

At Home in Babylon: Billy Sunday's Revival Team
and Evangelicalism in Modern America

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers a provocative reassessment of Billy Sunday and his revivals in the Progressive Era. Sunday was the most successful American revivalist before Billy Graham, but despite his importance, he remains caricatured as a fundamentalist or a cavorting pulpit clown. This study argues that Sunday and his team helped lead and reinforce some of the biggest social and cultural transformations of the early twentieth century. In an era of mass production and consumption, Sunday and his team crafted a systematic revival program that made outpourings of the Holy Spirit replicable in cities across the nation and appealing to cross-class audiences. His revivals drew unique power from the progressive milieu, and they facilitated the revolution in women's roles. They led the cultural transition from Victorianism to consumerism, encouraged civic activism, and made the bureaucratic orientation palatable to millions of Americans. Billy Sunday, therefore, was not an anti-modernist. He and his revivals were part of the urban-industrial experience.