Christian ideals of immigration promoted by the Pope. Members of the Catholic Press Association called McCarran-Walter “nationally and racially discriminatory,” and editors of more than one hundred Catholic newspapers urged Truman to veto it.<sup>15</sup> Boston Archbishop Richard Cushing condemned the act as “un-Christian and un-American,” while Archbishop Joseph Ritter of St. Louis organized a fall conference and invited leading Catholics to speak out against the legislation.<sup>16</sup>

No Catholic leader did more to fan the flames of protest within the church than Monsignor John O’Grady. O’Grady had become passionate about the immigration issue the previous winter when he spent time in Southern Italy and observed the degree to which resentment of U.S. immigration policy was fueling support for communism.<sup>17</sup> In addition to decrying the policy in closed-door meetings with NCWC staffers and the heads of other Catholic agencies, O’Grady took his complaints public. He wrote letters to Senate opponents of the McCarran-Walter bill applauding them for their “valiant fight.”<sup>18</sup> He held press conferences in New York, Washington, D.C., and other cities to condemn both the NCWC and the bill, and he

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<sup>14</sup> See the contents of folder 18, box 40, National Catholic Welfare Conference Executive Department/Office of the General Secretary, American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives (hereafter NCWC Papers); and Todd Scribner, “Negotiating Priorities: The National Catholic Welfare Conference and United States Migration Policy in a Post-World War II World, 1948-1952,” *American Catholic Studies*, vol. 121 (December 2010): 61-86.

<sup>15</sup> Editorial, *The Sign* (August 1952): 5; “Veto of the McCarran Bill,” *America* (5 July 1952): 347.

<sup>16</sup> “Cushing Condemns Immigration Law,” *New York Times*, 3 October 1952; and “Archbishop Ritter Wants More Fair Immigration Law,” *Catholic Telegraph-Register*, 31 October 1952.

<sup>17</sup> John O’Grady to Walter E. Alessandrini, 23 October 1952, in “Immigration: McCarran Act (1952)” folder, Box 8, Msgr. John O’Grady Papers, American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter O’Grady Papers).

<sup>18</sup> John O’Grady to Sen. John O. Pastore, 23 May 1952, and letters from O’Grady to Senators Wayne Morse, Herbert Lehman, Joseph C. O’Mahoney; Hubert Humphrey, Paul Douglas, William Benton, and Brian McMahon, all dated 26 May 1952; “Immigration: General (1952)” folder, Box 7, O’Grady Papers.

attacked both again in an opinion piece published in *Commonweal*.<sup>19</sup> Finally, O’Grady wrote President Truman, urging him to veto the legislation.<sup>20</sup> In fact, O’Grady’s fierce and public opposition to the McCarran-Walter bill was one reason that Truman tapped him to serve on the presidential commission.

O’Grady’s appointment clearly alarmed some members of the Church hierarchy. The day after the appointment was announced, Monsignor Howard J. Carroll, general secretary of the NCWC, wrote to five of the bishops who sat on the Conference’s Administrative Board. Carroll noted that “a Jewish gentleman of the White House staff” was setting up the presidential commission, adding that O’Grady’s appointment was hardly surprising since he, like “Jewish groups,” “adhered to the administration ‘line’ with regard to the McCarran Bill.” Carroll predicted that O’Grady’s appointment would be “a source of further irritation, embarrassment and confusion.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, during the hearings, O’Grady and his allies worked overtime to line up Catholic witnesses and to provide them with the ammunition they needed to condemn the McCarran-Walter bill.<sup>22</sup>

In a memo accompanying his letter to the bishops, Carroll also complained that O’Grady favored too close an alliance with Jews and Protestants. “The N.C.W.C. staff is convinced that neither the Jewish nor the Protestant groups are particularly interested in furthering Catholic

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<sup>19</sup> “Comments on Statements and Activities of Monsignor O’Grady on the Immigration Question,” 9 September 1952, folder 17, box 40, NCWC Papers; “Immigration Bill Hit by Catholic Leader,” *New York Times*, 21 March 2014, p. 16; John O’Grady, “The McCarran Immigration Bill,” *Commonweal*, (20 June 1952): 263.

<sup>20</sup> O’Grady to Harry S. Truman, 26 May 1952, “Immigration: General (1952)” folder, box 7, O’Grady Papers.

<sup>21</sup> Msgr. Howard J. Carroll to Archbishop Francis P. Keough, with copies to Archbishop Karl Alter, Cardinal Edward Mooney, Cardinal Samuel Stritch, and Bishop Emmett Walsh, 5 September 1952, folder 20, box 40, NCWC Papers. The “Jewish gentleman” to whom Carroll referred was Harry N. Rosenfield.

<sup>22</sup> For examples of long briefing memos and other materials sent by O’Grady to potential witnesses, see “Immigration: General (1952)” folder, box 7, O’Grady Papers. For another example, see the letter and assorted materials sent by Msgr. Edward Swanstrom to Diocesan Resettlement Directors in folder 20, box 40, NCWC Papers.

immigration into the United States,” he wrote. This pointed to a divide between faiths—one over substance and emphasis—that ultimately may have been far more effect on the shaping of postwar immigration policy.

During the immediate postwar period, Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant groups were all deeply concerned about and involved with the resettlement of refugees and displaced persons. But this issue frequently bled into a second one: that of “surplus” populations. Although “overpopulation” was and is a difficult term to define, most experts agreed that the problem existed when the natural or economic resources in a given area were not sufficient to support the local population.<sup>23</sup> In European countries ranging from Italy to Holland, economic devastation, the loss of colonies abroad, and a steady stream of “escapees” from Communist nations exacerbated the lingering problems of population displacement caused by World War II. There and particularly in less developed parts of the world, medical advances were lowering death rates, leading to what was already beginning to be called a “population explosion.”

Whatever they thought of the McCarran-Walter legislation, most members of the Catholic hierarchy and the Catholic press agreed with O’Grady that the church had “an interest in relieving European countries of their surplus populations so that they may be able to establish stable economies, develop constructive social programs, and resist the inroads of Communism.”

<sup>24</sup> (In fact, the internal Catholic debate over McCarran-Walter reflected disagreement over the

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<sup>23</sup> Council of Europe, Committee of Experts on the Problem of Refugees and Overpopulation, *Refugees and Surplus Elements of Population* (Strasbourg: Secretariat-General of the Council of Europe, 1953), pp. 9-10; Joyce Oramel Hertzler, *The Crisis in World Population: A Sociological Examination, with Special Reference to the Underdeveloped Areas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1956), p. 94.

<sup>24</sup> “Will the People of the United States Now Close Their Doors to Displaced Persons?”, memo prepared by O’Grady for discussion at the NCWC’s Meeting on Immigration on 3 March 1952, in “Immigration: McCarran Act (1952)” folder, box 8, O’Grady Papers. In February 1952, the NCWC’s Bureau of Migration and allied Catholic institutions agreed to undertake “an educational crusade to inculcate [in Catholics] a Christian and democratic attitude toward immigration.” The fact that they felt the need to

best means of achieving this end.) While this argument was political and pragmatic, it also aligned with Catholic theology, which asserted a “natural right” of man to migrate. In 1952, Pope Pius XII issued an apostolic constitution, *Exsul Familia*, in which he argued that God had created “all good things primarily for the good of all.” Given this, when men in overpopulated areas could not support their families, they had a God-given right to migrate to areas of the globe where resources were more plentiful. The Pope recognized a degree of state sovereignty, but he argued that it could not be “exaggerated to the point that access to this land is, for inadequate or unjustified reasons, denied to needy and decent peoples of other nations....” The Pope specifically condemned “the overly restrictive provisions” of U.S. immigration law.<sup>25</sup>

Pope Pius XII and other members of the Catholic hierarchy reiterated and developed this message in letters, radio addresses, articles, and speeches to lay leaders, diplomats, legislators, and other audiences both in the U.S. and abroad. In 1954, Monsignor Edward E. Swanstrom, executive director of Catholic Relief Services, urged Christians to reject “the Neo-Malthusian attitude that gave rise to the term ‘surplus populations,’” adding that Christians “cannot conceive of an image of the Creator being ‘surplus’ in the economy of earth or the economy of salvation.” Swanstrom argued that it was not possible to transport enough foreign aid from “have” to “have-not” countries, so “[t]he charitable and practical course is to allow migration from the overpopulated areas” to resource-rich countries like the United States.<sup>26</sup> In an encyclical issued nine years later, Pope John XXIII advocated “bringing the work to the workers, whenever possible.” But he added that those living in areas with insufficient economic resources “must be permitted

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undertake such a crusade suggests that not all Catholics shared the beliefs of many Church leaders. “Excerpts from Meeting on Immigration Problems,” 27 February 1952, folder 18, box 40, NCWC Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Exsul Familia Nazarethana*, 1 August 1952 at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/p12exsul.htm> (last accessed 15 December 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Edward E. Swanstrom, “The Christian Attitude Towards Migration,” *Social Compass* (January 1956): 10-14. Swanstrom originally gave this address to the meeting of the International Catholic Migration Commission in Breda, the Netherlands, September 1954.

to emigrate to other countries.” “The fact that [a human being] is a citizen of a particular State,” the Pope reasoned, “does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men.”<sup>27</sup>

This emphasis on relieving population pressures abroad set Catholic immigration reformers apart from many of the Jewish organizations and individuals at the forefront of the immigration reform campaign. Millions of European Jews had perished during the Holocaust, and others were caught behind the “Iron Curtain.” Zionists, the group most concerned with spurring Jewish immigration in the postwar decades, focused their attention on Israel. The Jewish groups who worked to reform U.S. immigration policy in the postwar decades were less concerned with moving global populations from areas of poverty to areas of plenty than with combating anti-Semitism at home. As Mae Ngai has rightly noted, they were primarily concerned with eradicating the stigma that national origins quotas conveyed—in other words, with *symbolic* reform.<sup>28</sup> This “abstract and formal approach” prompted Jewish individuals like New York Senator Herbert Lehman and historian Oscar Handlin, a key Lehman advisor, to advocate as early as 1953 for imposing a cap on immigration from the Western Hemisphere. Since Eastern Hemisphere immigration was limited, they argued, such a step was necessary for the sake of “consistency.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 11 April 1963 at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html) (last accessed 15 December 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Mae M. Ngai, “‘The Unlovely Residue of Outworn Prejudices’: The Hart-Celler Act and the Politics of Immigration Reform, 1945-1965,” in Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin, eds., *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 115. In this chapter, Ngai rightly attributes this viewpoint above all to American Jews. In *Impossible Subjects*, however, Ngai tends to equate the views of Jewish individuals like Lehman and Handlin with the views of all backers of immigration reform.

<sup>29</sup> Lehman first proposed a “blanket cap” on immigration to the U.S. in his testimony before Truman’s Commission on Immigration and Naturalization. He later incorporated this cap into an omnibus immigration bill he introduced in 1953. *Hearings*, p. 61; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, p. 255. To be sure, some Jewish individuals felt differently. The powerful New York congressman Emanuel Celler, for instance, sponsored emergency legislation in 1952 designed to relieve population pressures abroad.

Jewish and Catholic leaders in the United States thus viewed the issue of immigration reform through very different lenses. Mainline Protestants represented a third perspective. Officials of the National Council of Churches (NCC), together with its affiliated organizations and constituent denominations, argued against the national origins quota system on humanitarian, symbolic, and foreign policy grounds; however, they saved most of their passion for the plight of refugees, escapees, and displaced persons. While they too acknowledged that the overpopulation problem was dire, representatives of mainline Protestant churches frequently warned that immigration was not the solution. In fact, in 1960 one American official of the World Council of Churches called any attempt to promote an international right to migration “foolhardy.” “[D]emographic considerations,” he warned, “provide a powerful argument for restrictive and conservative immigration policies.”<sup>30</sup>

Unlike their Catholic counterparts, most mainline Protestant leaders stressed that the solution to the problem of global overpopulation lay not in immigration, but in family planning. Reverend Roswell P. Barnes, the pioneering ecumenicist who headed the World Council of Churches’ U.S. conference, alluded to this point when addressing a major conclave on U.S. immigration policy hosted by the NCC in 1961. The question of “moral responsibility” for sharing material goods and natural resources, he suggested, was closely related to “the question of moral responsibility for discipline and restraint in bringing into the world children who have little prospect for a decent physical existence.”<sup>31</sup> Other conference participants made the same point. The authors of a background paper on “Population Pressures” warned that overpopulation

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<sup>30</sup> Richard M. Fagley, *The Population Explosion and Christian Responsibility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 53, 57. Fagley was executive secretary of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, World Council of Churches.

<sup>31</sup> Roswell P. Barnes, “Highlights and Dilemmas of Protestant Experience in U.S. Immigration,” “Immigration and Refugees, 1961-69” folder, box 20, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America-Division of Christian Life and Mission Records, 1945-1973 (hereafter NCCC Records), Presbyterian Historical Society.

threatened to give rise “to some of the most serious and dangerous problems the human race has ever faced.” War was not a solution to the problem: “[E]ven a global holocaust of missiles and nuclear bombs bringing death to half the people of Europe and North America” would barely dent the rising tide. Nor could migration provide the answer. “It is becoming quite clear that the ultimate solution is to be found in population limitation—preferably by voluntary family planning,” the paper’s authors concluded.<sup>32</sup>

While most mainline Protestants talked generically about the need for family planning, some pointed out that the “overpopulated” countries of Europe were primarily Catholic and that, in less developed areas, Catholic doctrine was stimulating population growth. The religious overtones of the immigration argument surfaced explicitly in August 1952, when the Catholic Association for International Peace urged the U.S. to accept more immigrants from Asia and argued that “[e]conomically favored countries have a moral obligation to assist in the resettlement of displaced persons, expellees and *surplus populations of the world*.”<sup>33</sup> The *Christian Century* applauded the association’s “anti-racism,” but noted that many Protestants might oppose the idea that “this country [is] under obligation to absorb ‘surplus’ populations from lands where Catholic doctrine encourages overpopulation.”<sup>34</sup>

A few mainline Protestants went even further, not only decrying the pronatalist policies of the Catholic Church, but accusing the Church of using immigration to increase its influence in the United States. In early June 1952, the *Christian Century* published an article by Reverend

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<sup>32</sup> “Population Pressures,” a background paper for Workshop III of the Consultation on Immigration Policy in the United States, “Immigration & Refugees, 1961-69” folder, box 20, NCCC Papers. For further discussion of this issue, see Benson Y. Landis and Constant H. Jacquet, Jr., *Immigration Programs and Policies of Churches of the United States* (New York: National Council of Churches of Christ, 1957), pp. 32, 34-36, 56. Landis and Jacquet noted an irony: “[M]any Protestants are critical of lack of control of population in nations with surplus populations abroad. But most Protestant bodies in the United States have not officially recommended birth control to the American people.”

<sup>33</sup> “Catholic Unit Scores U.S. on Asian Curbs,” *New York Times* (3 August 1952): 4. [Italics added.]

<sup>34</sup> “Pope and Catholics Show Concern for Migrants,” *Christian Century* (27 August 1952): 965.



Ralph E. Smeltzer, a Church of Brethren minister, attacking both the McCarran-Walter bill then pending before Congress and an emergency measure (supported by the NCWC) designed to bring 300,000 non-quota European immigrants to the United States. Smeltzer had volunteered in the Manzanar internment camp during World War II, and after the war helped relocate over 1000 Japanese-American families. He spent 1964-65 in Selma, Alabama, trying to mediate between the city's black leadership and white establishment in the year before the city became the focus of the national civil rights movement.<sup>35</sup> In 1952, Smeltzer condemned the McCarran-Walter Act as racially discriminatory. At the same time, he called on Protestants to "immediately and strongly oppose" the emergency bill, arguing that it "would commit the United States to accept responsibility for absorbing 'surplus populations.'" "Roman Catholics see in [this bill] an opportunity to increase their religious and political power in the United States," Smeltzer wrote. "It would also help the Vatican to meet the serious problem it faces in Italy without fundamental reform." Smeltzer warned that Roman Catholic leaders were "deliberately and cleverly" using "the sympathies of people for the uprooted 'refugees' in Europe" to "quietly secur[e] 'surplus population' legislation." If the bill were passed, he cautioned, "the surplus population advocates will have got their foot in the door."<sup>36</sup>

In the 1950s and early 1960s, few representatives of mainline Protestantism linked immigration and anti-Catholicism as openly as Smeltzer.<sup>37</sup> Evangelicals, however, were less

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<sup>35</sup> Steve L. Longenecker, *Selma's Peacemaker: Ralph Smeltzer and Civil Rights Mediation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

<sup>36</sup> Ralph E. Smeltzer, "For Justice in Immigration," *Christian Century* 69 (4 June 1952): 666-68.

<sup>37</sup> Many liberal American intellectuals, however, were deeply suspicious of Catholic Power during this period. In fact, Paul Blanshard's 1949 *American Freedom and Catholic Power* was a bestseller, recommended by the Book-of-the-Month Club and praised by individuals ranging from John Dewey to McGeorge Bundy. In a review of Blanshard's book, Henry Sloane Coffin, the former president of Union Theological Seminary and one of America's most famous ministers, bemoaned the "kinship" between "totalitarian Moscow...and equally totalitarian Rome." John T. McGreevy, "Thinking on One's Own:

restrained. The pages of *United Evangelical Action*, the official publication of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), were filled with attacks on the NCC, the American Jewish Congress, and other religious organizations that had joined what the magazine's editors called a "conspiracy by the left-wing liberals" seeking to dismantle the national origins quota system.<sup>38</sup> The editors and some readers, however, saved special vitriol for the Catholic Church, which they saw as persecuting evangelicals abroad and working to undermine "religious freedom" at home. In 1952, the magazine quoted an unnamed "Italian NAE leader" as warning that a flood of Italian Catholics might put the U.S. "under the dictatorship of a theocracy headed by some Roman Catholic Bishop" sent "from Italy as a Papal Delegate."<sup>39</sup> In a 1956 letter to the editor, Carl J. Nelson of Turlock, California, charged that "the Roman Church is bending every effort to gain entrance for Catholic immigrants from all parts of the world" in order "[t]o increase her numbers, prestige and influence in the USA."<sup>40</sup> The following year the magazine decried a torrent of "nominal Christians"—"Roman or Greek Catholic[s] with so-called 'continental' ideas of Christian conduct and citizenship"—whom it believed were "dictating the political, educational, social, legislative and cultural decisions America is making today."<sup>41</sup>

Such sentiments made the NAE the only major religious group in the 1950s and early 1960s to oppose any substantial changes in the nation's immigration law. At its annual convention in 1957, the NAE reaffirmed its support for national origins quotas, arguing that any departure from that system would allow in large numbers of people who did not understand the

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Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928-1960" *Journal of American History* 84 (June 1997): 97-131.

<sup>38</sup> "Immigration Hearings," *United Evangelical Action* (1 January 1956): 6.

<sup>39</sup> "Italian Immigration," *United Evangelical Action* (15 November 1952): 11.

<sup>40</sup> "Immigration Again," *United Evangelical Action* (15 March 1956): 42.

<sup>41</sup> "The Tragedy of America's Newborn Religiosity," *United Evangelical Action* (15 March 1957): 19.

“American heritage” of religious freedom.<sup>42</sup> In 1965, the NAE again passed a resolution supporting the quota system. “[T]he United States concept of religious freedom includes separation of church and state which cannot be readily understood or appreciated by people who for a lifetime have been taught that the union of church and state in some degree is a divine imperative,” the NAE declared. It added that any change in immigration law that opened the door to more immigrants would thus undermine the Bill of Rights.<sup>43</sup>

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Faith-based groups did not limit their political activity to offering testimony or passing resolutions. Between 1957 and 1965, the NAE repeatedly urged its members to write their senators and congressmen opposing any changes to the McCarran-Walter Act. At the same time, Catholic, Jewish, Greek Orthodox, and many mainline Protestant denominations played a key role both in building public support for immigration reform and in pressuring politicians to act. The NCWC spawned and helped staff the American Committee on Italian Migration, an ethnic organization that quickly moved to the forefront of the reform campaign. Italian-American Catholics and other Catholic reformers met in church basements and parish halls, advertised through Church newsletters and lay Catholic organizations, and recruited priests and the faithful to address and attend events like a 1963 immigration reform rally in Chicago’s McCormick Place.<sup>44</sup> The American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, and other Jewish groups orchestrated public events and letter-writing

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<sup>42</sup> “Resolutions,” *United Evangelical Action* (15 May 1957): 9.

<sup>43</sup> [www.nae.net/fullresolutionlist/194-immigration-laws-1965](http://www.nae.net/fullresolutionlist/194-immigration-laws-1965) (last accessed on 13 August 2013). The NAE has since removed this resolution from its website.

<sup>44</sup> Danielle Battisti, “Relatives, Refugees, and Reform: Italian-Americans and Italian Immigration during the Cold War, 1945-1965,” (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 2010), especially pp. 115-121; Anthony Sorrentino, *Organizing the Ethnic Community: An Account of the Origin, History, and Development of the Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans, 1952-1995* (Center for Migration Studies, 1995), pp. 34-35.

campaigns on behalf of immigration reform, while arranging for the publication and distribution of relevant books by allies like Senators Hubert Humphrey and John F. Kennedy.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, Protestant churches ranging from the Presbyterians to the Episcopalians denounced U.S. immigration law in church newsletters and special mailings. In May 1965, as Congress was considering the Hart-Celler Act, the American Baptist Home Mission Societies sent a packet of pro-reform “fact sheets” to 6000 pastors, urging them “to lead your congregation in prayerful study and discussion” and inform their political leaders of their views.<sup>46</sup>

Such campaigns clearly mobilized the faithful. Between 1957 and 1965, Senator Sam Ervin, a powerful North Carolina Democrat and a key member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, received hundreds of letters and petitions from religious entities and individuals urging him to back immigration reform. His immigration files include letters from a Presbyterian rector in Oregon; a Methodist women’s group in Burnsville, North Carolina; the pastor of a Lutheran church in Iowa; and the North Carolina chapter of B’nai B’rith. Some correspondents asked Ervin to support a complete overhaul of McCarran-Walter, while others favored the admission of more refugees or the reassignment of unused quotas to countries with long waiting lists. In 1963, Ervin received a petition with five pages of signatures collected by the Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Charlotte asking him to increase the Greek quota. Form letters also poured in from Greeks across the state warning the senator that “the eyes of Eastern Orthodoxy are focused upon your action.” Two years later the minister of Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church in Asheville, North Carolina urged Ervin to support the bill then pending in Congress. “Not only do the racial insults implied in the present [national origins quota] system

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<sup>45</sup> Libby Garland, *After They Closed the Gates: Jewish Illegal Immigration to the United States, 1921-1965* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 207-209.

<sup>46</sup> The American Baptists also sent the pack of materials to Sen. Sam Ervin. See folder 5083, box 115, Subgroup A of the Sam Ervin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereinafter cited as Ervin Papers).

harm our foreign relations and national image abroad,” Rev. Robert S. Busey wrote, “but we also seem to be depriving ourselves of some very valuable potential citizens by use of irrational criteria.”<sup>47</sup>

Not all of Ervin’s correspondents appreciated the political activism of their faith communities. In 1957, the rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Statesville, North Carolina copied Ervin on an angry letter he had just dashed off to *Episcopal Churchnews*. That publication had reprinted statements by Episcopal, Church World Service, and NCC officials condemning the national origins quota system and urging Congress to open the doors to more refugees. “Our church leadership can get itself out on some gosh-awful limbs,” Reverend James Dees wrote Ervin. “Believe me, they don’t represent the thinking of the people, at least not in the South.”<sup>48</sup> In June 1965, A.W. McAlister, Jr. of Greensboro, North Carolina, complained of the “organized effort” by various Protestant, Jewish and Catholic groups to “destroy the influence of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants in both politics and religion” by advancing immigration reform. As evidence, he attached an issue of a monthly publication put out by “my own church,” the United Church of Christ, which “is from cover to cover dedicated to this subject.”<sup>49</sup>

These individuals were hardly alone, and at least some who felt alienated by such liberal political activism drifted into the conservative evangelical fold. The NAE was attuned to such possibilities. In a 1957 article in *United Evangelical Action*, an NAE official told of an “active Presbyterian churchwoman” in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania who had been appalled to discover that “materials distributed by her denomination to the women’s group across the nation were slanted

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<sup>47</sup> See petition in folder 3908, box 87; and Busey to Ervin (3 February 1965) in folder 5081, box 115; both in Ervin Papers.

<sup>48</sup> Rev. James P. Dees to Ervin (3 April 1957), folder 1382, box 22, Ervin Papers.

<sup>49</sup> A.W. McAlister, Jr. to Ervin (5 June 1965), folder 5084, box 115, Ervin Papers.

to develop opposition” to the McCarran-Walter Act. “That church organizations should lead the drive to open up the immigration act is disconcerting to many church members,” he opined. The NAE ordered 36,000 reprints of the article and sent it to churches and individuals across the nation.<sup>50</sup>

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So what does all this mean for our understanding of religion and politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? At the very least, it suggests that religious entities, issues, and language played a larger role in the politics of mid-century immigration reform than scholars have generally realized. It also reveals oft-overlooked fissures in the coalition that backed such reform. One prominent immigration historian, for instance, has argued that “McCarthyism’s assault on the left silenced anticolonial and internationalist politics,” leading immigration reformers to an unchallenged embrace of “liberal nationalism.” Such nationalism privileged U.S. economic interests over the needs of sending nations.<sup>51</sup> The Red Scare undoubtedly shaped debates over immigration reform, but this argument overlooks the views of many Catholic and some other religious leaders who believed that U.S. immigration policy should be marshaled to address the problem of global overpopulation. They embraced an “internationalist” agenda—one that could be both compatible with anticommunism and at odds with U.S. economic nationalism.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, evangelicals were just beginning to flex their political muscles. Religious conservatives have been entirely ignored by historians of immigration policy, but they too may have helped stall and then shape immigration reform. The NAE encouraged its members to oppose any changes to the McCarran-Walter Act, and evangelical churches provided

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<sup>50</sup> Clyde W. Taylor, “Where Does the Church Stand on Immigration?” *United Evangelical Action* (15 June 1957): 30-31. For correspondence relating to the article and mass mailing, see “Immigration Article” folder, box 34, Records of the National Association of Evangelicals, Wheaton College Archives, Wheaton, Illinois.

<sup>51</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, p. 243.

conduits for the dissemination of conservative newsletters and views. Ardent opponents of immigration reform also deluged Ervin with mail, and some of these individuals deployed virulently anti-Catholic language that they likely honed in evangelical networks. Reverend Melvin Sparks of Pinecroft Church of Christ in Hamlet, North Carolina, for instance, warned in 1964 that any substantial change in immigration law would lead “Communists and Roman Catholics [to] flood our Country.”<sup>52</sup> The following year James P. Cating of Raleigh decried the expected passage of “that blatantly Catholic immigration act.” “Everyone else loses when new hordes of Catholic Rabbits come in to further overpopulate us and increasingly gain power,” he declared.<sup>53</sup>

Such arguments may have contributed to one of the most conservative—and consequential—provisions of the 1965 Immigration Act: its limitation on immigration from the Western Hemisphere. Senator Lehman first proposed such a cap in 1953, but reform-minded policymakers soon took it off the table and it was strongly opposed by both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. In the final round of negotiations, two powerful Senators—Ervin and minority leader Everett Dirksen (R-Ill.)—forced the White House to accept the provision as the price of passing the immigration bill out of their Senate subcommittee.

Historians have generally suggested that Southern Democrats and their conservative allies held the bill hostage because of their shared concerns about the racial character of potential immigrants from Latin America and the West Indies—the Western Hemisphere’s “browns and blacks.”<sup>54</sup> Racial anxieties undoubtedly shaped Ervin’s stance. A self-described country lawyer fond of quoting Shakespeare and Aesop’s Fables in his Southern drawl, Ervin led the fight

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<sup>52</sup> Sparks to Ervin, 16 June 1964, folder 4473, box 101, Ervin Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Cating to Ervin, 21 September 1965, folder 5088, box 115, Ervin Papers. While Cating doesn’t give his religious affiliation, his views mirrored those of many evangelicals.

<sup>54</sup> Zolberg, *A Nation by Design*, p. 320.

against civil rights legislation and openly questioned the contribution of Indonesians and Congolese to American culture. But Ervin also quoted Bible verses, and his response to Cating suggests that religion too may have been on his mind. “You are correct that the original measure would have resulted in increased immigration from the Catholic countries,” he wrote, but the bill just passed did “exactly the opposite.” His amendment, he explained, restricted immigration from fast-growing and “predominantly Catholic” Latin America for the first time in U.S. history. For that reason, “in the future we will be receiving fewer immigrants from Catholic countries than we have in the past.”<sup>55</sup>

Dirksen’s motives are harder to untangle, and his paper trail is thinner, because he transacted so much of his business over the phone. Still, if race may not have been Ervin’s only consideration, it seems even less likely to have motivated Dirksen. Though a steadfast conservative with libertarian tendencies, the Illinois senator had just delivered the Republican votes needed to pass both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Dirksen was, however, a lifelong member of the evangelical Christian Reformed Church and he had honed his speaking skills filling in at the pulpit. When the Senate took up the immigration bill, he was in the midst of promoting a constitutional amendment to allow voluntary prayer in public schools. Dirksen’s principal allies in that fight were evangelicals and fundamentalists, who viewed the ban on school prayer as they did immigration. They saw both as threats to America’s “religious freedom.”

Whatever influence on immigration policy evangelicals had in 1965, their position looks, in hindsight, deeply ironic. If evangelical churches once benefitted from the defection of conservative white mainline Protestants, their numbers have been buoyed in recent years by immigrants from Africa, Asia, and especially Latin America. Today, roughly one-quarter of all

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<sup>55</sup> Ervin to Cating, 23 September 1965, folder 5088, box 115, Ervin Papers.



American evangelicals are non-white or Hispanic, compared to just 14% of those who attend mainline Protestant churches.<sup>56</sup> This shift has begun to reshape evangelical politics. While the rank-and-file remain divided on issues like refugee resettlement and a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants, many evangelical pastors and organizations now support such measures. In 2014, the NAE finally expunged its 1957 and 1965 immigration resolutions from its website. It replaced those resolutions with a lengthy discussion of the need for reform.

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<sup>56</sup> Pew Research Center, 12 May 2015, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape.”