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Review Panel: A House Full of Females


Reviewed by Ann M. Little, W. Paul Reeve, and Sarah Carter
Response by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

ANN M. LITTLE: A House Full of Females has all of the signature flourishes we’ve come to expect from the Bancroft and Pulitzer Prize–winning historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich: sensitive readings of textual sources; lavish attention to material culture, especially anything that women had their hands in creating; and very gentle nudges for readers to appreciate the ironies of history. They all add up to create a messy and ambitious portrait of the founding generation of Latter-day Saints, especially of the women whose faith and labor Ulrich argues were crucial to the survival and success of the Mormons. Perhaps more importantly, Ulrich shows her flair for that slipperiest of historians’ skills: the knack for showing her readers that the past is indeed a foreign country, or as she slyly suggests, “a different planet” entirely (p. xxv).

Ulrich has taken on a challenging task in attempting to bridge LDS history and American women’s history in order to write a book that speaks convincingly to both audiences. Ulrich betrays no little irritation that “the word ‘paradox’ appears again and again in books and articles dealing with” Mormon women’s history, not just because Mormon
history—like most institutional or denominational histories—has written women's labor and spiritual and intellectual contributions out of the official record, but because of the apparently sharply opposed values and goals of American feminism and plural marriage. As Ulrich puts it, many Americans wonder “how could women simultaneously support a national campaign for political and economic rights while defending marital practices that to most people seemed relentlessly patriarchal” (p. xiii). This “paradox” lives on in the minds of Americans, male and female, scholars and nonscholars, feminists and anti-feminists alike. Every time I mentioned that I was reading this book to review it, the responses were some variety of “Good luck with that.”

Addressing the challenge head on, Ulrich reaches for not just early Mormon texts but also symbolically laden textiles. In the justly celebrated A Midwife’s Tale, Ulrich asked readers to see a piece of common fabric—a blue and white checked linen cloth—as a metaphor for understanding the gendered patterns of daily life in Hallowell, Maine, at the turn of the nineteenth century. “Think of the white threads as women’s activities, the blue as men’s, then imagine the resulting social web,” with some squares all white, some all blue, and others mixed, warp and weft intermingling.1 Once again, Ulrich reaches to fabric worked by women’s hands as a central metaphor in this book, seizing upon the remarkable discovery and reunification of an 1857 Mormon album quilt (pp. 336–54, 367–68, and color insert 2, pp. 2–3) made of squares appliquéd or embroidered by the girls and women of the Fourteenth Ward. Raffled off to raise money for a pipe organ, it was crudely severed in a later generation, but both halves survived in two different families until it was providentially reunited in 2004—much as feminism and Mormon history have been rent for much of the past 150 years.2

From the beginning, Ulrich’s early Mormon women are opinionated, active, and political. They were spiritually daring and sometimes sexually daring too; many of them courted scandal or disgrace by divorcing their husbands and leaving children behind in order to live their faith. Ulrich begins the book in the midst of an 1870 “indignation meeting” in Salt Lake City, in which Mormon women gathered to protest the Cullom Bill, and this meeting is also where the book will end four hundred pages later. In the intervening pages, Ulrich shows how women as well as men were caught up in the religious and sexual experimentation of the first half of the nineteenth century on a continuum with other communities that put sexuality at the center of their spiritual practice and community life: celibacy among the Shakers, “complex marriage” in the Oneida community (adults could have multiple sexual partners; children were reared communally), and “celestial marriage” among the Latter-day Saints. All of these perfectionist Christian communities saw heterosexual monogamy and nuclear families as institutions that interfered with their spiritual goals. And which other Americans were as invested in reforming American family and sexual life in the nineteenth century? Feminists. So it’s not surprising that Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony show up in Salt Lake in 1871 to spread the message of feminism and women’s suffrage, because “polygamy and monogamy were both oppressive systems” (p. xiii), but it was Mormon Utah that recognized women’s voting rights first.

Ulrich’s instinct to hew to the daily realities of mid-nineteenth-century missionary life and westward imperial expansion serves her well. The Mormons she portrays lead complicated lives—emotionally and sexually messy as well as frequently (literally) clogged with mud, dirt, and dysentery from their various removes and migrations. She focuses on the details of early Mormon life as they were revealed in diaries rather than retrospective memoirs, which brings the immediacy of their experimentation to life. These are not modern Latter-day Saints:

they drink hot beverages like tea and coffee, pass the whiskey jug, and drink beer too. Many women resisted plural marriage besides Emma Smith, but plenty of men appear to have been reluctant polygamists too. One of Ulrich’s main protagonists, the prolific diarist and member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles and future church president Wilford Woodruff, endured gossip and peer pressure because he remained married only to Phebe Carter Woodruff for so long. (He eventually gave in and married several younger women, but only after Phebe had reached the end of her childbearing years.) For a religious faith built around family life, early Mormonism was extremely hard on families because it demanded suffering and deprivation—of the husbands and children who were abandoned by their wives and mothers gripped by the zeal of conversion, and of the wives and children left to shift for themselves in Illinois, Missouri, and on the Overland Trail by missionary husbands and fathers. Early church members were also pioneers of divorce, which Ulrich says was a safety valve for the pressures of polygamous family life. And they wrote it all down in prolix diaries and albums decorated with hearts, arrows, and keys in ink and cut paper, and stitched or embroidered their histories into samplers and quilts with silk floss, cotton thread, and human hair.

Although Ulrich’s book is a bid to bridge two different intellectual traditions in American history, she seems to pitch her argument more at convincing Mormons than feminists that both of these traditions were woven into the fabric of early Mormon life. “Women’s voices trouble the old stories,” and listening to those voices is what women’s historians do (p. 32). Women’s history has come a long way from its birth as a field of professional inquiry that focused on the white women’s suffrage movement and other histories of feminist activism. Women’s historians have always taken women’s work and ideas seriously, and that means taking seriously the ideas and work of women whose politics or faith we may not share. For the past twenty years, politically conservative women’s activism and religiously conservative women have been the subjects of some of the most celebrated books in the field, and they were written
by feminist scholars. Furthermore, historians of sexuality—most of whom were trained as women’s historians—have worked to provide context and detail for understanding the experimental sexual culture of the antebellum US. For historians familiar with this literature, celestial marriage is as American as the applejack passed around in Hosea Stout’s “police men’s” jug at Winter Quarters in 1847 (pp. 165–66).

Ulrich reminds her readers throughout her book that Mormon polygamy operated in a very different marital and sexual landscape in the mid-nineteenth century. As feminists of the time argued, monogamous (in theory) marriage radically disempowered women too, so that if Mormons offered women “patriarchy with a soft voice, male dominance with a caress[,] there was nothing here to distinguish Latter-day Saints from other Christians” (p. 40). It was a sign of the times. A comparison Ulrich doesn’t develop is the fact that polygamy was practiced in many Great Plains and western communities among the people that Mormons called “Lamanites.” There is ample evidence that polygamy became even more prominent as a result of the stresses of colonization throughout Native North America. Indeed, the stresses of Mormon refugee life combined with the imperative of missionary work that Ulrich documents so carefully suggest that polygyny served similar purposes in Mormon and Native American communities alike. We know that the Comanche and Kiowa, for example, practiced a polygamy that bears a strong resemblance to Mormon polygamy: wives were a status symbol, so the distribution of female labor correlated strongly with a man’s wealth and standing in his community. Recent work by junior scholars—especially historians of gender and sexuality—on polygamy

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inside and beyond the Latter-day Saints offers another means by which we might bring Mormon history and women’s history together.\textbf{6}

\textit{A House Full of Females} entirely succeeds in its task of reuniting Mormon history and women’s history to tell a story fundamentally American: women and men of faith, moved by a vision of family and community unity with God, gathered to pray, work, and build something of lasting value for their descendants. (Secular historians would add that the journey was difficult and its outcome entirely uncertain.) Like the sundered Fourteenth Ward album quilt that serves as the book’s central metaphor, we can see the seams, the individual stitches, and the wear and tear of 160 years, but it’s a mantle large enough to tell many different stories.

\textbf{Ann M. Little} is professor of history at Colorado State University and the author of \textit{The Many Captivities of Esther Wheelwright} (Yale University Press, 2016) and \textit{Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England} (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). She blogs at Historiann.com and is on Twitter @Historiann.

\textbf{W. Paul Reeve}: Bancroft and Pulitzer Prize–winning historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has spent most of her academic career studying women, gender, and sexuality in early American history. In \textit{A House Full of Females}, she now turns her attention toward the founding generation of Latter-day Saints, and the rewards are invigorating. How was it, she

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Published by BYU ScholarsArchive, 2017
wonders, that Mormon women came to champion women’s rights and enjoy the political franchise fifty years ahead of female suffrage being granted nationwide? An 1870 indignation meeting on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, which witnessed masses of Mormon women speak out in opposition to the Cullom Bill, a piece of antipolygamy legislation then under consideration in Congress, is the starting and ending point of her study. What was it that led Mormon women to protest congressional legislation, to defend polygamy, and to speak out in favor of female suffrage, a right they won later that same year?

Ulrich’s central questions are all the more perplexing given the patriarchal nature of Mormon society and the fact that outsiders frequently described LDS polygamy as a version of “white slavery.” Latter-day Saints rejected the notion that Mormon women were held captive in a repressive system and instead emphasized plural marriage as a religious sacrament and its liberating potential. Scholarly treatments of the subject have tended to align along a similar binary. Ulrich’s solution is to let Mormon women speak for themselves. Their voices, she tells us, “trouble the old stories” (p. 32).

To fully answer her questions, Ulrich leads readers on a variety of journeys across time and space as well as into the religious lives of first-generation converts to an upstart and suspect faith. She first steps back in time to 1835 and in space to Ohio, Connecticut, and Maine, where she explores the conversions of women and men into “a faith that promised wonders on wonders” (p. 5). Britain, Nauvoo, Iowa, Winter Quarters, the Overland Trail, Salt Lake City, Hong Kong, Hindoostan (India), Liverpool, and San Bernardino are the geographic ranges of her story as she follows various women and men whose spiritual yearnings relegated them to the economic, political, social, geographic, and religious margins. Joseph Smith’s unfolding cosmology and his promises of celestial glory captivated these early Saints, especially as both men and women spoke in tongues, interpreted tongues, healed the sick, presided and preached, dreamed and prophesied. They built new settlements, temples, and Relief Society halls; cared for Native Americans and for the poor; dressed and buried their dead; blessed and anointed women for
childbirth; delivered babies; served missions; sustained themselves and their families while their husbands were on missions; and ultimately built a church from scratch.

Ulrich's chronological trajectory is detailed up through 1858 and the end of the Utah War and then comparatively uneven through the 1860s, ending back at the 1870 indignation meeting in Salt Lake City, which opened her story. By that point her readers have traveled the globe with her subjects and experienced many of the intimate details of their lives. What emerges is much more than an answer to Ulrich's questions—it is a gripping revitalization of Mormon history with women claiming their rightful place as actors, agents, and agitators who shaped their own destinies.

The cycles of life are ever present in Ulrich's narrative as the vicissitudes of birth, marriage, divorce, and death compel her story along and steep it in a spirit of compassion and understanding that only a historian of her caliber could achieve. This is not a dry and detached analysis, but rather it reads as if Ulrich herself got mud on her hands as she struggled through the sodden dirt of Iowa alongside her nineteenth-century subjects. This is not to suggest that Ulrich abandoned her duty as historian to evaluate, organize, interpret, analyze, and ultimately make sense of the past. To the contrary, she does just that, but in a way that draws readers in and makes them trust her assessments because she has done the difficult work of getting to know her subjects—on their terms, not Ulrich's.

This level of intimacy and immediacy is achievable because of Ulrich's source base. She largely confines herself to the letters, journals, poetry, and diaries of her subjects and then lets the letter writers and diary keepers speak for themselves. It is a compelling methodology and one in which Ulrich is an expert. She relishes not only the words that her subjects left behind, but the diaries and letters themselves. She describes their sizes and shapes as well as the penmanship, spelling skills (or lack thereof), and grammar of the various writers, the drawings they made in their diaries, the things that seemed important to them to record, and the things that did not. Ulrich gets to know her
subjects through the material culture they left behind, and then she shares her discoveries with her readers as if she were alone with them and revealing a new find for the first time. She is at ease with her sources and fluid with her assessments in a way that captivates and engages.

She also captures the spectrum of Mormon lives in the writings she selects. Prominent Mormons such as Wilford and Phebe Woodruff, Eliza R. Snow, and William Clayton are balanced with less well-known Saints such as Augusta Adams Cobb, Caroline Barnes Crosby, and Patty B. Sessions. In this way, a cross section of experiences emerges to shape our understanding of the place of women in Mormon history and American culture.

While Ulrich’s sources reveal so much of the day-to-day details of life and death, the various responses to plural marriage, the difficulties of separation resulting from missionary assignments, and the challenges of creating new settlements as religious refugees, they do not and cannot explain the overall shape of the Mormon community in relationship to its individual diary keepers. Ulrich does an adequate job of tapping into secondary sources to give form to the proverbial forest, but a broader perspective is sometimes missing. Death pervades the diaries, which begs a variety of questions: What were death rates in Nauvoo, and how did they compare to the national average? How many Saints died on the trail from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters, how many died the first year at Winter Quarters, and how many died in Utah? Historians of the Mormon past have done the difficult job of calculating much of this information, which might have better contextualized the relenting deaths the diaries reveal. Demographic information on polygamy also continues to emerge as researchers such as Kathryn Daynes and Ben Bennion calculate the number of polygamous versus monogamous households in a given Utah community in a given census year. Average age at marriage, average number of wives per husband, and other such evidence are also available in the secondary sources. Tapping into some of this research would have allowed readers to better evaluate how representative the diary keepers were of Mormonism as a whole.
Certainly *A House Full of Females* is more a cultural history of early Mormonism than it is a history of Mormon polygamy, yet polygamy is a key focus. Ulrich is attuned to the debates surrounding polygamy, especially its fraught introduction under Joseph Smith’s tutelage in Nauvoo, yet she does not get bogged down in the disputes. Her measured assessments are seamlessly woven into her story—perhaps too seamlessly for some scholars who might have hoped for an appraisal of Joseph Smith’s relationship with Fanny Alger or Helen Mar Kimball Whitney.

Was plural marriage a cover for the excesses of Joseph Smith’s libido or an excuse to gain sexual access to young women? Ulrich does not think so even as she explores a variety of female responses to its introduction: from rage and despair to caution and rejoicing. In her words, “plural marriage did not drop out of the heavens fully formed,” and there was not “a single path to its acceptance” (p. 85). Some women expressed repugnance while others conveyed curiosity and ambition. Those Nauvoo women who accepted “the principle” forged a “religious vocation” and found belonging and even status (p. 85). Polygamy also offered economic and spiritual security, a way of rejecting convention, and an escape route from troubled marriages. Ultimately Ulrich demonstrates that polygamy would never have worked without the consent of women, and it is their agency that she emphasizes. As she puts it, male leaders “wanted to attract, not command, female loyalty” (p. 107).

The strength of *A House Full of Females* is the women themselves. Ulrich privileges their estimation of their own lives over twenty-first-century indignation over plural marriage. The women she studies were indignant that outsiders so blithely dismissed the possibility that Mormon women could have chosen their own paths into Mormonism and, for some of them, into plural marriage. Perhaps Ulrich’s assessment of Eleanor McLean Pratt’s anger over her treatment in an Arkansas courthouse offers an apt evaluation of why Mormon women defended plural marriage in 1870 and spoke up for women’s rights thereafter. Eleanor was angry at the “self-righteousness of those who claimed to be protecting Latter-day Saint women by assaulting their choices” (p. 352). Far from assaulting their choices, Ulrich honors their words and their lives.
W. Paul Reeve is Simmons Professor of Mormon Studies at the University of Utah. He is the author of *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford, 2015). He is currently coediting with LaJean Carruth and Christopher Rich a documentary history of race, slavery, and servitude at the 1852 Utah Territorial legislature and creating a digital database of all known black Latter-day Saints from 1830 to 1930.

Sarah Carter: In my classes on women's and gender history in Western Canada, I like to introduce students to Zina Young Card, founder, along with her husband Charles Ora Card, of the Mormon settlements of southern Alberta. She challenges assumptions about subservient Mormon plural wives. A daughter of Brigham Young, she was raised in a house full of females and had worked as theater performer, a teacher, and a homesteader before settling in Canada in the late 1880s. She was active in the cause of women's suffrage; in 1879 she was a delegate to the first Congress of Women's Suffrage in Washington, DC, and gained national attention for her suffrage work in Utah. She was a plural wife, a mother of two boys, and a widow at a young age, and in 1884 she became the plural wife of Charles Card. Describing Zina Card in his memoir, Mountie Sam Steele wrote that “brilliant lawyers and able financiers . . . had all they could do to hold their own in arguments with the leading lady of the settlement.” Steele added that “strange to say I found the Mormon women-folk the strongest supporters of polygamy.”

*A House Full of Females* provides fresh and deep understanding of LDS women such as Card. This is a fascinating analysis of the complex history of how Mormon women came to be supporters of plural marriage and, to a lesser extent, how they also became ardent supporters of suffrage. It begins and ends with an “indignation meeting” of women held in Salt Lake City in 1870 organized to express their support for plural marriage and their outrage over federal legislation that meant their husbands could be imprisoned and Mormon property confiscated. That year a bill granting settler women the vote was passed in the Utah
legislature, and in 1871, when powerful advocates for women’s suffrage Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony visited Utah, Mormon women rallied to that cause. The emergence of Utah settler women as political actors was confounding to outsiders, who saw this as a “paradox”: “How could women simultaneously support a national campaign for political and economic rights while defending marital practices that to most people seemed relentlessly patriarchal?” (p. xiii). This book addresses that question, rejecting simplistic answers such as they were doing what the male leaders of the church demanded of them. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich stresses that “nothing outraged Mormon women more that the notion that they were simply pawns of the patriarchy” (p. 385).

Ulrich notes, “There could have been no such thing as plural marriage if hundreds of women had not accepted ‘the principle’ and passed it on to new generations” (p. 387). For some it was a means of salvation, offering the hope of future exaltation. Plural marriage offered spiritual and economic security for some, and for others it was an alternative to a troubled marriage or a way of defying convention. But accepting plural marriage was a long and fraught process. Drawing on the diaries, letters, and life writing of ordinary women and men to understand early Mormonism from their perspective, Ulrich follows the Saints from upstate New York to the Ohio Valley and to Utah, while also tracing the gradual embrace of plural marriage. There was “not a single path to its acceptance” (p. 85). Plural marriage “generated conflict and gossip,” and “emotions pivoted from rage to melancholy and from joy to despondency” (p. 99). Women struggled to grasp the inchoate implications of plurality when first introduced to the practice.

There was never universal acceptance. Two of the wives of Brigham Young illustrate the diversity of responses. Augusta Cobb felt neglected and was not happy to share her husband with so many others, while Zina Jacobs (mother of Zina Card) was content as a plural wife. Ulrich points out that the sources do not always provide clear insight into the innermost thoughts of plural wives. Phebe Woodruff’s husband, Wilford, was one of the last of the apostles to take a plural wife, and she was opposed to plural marriage until after she gave birth to her last
child at age forty-six, until she became “sick and wretched,” and after a revelation from God convinced her to accept the principle. She thereafter defended polygamy, but it is difficult to interpret her letters to her husband when she urged him to take other wives and wrote sentences such as “Don’t let me stand in your way in regard to that” (p. 347). Ulrich writes, “It is impossible to know whether her comments were supportive or sardonic” (p. 347). Yet at the indignation meeting, Phebe Woodruff warned Congress that if they imprisoned Mormon men, they would need “to make their prisons large enough to hold their wives, for where they go we will go also” (p. xii).

Strong and independent women are featured throughout this book. Zina Card was far from alone. As Ulrich demonstrates, from the earliest days Mormon women were willing to “push against the grain,” sometimes abandoning homes, families, and legal husbands. Through the Female Relief Society—founded in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1842; disbanded by Brigham Young in 1845; and reconstructed in Utah—women acquired organizational, speaking, and leadership experience. Although these societies declined in the 1860s, they were revived in 1870 with the indignation meeting. Women leaders of the organization included Eliza Snow, a plural wife of first Joseph Smith and later Brigham Young. She is followed throughout the book through her diary, letters, album, memoir, poetry, song, drawings, and needlework. She preserved the minutes of the original Nauvoo society, helped revive the societies in Utah, and was an organizer of the indignation meeting.

As to be expected in a book by Ulrich, there is an emphasis on material culture as a source for understanding the past, particularly the history of women. There are beautiful illustrations but also analysis of their quilts, embroidery, needlework, and paintings. Phebe Woodruff was president of the Salt Lake Fourteenth Ward Female Relief Society in 1857 when they created an “album quilt” amid a series of crises and threats. The quilt “takes us beneath headlines to the symbolic language through which Phebe Woodruff and her sisters defended their faith, their civility and their patriotism” (p. 338). The book also contains an analysis and illustrations of the floor plans of houses designed to
accommodate plural wives, and insight is provided into objects such as keys, crucial symbols in Mormon thought employed by both women and men in their writing and art.

While this book provides insight into the complexities of Mormon women’s defense of plural marriage, I hoped to understand more deeply why they wanted the right to vote. This issue seems to have been rarely mentioned in the diaries and letters of the women studied here, although the sources relied on for this book—the writing of ordinary people—dwindle after 1858, for reasons that Ulrich can only speculate on, and these would have been the years of growing interest in the cause of suffrage. One last chapter deals with the period 1858–1872. While it mentions that by 1900 in Utah there were more people affiliated with the national suffrage movement than in any other state or territory in the United States, I am not clear why that was so (p. 386). I would also like to know more about the dissenters, those who broke with the church, such as Fanny Stenhouse, who became an anti-Mormon lecturer condemning plural marriage. But these are topics for other books; this is a beautifully written study that brings the spiritual and material struggles of ordinary men and women to life. The book exposes the “peculiar values” of the Mormons but also reveals “the many things they shared with those who considered them aliens” (p. xxv). With this book my students will now have much richer understanding of the lives of settlers to Canada such as Zina Card, who challenged conventions and made history.

Sarah Carter is a professor of history and Henry Marshall Tory Chair in the Department of History and Classics and in the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta.

Laurel Tatcher Ulrich: For an author, nothing is more satisfying than discovering that people you admire not only like your work but understand it. I was pleased by the praise Sarah Carter, Ann Little,
and Paul Reeve offered *A House Full of Females*, even more so by their insights into what I was trying to do in what is, admittedly, a complicated and many-faceted work. As I have warned my friends, “This may not be an easy book to read.”

Each reviewer pointed not just to the overall problem posed in the book—how women could simultaneously embrace plural marriage and women’s rights—but to the underlying methodological issues that drove my inquiry. As Paul Reeve observed, my goal was not so much to explain the indignation meeting of 1870 as to revitalize Mormon history by exploring ways in which women served as “actors, agents, and agitators who shaped their own destinies.” I was not interested in creating heroines. I wanted to know what women wrote down or created in the heat of events and what men said about them or to them.

*A House Full of Females* is a source-centered work. It focuses on diaries and other written documents, but as all three reviewers observed, it is also, at least in part, a material cultural study. As Sarah Carter noted, “beautiful illustrations” allowed by my publisher are not just there for looks but are subjects of analysis. Because the *Mormon Studies Review* is inherently interdisciplinary, I was especially pleased to see that aspect of the book highlighted. Despite excellent work done by scholars like Thomas Carter, Paul Anderson, Emily Utt, Jenny Reeder, and others, the field of material culture is still relatively undeveloped in Mormon studies or, perhaps more accurately, remains bound by disciplinary boundaries that make it difficult to bring together detailed studies of artifacts with broader historical queries.

Ann Little’s review highlights my attempt to “bridge LDS history and American women’s history.” She acknowledges the difficulty in doing that. Many Americans still find Mormon feminism paradoxical with or without polygamy. Yet she astutely observes that readers conversant with recent scholarship on sexuality and gender will not be surprised by what I found. For them, she writes, “celestial marriage is as American as the applejack passed around in Hosea Stout’s . . . jug.” She also suggests that it might not be easy to convince Mormons that their religious predecessors were sexual revolutionaries and pioneers in divorce.
She may be right about that. Latter-day Saints of my generation may have rejected plural marriage as an ideal, but we accepted its reality in our history. Unfortunately, many LDS feminists today grew up in ignorance of the practice, not just because fewer of them are descended from early church members but because polygamy has been systematically removed from the church curriculum. It is still there in the Doctrine and Covenants, though mostly ignored. So I found myself in the strange position of making Mormonism less exotic to general readers and more so to its own practitioners.

There are many things missing from the book, as each reviewer has kindly noted. One of them is a detailed exploration of relationships between Mormons and American Indians, some of whom were polygamists. Despite the fact that for a brief period Latter-day Saint women were deeply engaged in shipping clothing to the Paiute mission, I found very little on cross-cultural encounters. Those who wish to fill this gap have an excellent model in Sarah Carter’s comparative study of Canadian prosecution of Mormon and Blackfoot polygamists later in the nineteenth century. Last spring, while I was teaching Carter’s book in one of my courses, I invited Blackfoot/Metis historian Rosalyn R. LaPier, who was a visitor scholar at Harvard, to speak to one of my classes. We both laughed when we found ourselves swapping stories about our polygamous great-grandmothers.

There are still many rooms to explore in our historical houses.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, a graduate of the University of Utah, Simmons College, and the University of New Hampshire is 300th Anniversary University Professor at Harvard University, where she has taught since 1995. She is the author of many books and articles on early American history, women’s history, and the use of artifacts as sources in history. Although she has published personal essays in Mormon periodicals, A House Full of Females is her first full-length work of scholarship to address Mormon history. She is a past president of the American Historical Association and the Mormon History Association.
Introduction: Small Means, Great Things

Benjamin Peters and John Durham Peters

“And the Lord God doth work by means.” (Alma 37:7)

Mormonism is a media religion: every contribution to this forum makes this point in some way. Of course, the same could be said of most religions, and yet the Mormon tradition in particular incorporates media. How so?

The most obvious way to make this point would be to attend to the robust historical confluence of Mormonism and the media of communication. The Mormon movement, which takes its name from a book, has used many kinds of media, modern and ancient alike, to preach the gospel and perfect the saints. From pamphlets, choirs, and manifestos to visitors centers, filmstrips, and websites, the history of the global correlated church is inseparable from mass media.

In this forum we pursue a less obvious but, we believe, equally exciting approach to Mormonism as a media religion. We argue that Mormonism can provoke new perspectives among media scholars for the same reasons that media theory can rethink basic questions in religious thought, culture, and history. Media, in our view, need not have words, images, sounds, tubes, or screens. They need not have large audiences or be mass in any way. Rather, media can be the metaphysical constituents
of the cosmos. Early Mormon leaders, brothers, and writers Parley and Orson Pratt used the term in this sense—as did indeed almost everybody before roughly 1900, when media came to mean the agencies of mass communication. Before then a medium bore light, truth, heat, or magnetic force. This older, elemental meaning of medium has found new resonance today when so much of our lives is digitally governed, since it suggests that media not only carry signals: they create and shape the environments in which we live. A medium is not only about the transmission or storage of meaning. It also affects the ordering of time, space, and relationships. (Anyone who has misplaced a smartphone understands this.) A student of media interested in Mormon culture may be just as fascinated by granite, grids, signatures, paperwork, or microfilm as by press coverage, proclamations, or pop stars. Media scholarship need not focus alone on the accuracy of representation (think fake news concerns); it should also seek to understand the means by which worlds are organized. Media not only show: they also are.

The approach to media studies we pursue here is closer to the humanities than the social sciences or natural sciences, although they too play their part in understanding media. But it is also a revision of the humanities. Typically, the humanities have been understood as the study of meanings made by humans in poems, songs, paintings, philosophies, and so on. Media theory rethinks both meaning and humans. A sonnet can have meaning, but so can a computer chip. A painting can overflow with data, but so can a fossil or a cloud. Clouds and fossils brim with signals: meteorologists and paleontologists know how to read them richly, even when their mode of being is relatively mute and implicit. Clouds and fossils are not like books or movies that cry out to be read or watched, and yet they reward rereading to all those with eyes to see and ears to hear. Media theory prompts us to learn to

read what was never written but has long been legible. The radical move to free meaning from the domain of human-made objects grooves with Mormon theology, which allows for intelligence in a variety of embodiments, and Mormon practice, in which form and behavior often enjoy priority over content and theory. The deepest meanings are not always stated: they occur in action and repetition, ordinance and embodiment, prompting and being. Mormon thought has always been media theory, even unintentionally.

The contributors to this forum help enrich, challenge, and clarify this point. Medical humanist Samuel Morris Brown leads with a plea to take seriously the Mormon treasury of radiant objects without reducing them to magic or projection. “Wild facts,” whatever else they may or may not do, escape the reductions of Enlightenment thought. Next, literary scholar Sharon Harris and ethnomusicologist Peter McMurray call for a refreshed Mormon history through a series of objects that galvanize invention and discovery: in particular, sound. Students of sound are particularly well equipped to process plural registers simultaneously—and Mormon history offers up many pluralities (wives, books, zions, gods). Furthermore, sound’s eerie metaphysical properties—it disappears as it exists—make it rich for the religious imagination, and Harris and McMurray invite a creative resounding of the faith’s history through some of its audible objects. Film scholar Mason Kamana Allred extends this theme of radiant objects and applies it to media archaeology, a tradition of media history developed in northern Europe; in the process, he shows how media archaeology unearths, among other resonances, perhaps the most uncannily vital historical object that Mormons hold in their history: their commitment to care for their dead. Historian Kate Holbrook turns instead to a close study of an everyday cultural object—Jell-O. Her insight is subtle: derogatory attitudes about Jell-O at the turn of the last century taint the messages conveyed by Mormon and other American religious groups through a century of incorporating Jell-O in the religious culture. Sometimes a medium can obliterate (or at least obscure) the beauty of human contribution. Her implicit invitation rings clear to scholars of folk culture: Jell-O is a
counterintuitive medium par excellence. In fact, the petri dishes of the sciences typically hold such plastic and stretchy media: gels, gelatins, molds, and, indeed, *cultures*. Her essay also highlights just how much ordinary people matter (a point lost on some prominent media theorists such as Friedrich Kittler). Communication scholar and ethnographer of religion Rosemary Avance showcases how the homogenizing mass media caused the heterogeneous internet to come as a shock to Mormon institutional structures. Here her definition of media is more precise: media are institutional efforts to communicate. Her essay in turn paints an essential backdrop for media and culture scholar Gavin Feller’s sketch of the church’s changing relationship to the internet—from pornography panics to family history promises. Taken as a whole, these essays expand, enrich, and complicate our senses of media with visual panoramas, auditory hymnals, and even the touch and taste of wiggly desserts.

It is hard, of course, to specify what unites such a diverse set of essays, although perhaps they mostly, whether knowingly or not, partake in a media theoretic turn toward what has been called “the materialities of communication,” the “ontology of media,” or “infrastructural media.” As such, these essays revisit not only Mormonism’s media history but its deepest theological values. This revisiting opens up treasures for the media scholar, as Mormonism invites us to imagine communication not only as a struggle for hearts, minds, clicks, and likes, but as the universe-spanning linkage between the living and the dead, gods, angels, humans, plants, animals, and minerals. A media-theoretic focus on Mormonism thus invites at once an enlargement of vision and a fresh interest in apparently irrelevant minutiae. Indeed, the Book of Mormon prophet Alma notes that “means” can both be “simple” and “confound the wise” (Alma 37:6–7). (Consider how many digital media narratives

follow the same line. For example, Is your router broken? Ask a ten-year-old for help!) Media may be simple, at times, but they are never easy, and their specificities speak volumes. Thus, general claims about “the media” tend to be about as useless as those about “the Mormons.” At the same time the pairing of the cosmic and the banal resounds with Mormon thought and culture, with its majestic cosmologies and busy-bee mundanities.

One of the benefits of the aforementioned material turn in media theory is an expanded menu of topics. Taking media as ontological is not only a theoretical reset—it is an explosion in the archive. There was hardly anything that Marshall McLuhan, the Catholic convert and Canadian English professor turned media theorist (and, later, media showman), would not consider a medium. His lists and enumerations sometimes verged on the silly, but they were always canon smashing and stimulating to a sympathetic ear. Media scholars familiar with his interest in media such as light bulbs, money, and bicycles will find Mormonism uniquely stocked with objects of curious workmanship: a more complete Mormon media curriculum might highlight, for starters, public and private spectacles like pageants and seer stones, sites of worship and service such as tabernacles and temples, the various channels by which Mormon modernity has extended its messages from the Erie Canal (the economic boom that brought the Book of Mormon into print) to the Mormon Channel, the historical arc of attempts to build Zion with media from Brigham Young’s ambitious Deseret Alphabet to the contemporary church-owned newspaper Deseret News, from Joseph Smith’s celestial bookkeeping to the embarrassingly bad film Johnny Lingo. Each offers a medium with a new story to tell. Perhaps we can see revelation as a media process by which things that once appeared ordinary quiver anew with significance.

Media studies is good for Mormon studies just as is the reverse—for, at the very least, they could prove therapeutic listeners to the other’s woes. In a time, for example, when the news media face waves of public incredulity and claims of fake news, Mormon history offers an alternate route for describing how strained claims can, over the course of more
than a century, slowly seed a flourishing mainstream global niche culture. At the same time, many practicing Mormons appear perturbed by the mundane materiality of seer stones; yet, as Brown argues, modern media studies offer inoculation against too-easy disappointment at such mysteries by teaching us appreciation for the odd and concrete. The mark of a medium, said media historian Harold Adams Innis, is bias. That is not necessarily its fault; that is its advantage.

All too often modern humans bring to God and religion notions of purity and objectivity— notions inherited from scientific-cum-Protestant dreams of immediacy. Both media and Mormon culture can foster apostate fantasies of vanishing mediators—as if media were a bad thing and should disappear once their work is done! Such foolishness, embraced by tech utopians, religious zealots, and public relation specialists alike, profits from the human desire for instantaneous answers. Prayer, like transfer speeds, will always take time and effort. (Neither appeal nor reply can ever be immediate, unless the answer is already stored within.) The church’s efforts to construct a millennium-ready record of the human family, as Allred points out, also prompts us to acknowledge the truth that, no matter what passes, layers of media are what remain.

Both Mormonism and media, properly understood, deprive us of the very illusion that many think they provide—a quick and immediate fix. Instead, we have only what remains, and diverse media theoretic approach to Mormonism helps us celebrate the flawed labor of making sense through ongoing struggles with fragile apparatuses. Perhaps media are both the boundary conditions and the building blocks of the bridge between the here and now and the eternities; media trouble our most stubborn binaries by both bridging and complicating them—gender and sex, death and life, solitude and kinship, time and eternities. Media studies and Mormonism, in other words, present theoretically compatible practices of the limited means by which the cosmos is made.

We’ll conclude this reverie with a nod to a few voices in a literature we might dub Mormonish media studies. Specialists will find many more names to add to this diverse alphabet of contributors ranging
from Leonard Arrington’s works of LDS Church history; Randy Astle on Mormon cinema; Sherry Baker’s essential Mormon media timeline; Amanda Beardsley on Mormon sound culture; Ben Burroughs on the rituals of Mormon social media; Gideon Burton’s comprehensive take on rhetoric and film; Joel Campbell on Mormon public relations; Chiung Hwang Chen on the church’s online strategies; Scott Church on glitch music and grave memorials; Jared Farmer’s exquisite source books of Mormon images; Elizabeth Fenton on the textual complexities of the Book of Mormon; Kathleen Flake on the hermeneutics of translation; Jacob Gaboury on the image worlds built in University of Utah computing labs; most everything by Terryl Givens; David Gore on media theology in McLuhan; Jeremy Grimshaw on world music and mysticism; Paul Gutjahr’s multimedia biography of the Book of Mormon; Tona Hangen on religious radio history; Grant Hardy’s close readings of the Book of Mormon; J. B. Haws on the Mormon image; Jared Hickman on race in American scripture; Michael Hicks on Mormonism and music; Jake Johnson on musical theater; Kimberly Johnson’s sacramental poetry and poetics; Seth Lewis on the borders of journalism; Adam Miller’s expansive theologies of matter and grace; Max Perry Mueller on racialized writing in Mormon history; Joseph Spencer on the obsessive documentary self-reflexivity in the Book of Mormon; Daniel Stout’s many works on the media, Mormonism, and popular culture; Joseph Straubhaar on global media in the Americas; the late Stephen Webb on materialist theologies; and Laurel Ulrich on polygamy and textile work, among so much scholarship by so many authors.3

A thousand new projects could—and should—be found here. We are

pleased to orchestrate a rendezvous of media theory and Mormonism and to invite media theorists to sample the treasures of a religious tradition that has a uniquely materialist media sensibility.

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Minds, Bodies, and Objects

Samuel Morris Brown

As I wander ever more deeply into the semantic labyrinths of early Mormon translation, I find myself confronting ubiquitous objects that matter for more than their mere physicality. Seer stones, interpreters, gold plates, Egyptian papyri, locks of hair, underclothing, and scores more. Mormonism is saturated with such objects, pregnant with what some scholars call “abundance” or “real presence.” Mormons don’t call them “relics,” afraid to conjure (that fraught word!) Catholic altars, corpses, and catacombs. Mormons are no idolaters, so there must be no relics. But we who think academically about Mormons may do well to acknowledge the deep kinship Mormons have with others who have cherished manifestations of the divine in time and space.

These distressingly powerful objects—some of what William James called the “wild facts” of the cosmos, media that won’t easily reduce into digestible bits via traditional scientific methods—have presented interpretive problems for observers for a long time. We twenty-first-century folk—whether academics, practitioners, or both—struggle to make sense of such objects, which early Mormons deployed in multiple applications. We students of Mormons and media seem to adopt one of two equally obtuse approaches. To steal metaphors from my main line of work in biomedicine, these objects are seen as either potent medicines or placebos. Neither explanation is adequate; both are dependent on
cultural changes of the last several centuries. These recent changes have obscured our scholarly vision of powerful objects.

In general, Catholic historians know these stories better than Mormons do. Robert Orsi has written influentially on the problems of real presence for scholars hoping to understand Catholics, and he joins a chorus of Catholic scholars wincing at the mess, as they see it, that Protestants have made of the modern intellectual world. These criticisms aren’t always fair, but they are sometimes insightful. In a similar vein mined in the anthropology of African Christianities, Birgit Meyer resists Protestant assumptions about the nature of media and religion and the ostensible antagonism between the two. She argues against the dominant model, insisting instead that media can serve as instruments of real presence in the modern world.

Working from philosophical history, Charles Taylor’s smart, sprawling work on the nature of modernity helps frame an approach to abundance and its critics. Orsi steered clear of Taylor’s highbrow philosophical work, but they share a sensibility beyond their Catholic background. Taylor argues, following Max Weber in a neo-Hegelian sort of way, that secular modernity restricted itself to an immanent frame. In other


3. Birgit Meyer, “Mediation and Immediacy: Sensational Forms, Semiotic Ideolo-

words, an influential part of Western society (most memorably, its governments) rejected the possibility of something beyond physical nature. There were no more ghosts, wizards, or demons. But there was also no God, no human soul, no power infusing or ordering all of nature. The heuristic device of mechanistic materialism—one mustn’t invoke unquantifiable forces to explain observed phenomena, a tactic central to applied science—became the linchpin of an emaciated metaphysics. In Erazim Kohák’s apt phrase, “Good physics made bad metaphysics.”

The constriction of existence to this immanent frame occurred not only as a metaphor from applied science, it also reflected ethical positions based in new ideas about equal human dignity, the nature of pluralism, the politics of modern governance (this, another instance of heuristics baptized as metaphysics), and the importance of resisting the authority of others, as Taylor describes at length. Anti-Catholic sensibilities infiltrated many of these developments, including ardent rejection of the status of abundant objects of real divine presence.

Fast forward a century or three, and we espy a treasure-seeking frontiersman who, as most of his neighbors, drinks too much and is suspicious of churches. His namesake son is a bright, autodidact farmhand with second sight. This boy will found a new church to replace all churches, founded on a bible that unseats and transforms all Bibles. This special son’s early career is embedded in webs of charged objects. Some objects were treasure-questing paraphernalia: seer stones, daggers, sigils, lamens, and the like. Others were perhaps more religious

6. This is one of the core arguments of A Secular Age, that secular rationality is an ethical rather than logical stance.
8. Whatever its interpretive limitations, D. Michael Quinn’s Early Mormonism and the Magic Worldview (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987) provides a helpful catalogue of charged objects familiar to Smith and his intimates.
(acknowledging the semantic wobble in that adjective): ancient interpreters, gold plates, and Egyptian funeral papyri. Some were in the intermediate zones associated with yearning for good health and postponed death. These might include Joseph Smith’s red handkerchief (famously used to heal malarial Saints in Nauvoo), the canes made from his and his brother’s coffins, olive oil, scented whiskey, and many other physical objects that contained or disseminated healing power.9

Disciples have tended to use the mechanistic, medicinal metaphor in their devotional stories about these objects. When it comes to translation, there is Google Translate (the computer technician’s xenoglossia) on a special thumb drive (the seer stone interpreters). The gold plates were an ancient record legible to any reader of reformed Egyptian glyphs, and the interpreters were linguistic machines that spat out the English text corresponding to each individual glyph. For health, one touched a body with sanctified olive oil, and its cells realigned as needed. These objects brim with mechanistic power for many believers.

That these odd machines did not obey science’s requirements for external reproducibility exposed them to criticisms within the immanent frame, even as they didn’t fit well on the axes of immanence and transcendence. The major response to mechanistic accounts is to see the objects as “inspirational” in the flat sense of the post-Romantic West. They are, in other words, placebos. Our creative juices start flowing when we see a sunrise in the mountains or hear a gorgeous opera. An embalmed rabbit foot creates the right mindset to win a footrace. We humans think more clearly when our minds are focused by belief in the efficacy of a neutral object.

The “catalyst” theory for the Egyptian project is a placebo wrapped in a modernist story. The objects (gold plates, seer stones, Egyptian papyri) catalyzed Smith’s revelatory output.⁠¹⁰ Some describe these translation placebos as analogous to “Dumbo’s feather.” In Dumbo (1941), a forlorn elephant with comically enormous ears learns to fly. But first he must look beyond his insecurities to a marvelous potential as the first flying elephant. A cadre of crows plucks a feather and tells Dumbo that the feather is magical. After the young elephant learns to fly, compliments of the magical feather, he discovers that he had the power of flight all along; he just had to believe in himself. He had to find a placebo.

When it comes to health, placebos are in their element. If people can be healed by believing in a sugar pill, surely they can be healed by belief in sacred oil and the laying on of hands.

Moderns love placebos. They’re the cornerstone of our contemporary biomedical scientific enterprise. They help us control what we don’t understand about mind and body. When we scholars say “placebo,” we don’t want to invoke mind-body interaction, though, just the unconscious bias introduced by patients and physicians when they want a treatment to succeed.

The two possibilities of direct treatment and placebo don’t consider the possibility that students of media and religion have misframed the problem entirely when it comes to Joseph Smith and his objects. We may be struggling, willy-nilly, with an encounter with real presence that the translator attempts to reduce to language. We also may not have language to acknowledge that placebo is itself a metaphor representing a basically secular account of phenomena beyond the explanatory reach of secularist models.

I’m aware of an easy criticism, that I haven’t provided a mechanistic account of these objects, probably because I have explicitly excluded

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such an account. I could be coy and say that this quest for mechanistic clarity is itself stamped by secular modernity. That may be true, but it’s not terribly useful. I could instead admit that I’m interested in the possibility that there are mechanistic traces of a broader experience and a reality that we do not exhaust with our observations.

These aren’t just academic questions. I will never wholly know my beloved wife, but I will anxiously and earnestly learn everything I can. She is an electrified mass of calcium, carbohydrates, amino acids, and water. Fine. So am I. But we are vastly more than that. We would do well to remember that is true not just of humans but of the things they see, encounter, handle, and believe in.\textsuperscript{11} Strict materialism as a worldview is spectacularly obtuse and ultimately unfeasible, as we see when we train its blinkered eyes on the relationships that matter most to us.

Still, we moderns—observers and observed alike—are all cross-pressured. Mormons are sacramentalists who can’t entirely shake Protestant antisacramentalism, and their double-mindedness shows in their rejection of divine presence in the emblems of the Lord’s Supper, served on a “sacrament table” rather than an “altar,” on the one hand, and the belief that in the temple the bodies of the dead are sufficiently present \textit{in our bodies}, that they are baptized through us. Mormons look straightforwardly Protestant in their churches and beyond Catholic in their temples, where—perhaps uniquely among current American Christian communities—human bodies become ritual relics of abundant presence. Without attempting to suggest any specific genetic association, one sees resonances with the “medium” of séance spiritualism, whose body becomes a vessel for abundant presence. Mormonism and its Mormons are brimming with objects full of power, not just for practitioners, but for scholars working to understand the multifarious intersections of media and religion.

I think there’s gorgeous and saving mystery in actual presence. That word \textit{mystery} is part of what has driven anti-Catholic secularizing

\textsuperscript{11} I find myself recurring often to Erazim Kohák’s notion of the “moral sense of nature” in \textit{The Embers and the Stars} as I consider these topics.
reform. One can hide a lot of craven stupidity in mystery, I agree. If we’re honest, though, mystery remains under modernist reductionist accounts; it just becomes the insipid mystery of sampling errors, confounding variables, and residuals. Our models are never wholly adequate to the phenomenon we’re describing. But what is missing may not be a nuisance we wish we could forget; it may rather be the very sinew of meaning. Allowing media to speak on their own terms can dramatically enrich the scholarly terms of engagement with traditions for whom objects can still whisper from the mortal dust.

Let these objects, these consummate media, incarnate great power. They do not need to be placebo feathers plucked from crows. Let them be vessels of actual divine presence. Let them escape the relentless reductionism of modernity. Let them be.

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Introduction

The restoration, or founding of the LDS Church, begins with a sonic battle of wills: “My toung seemed to be swolen in my mouth, so that I could not utter.” In this opening scene of Mormonism, the young prophet-to-be, Joseph Smith, tries but fails to pray aloud as his tongue is tied by the devil.1 When he finally succeeds in speaking, he sees a divine vision, accompanied by an inaugural command: to hear, or more precisely (in the canonical account of that event), “Hear Him!” Thus Smith is called to hear the words of Jesus Christ, who is hovering over his head in the woods of upstate New York. Though referred to as “the first vision,” this event is simultaneously steeped in sound and silence, in speech and its impossibility. Indeed, the only other direct quotation from the canonical account is Smith quoting Jesus quoting himself talking about preachers: “they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (JS—H 1:19; compare Matthew 15:8). Put differently, the restoration begins not merely with sound but with a nascent yet critical theory of embodied voices, a tied tongue, duplicitous

sound, and the multilayered ventriloquism that constitutes revelatory utterance, even for Jesus.

What is most striking, then, is not simply that the first vision is as much audition as vision—that is, that revelation entails sound as well as image—but rather that from the very first moment, Mormonism has been produced through sound while simultaneously theorizing about its relationship to sound. A scholarly focus on sound in Mormonism is thus the most basic of media-theoretical gestures—a shift from what to how, from text to process, from message to medium. It turns out to be surprisingly easy to recover such a sonic history of Mormonism. Sound and sound media played a central role in making Mormonism from the very beginning, whether as overt commentary about voices, mouths, and lips or as other forms of noncorporeal sound including trumpets, temples and tabernacles, scriptures and song.

In this brief essay, we introduce a handful of sound objects and practices that chart an obviously incomplete course through Mormon history. Our argument is a rather simple one: these objects do not merely sound; rather, through their sounding they shape what Mormonism as a medium and as an accretion of audiovisual mediums and techniques has been and may yet become. While some of these objects will be familiar to most readers, whether coming from the discipline of Mormon studies or media studies, this brief excavation of Mormonism and its cultural acoustics traces out important new terrain for both disciplines. The point is not simply to name these objects but to “sonify” them—to render them (correctly, if sometimes not obviously) as audible. We might call this a sonic archaeology of Mormonism, to use the language of recent media theory.2 We take mediums and media

practices like translation and revelation, temples and physical books (especially hymnals), and even late polygamy that are too often imagined as lacking important sound and media functions and we hear them afresh. As a note, such emphasis on religious sound need not mean a return to the devotionalism of figures like Walter Ong, whose important theorizing of an earlier version of sound studies was nevertheless founded on religious ideas of “real presence.” More circumspect possibilities exist for fusing religious and sound/media studies together, as we show—and hear—in this material microhistory of Mormonism and its resonance.

Seer stones

Apart from the golden plates that Joseph Smith found and translated to produce the Book of Mormon, perhaps no object inspires the same curiosity and puzzlement within (and beyond) Mormonism. The LDS Church recently published photographs of a seer stone that Joseph Smith apparently used during much of his translation of the Book of Mormon, as well as during earlier money-digging ventures. This notion of “translation” remains a central point of contention not only between

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approaches to Mormonism more generally, see John Durham Peters, “Recording beyond the Grave: Joseph Smith’s Celestial Bookkeeping,” Critical Inquiry 42/4 (Summer 2016): 842–64; see also Mason Kamana Allred, “Mormonism and the Archaeology of Media,” in this issue of MSR.


Mormons and non-Mormons but also within the Mormon community, from B. H. Roberts’s investigation of the book’s historicity to recent studies and seminars on the mechanics of translation. But from the perspective of media and sound studies, the seer stone raises a very different set of issues. First of all, what was the relationship between image and sound, between the visual and the oral/aural? David Whitmer recounts that Smith saw light appearing as well as a kind of parchment simulacrum, then read English words to his scribe, who then repeated it back. The stone elicits a bodily response—Smith hunching over a hat containing the stone to block out the light—as well as visual and aural sensations (seeing words, dictating them, hearing them repeated back) that allow for a complex, embodied form of information processing and transmission. Given the centrality of dictation throughout Smith’s prophetic life, it is little surprise that Oliver Cowdery would fixate on Smith’s lips and


6. David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ (Richmond, MO: printed by the author, 1887), 12.
mouth in his classic account of their revelatory collaboration (Joseph Smith—History, 1:71n).  

“Adam-ondi-Ahman”

Two women instigated new musical sounds for Mormonism on September 14, 1835. The high council in Kirtland, Ohio, discussed the creation of the first Mormon hymnal, compiled by Emma Smith, and on that same day Elizabeth Ann Whitney burst into song and into tongues, singing of Adam-ondi-Ahman in an unknown language. Emma included an earlier hymn text in her compilation about Adam-ondi-Ahman, written by William W. Phelps. Although Joseph Smith first dictated the name Adam-ondi-Ahman in a revelation three years before, it was not until 1835 that he identified the name as referring to the valley where Adam blessed his posterity. As new converts moved to Kirtland, both Phelps’s and Whitney’s hymns helped solidify the idea of Adam-ondi-Ahman as the location where the Latter-day Saints would gather and meet with Father Adam. Connected to Emma Smith’s hymnal project and sung at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the musical declaration “Adam-ondi-Ahman” is an early expression of uniquely LDS nomenclature that, in its unusualness, indicates a distinct people with distinct sounds. “Adam-ondi-Ahman” also

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inaugurates the tradition of disseminating and generating theology through hymnody, along with the declaration of a Heavenly Mother in “O My Father” and the need to atone for the blood of Joseph Smith’s martyrdom in “Praise to the Man.” Of this pattern Mormon scholar and feminist Claudia Bushman has said, addressing other participants in Mormonism, “If you feel like writing poetry about the church, please do. It turns into doctrine.” In spite of its status as a new religion, Mormonism closely adheres to older, oral models of scripture. Much of Mormon holy writ was first spoken, as with the translation of the Book of Mormon, many revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, and addresses by current prophets and apostles in the church’s semiannual general conferences. As these hymns illustrate, such revelatory texts may even be sung.

The Kirtland Temple

The temple is the great multimedia experience in LDS worship. Temple ceremonies today combine acting, costumes, paintings, murals, symbols, film, music, ceremonial dress, anointing oil, water, call and response, gesture, and the spoken word, which may be live or prerecorded, broadcast via speakers, voiced through veils, translated in multiple languages, and transmitted

9. Claudia Bushman, Neal A. Maxwell Institute Summer Seminar meeting, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, June 18, 2014.
through headsets. Early temples also hosted multiple media formats, even of the supernatural variety. Accounts of the dedication of the temple in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1836 describe experiences of visions, angels, lights, and cloven tongues of fire. Sounding media featured a rich array of saints’ voices from “an excellent choir of singers” to those speaking in tongues—“forty speaking at once,” from the stentorian oration of Sidney Rigdon to the hosanna shout of one thousand attendees. Remarkable for its account of silence as well as utterance is the story of a two-month-old infant who remained quiet through the entire eight-hour proceedings except during the hosanna shout when the child joined in: “[W]hen they shouted amen it shouted also for three times then it resumed its nursing without any alarm.” In addition to these earthly voices were heavenly voices. The voice of Jehovah was described “as the sound of the rushing of great waters” (D&C 110:3), and when the first washing ordinances were administered weeks earlier, Joseph Smith recorded, “[T]he gift of toungs, fell upon us in mighty power, angels mingled their voices with ours.” More than bringing numerous media to the temple, these accounts of the Kirtland Temple dedication depict the temple as the medium itself. The temple mediates between earth and heaven, between the human and divine, and between the living and the dead. It produces transformative and transformed sounds and voices that are otherwise inaccessible. From the church’s beginnings,


Mormons have understood the temple as a kind of heavenly antenna for capturing and transmitting otherworldly voices. The multimedia approach of temple worship reinforces this model, and all types of media are used to boost the signal.

Headphones

Inspired by what he deemed to be the poor acoustics of the Salt Lake City Tabernacle, Nathaniel Baldwin set out to invent an amplified loudspeaker in the early 1900s. After doing so, he set out to build a better telephone speaker, which in turn became the basis for the first functional headphones. As the United States geared up for World War I, the military placed a large order for Baldwin’s headphones, creating such a massive demand that Baldwin began to rapidly expand his business, based in East Millcreek in the Salt Lake Valley. Baldwin’s headphone story points to several different important trajectories in Mormon sound and media history. First, Baldwin was one of a handful of contemporary acousticians and inventors, including the better-known Harvey Fletcher and Vern Knudsen, who became key figures at Bell Labs in the 1930s and ’40s. That same lineage of Mormon acousticians might

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18. For more on these acousticians, see Jeremy Grimshaw, Draw a Straight Line and Follow It: The Music and Mysticism of LaMonte Young (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially discussions of just intonation in chapters 3 and 5; Amanda Beardsley, “God in Stereo: The Salt Lake Tabernacle and Harvey Fletcher’s Telephonic Symphony,” paper delivered at the “Knowing Mormonism through Sound” session, Mormon Scholars in the Humanities conference, May 26, 2017, Boston University.
include Stanley Smith Stevens, the founder of Harvard’s famous Psycho-Acoustic Laboratory, joint home to the world’s first anechoic chamber. In addition, we might situate Baldwin within a small cohort of early twentieth-century inventors including John Browning and Philo T. Farnsworth, whose inventions (machine gun and television, respectively) brought about significant shifts in modernity more broadly with their tools of warfare and entertainment. Baldwin’s headphones are both, embodying Friedrich Kittler’s dictum that “the entertainment industry is, in any conceivable sense of the word, an abuse of military equipment.” Finally, though he was himself monogamous, Baldwin had been a supporter of post–Second Manifesto polygamy (after the LDS Church completely renounced it in policy and practice), and he used his business success to employ many of the leaders of the early Fundamentalist Latter-day Saint movement. Baldwin’s headphones thus serve as a reminder that plural marriage has its own technical apparatus—a tangle of sealings, oaths, kinship ties, manifestos, and systems of subterfuge. Indeed, polygamy has always been a media operation.

The Book of Mormon

In 2011 the creators of South Park, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, teamed up with Robert Lopez to write The Book of Mormon musical. The musical received rave reviews as though it were a groundbreaking exploration of Mormon life. But from the perspective of Mormon media


21. The theme of sexuality as a media operation (or “cultural technique”) is central to the late work of Friedrich Kittler, but it also appears indirectly in Mormon studies, as in Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s accounts of quilting among polygamist families in A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women’s Rights in Early Mormonism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 336–60.
studies, or even Mormon music, it stands in dialogue with a half century of musical productions, pageants, and plays that similarly attempt to make sense of Mormonism through song, dance, and the machinery of the modern theater. The Hill Cumorah Pageant dates back nearly a century, and a number of musicals were composed in the intervening years, including productions sanctioned by the LDS Church and also others created by members or, eventually, artists such as Parker, Stone, and Lopez. Productions like the Hill Cumorah Pageant involve members reenacting scenes from the Book of Mormon, raising interesting issues concerning the performance of race (i.e., a mostly white cast performing as Lamanites) that emerge repeatedly in LDS Church films and performances. But in a more substantial way the musicalization of the Book of Mormon fits into an even older tradition within Mormonism in which the Book of Mormon is a sonic object: it is less codex than utterance, from its dictation to its text to its reception among Mormons as an object to be read aloud (e.g., as family scripture study), memorized and recited, quoted from, “ponderized,” set to Primary songs, and eventually even recorded as an audiobook.


Conclusion

These resonant objects all point to a long, audible past of Mormonism. Similarly, our efforts to tell that history—to sketch out a sonic historiography—are not particularly new either. In September 1842 Joseph Smith dictated a letter to be read in his absence at the “Grove” in Nauvoo, Illinois. This epistolary sermon would later become section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants, a revelation composed of multilayered, proxy dictations (from God to Smith, Smith to his scribe, and eventually to a proxy preacher/orator) about dictations and other voices (in temple ceremonies, in the church’s history), as John Durham Peters points out in his recent discussion of Smith’s “media theology.” If section 128 lays bare a media theology of “celestial bookkeeping,” its concluding verses underscore just how central a role sound plays in that process. Indeed, Smith recounts an abbreviated history of the restoration as sound, what Peters calls a “sonic time-lapse of the history of the church.” Smith asks, “Now, what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of gladness! A voice of mercy from heaven; and a voice of truth out of the earth; glad tidings for the dead; a voice of gladness for the living and the dead; glad tidings of great joy” (D&C 128:19). Smith then specifically refers to visitations from the angel Moroni, the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon plates, and priesthood restoration, among other events. Within a few verses, Smith not only recounts Mormonism’s history, but he folds into that history allusions to the history of everything, from the creation (“sons of God shout for joy”) through a lineage of archangels from Michael/Adam to Christ’s “glad tidings” to the present and beyond to the resurrection, when “the dead [will] speak forth anthems of eternal praise” (vv. 20–24). Sound has not only produced Mormonism, but it has also occasionally produced Mormon history.

By the same token, Mormonism’s extensive, if rather unorthodox, engagements with sound and media have long offered fertile ground for scholars, performers, and inventors of sound to explore. Helen Keller

Mormon Studies Review offers a prime example of such attraction to the unique, even strange, vibrations of Mormonism's sonic worlds. While visiting Salt Lake City in 1941, she requested to hear the pioneer anthem “Come, Come, Ye Saints” played on the Salt Lake Tabernacle organ.26 Mormon poet Emma Lou Thayne, who was in the audience, recounts how Keller went to the back of the organ with its five manuals and eight thousand pipes and put her hand on the console. She faced the audience, “all alone . . . her right arm extended, leaning slightly forward and touching the organ, with her head bowed.” As Alexander Schreiner played the hymn, Thayne writes, “Helen Keller stood there—hearing through her hand and sobbing.”27 Like Joseph Smith using a seer stone to translate from plates sitting across the room, Thayne also heard and saw by sensory proxy through Keller’s experience of the organ. Thayne tells of seeing her ancestors drawn from across Europe to Mormonism and of hearing their own singing and chorus: “That tabernacle, that singing, my ancestors welling in me, my father beside me, that magnificent woman [Keller], all combined with the organ . . . —whatever passed between the organ and her passed on to me.”28 Paradoxically, in the Tabernacle, a building renowned for its unique acoustics, neither Keller nor Thayne was moved by normative forms of aurality. Mormonism’s speculative, universalist streak seems well suited to embrace such noncochlear auditions so that both “he that hath ears to hear,” as well as she that possesses other means to encounter sound, may hear.

Whether through Joseph Smith’s sonic historiography or Helen Keller’s hearing through the body, mediation in Mormonism is both inescapable and a locus of sacred epiphany. Mormonism lays bare its reliance on sound and media for its production and instead reclaims them as sites of salvation. Thus, books and bodies, temples and stones, and hymns, headphones, and musicals produce and sound out

27. Thayne, Place of Knowing, 45.
28. Thayne, Place of Knowing, 45–46.
Mormonism, rendering them all as objects requiring us to listen. Echoing Smith’s question in D&C 128, what do we hear?

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Mormonism and the Archaeology of Media

Mason Kamana Allred

The angel [of history] would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed.

He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging.

—Walter Benjamin

Mormonism has a legacy of digging up the dead. It had early desires to excavate the past, not only metaphorically (through meticulous record keeping and strong ancestral ties), but literally by actually digging up dead material. Think Alvin, Zelph, gold plates, treasure, spirits, and angels. Even Joseph and Hyrum Smith were disinterred and


moved. Current digital attention to databases of the dead that coincide with corporeal proxy work in temples is a kind of disinterring under new technical circumstances. Mormonism won’t let the past rest—that is, not until it has been treated and properly cared for.

Analyzing Mormon mining proclivities—from digging up the gold plates to using FamilySearch.org—requires theoretical tools. “Media archaeology,” which methodologically digs up lost objects and resurrects dead media conditions, offers promise for future Mormon studies. As an offshoot of German media theory, or *Medienwissenschaft,* media archaeology draws heavily from Friedrich Kittler’s emphasis on technical history. It often seeks out obsolete and marginalized machinery of the past to expose the fallacy of linear technological development and to explore the initial vitality of dead media. By also adapting elements of discourse analysis as advocated by the French philosopher Michel Foucault and New Historicism, media archaeology unearths the material manifestation of culture.

Such an approach can reveal how (even forgotten) media have galvanized and shaped Mormonism since its very inception. The Mormon religion is particularly ripe for media archaeology, as it offers a robust history of inspired material. Strata of past Mormon mediation are numerous—from seer stones, Oliver Cowdery’s divining rod, metal plates, papyrus, and paintings to Philo Farnsworth’s image dissector, cassette tapes, and code. With a new focus on how these objects mediated between body and spirit, we might more precisely exhume the materiality behind the concepts of early Mormonism that could mistakenly be understood to defy perceptibility, such as revelation, spirit, and translation.3

These core elements of Mormonism are apparent in journals, letters, scripture, and so forth. But that skin scarcely covers the work of media and organs of perception beneath. Media archaeology can peel back the textuality of the religion’s past to reveal its technological skeleton. It exposes the role of media in shaping and enabling discourse

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networks and getting under the skin of humans. Moving from textuality to media materiality—from language to machines—can foreground the cultural and theological dynamism of Mormonism.

Since Mormonism is deeply materialist in its distinctive theology and philosophy, it likewise requires a unique media theory. Fittingly, Mormon media archaeology follows Mormonism’s lead in caring for and about materiality and embodiment. Unlike much mainstream media archaeology, the Mormon version must attend to the bodies that might otherwise be tossed to the wayside of posthuman, informational, or technological processes. Directing our attention to the body and affect in the face of media effects can uncover how scientific and technological conditions scaffold the flesh and blood of the Mormon cultural landscape and “even our basic ways of being in the world: seeing, hearing, thinking and feeling.” But attending to the hardware (machines) of Mormonism will also inevitably reveal just how integral to its theology wetware (the human body) really is. Like a hauntingly suggestive form of zombie media, Joseph Smith’s chocolate-brown seer stone is back, lumbering through the internet in digital form. But the stone is also, significantly, divorced from a reading body—like a cassette tape with no boombox. Often in less confounding ways, Mormonism invites media studies approaches at the nexus of corporeal practice and material machinery, where uniquely Mormon cultural techniques are born.

Sensational forms and sensory media seem to need the fleshly body to write upon in order to provoke spiritual experience. Intelligence seems also to require the body to sense and secure feeling and truth. In Mormonism, the path to spirituality is often through the body. Probing the strata of language, medium specificity, and embodied experience shows us what is only apparently a contradiction: media seek to


provide immediate communion with God and fellow humans through mediation.

Consider a medium for unearthing the dead: nineteenth-century Mormon large-scale panorama paintings. Today they are obsolete, a mere curiosity of art history. But both Philo Dibble’s (1845) and C. C. A. Christensen’s (ca. 1880) oversized sequential paintings of church history responded to, captured, and shaped conceptions of spiritually enhanced vision. The various forgotten dimensions of panoramas cry from the dust and require reclamation at three levels:

1. Language: Wilford Woodruff, who lectured at panorama shows, subsequently described his own spiritual visions as “panoramas,” which he wished he could paint for others to see.6 Similarly, George Q. Cannon described visions as “panoramas, with the rapidity of lightning.”7 Even John’s apocalypse was formulated as a “mighty panorama.”8 These understandings emerged from the specificities of the apparatus. The panorama and its attendant experience undergirded and enabled the conceptualization of revelatory experience. Like most spiritual technologies, Mormon panoramas combined both up-in-the-clouds and on-the-ground Mormonism—they made heaven and earth shake hands.

2. Medium specificity: Panorama offered an “all-encompassing view” for all, characterized by sharing, unity, and standardization. Through techniques of movement, either walking between displayed scenes or simulated movement by mechanical crank to roll scenes between two dowels behind a proscenium, panoramas could create sequence. Often with loops running ninety minutes in length, the technology was

not just precinematic, but connected to the experience of travel by steamboat, carriage, and especially train.9

3. Embodied experience: The medium’s association with trajectory, moving forward (on), was particularly felicitous in the aftermath of Joseph Smith’s assassination, when Mormons needed to dig up the past and make it alive and shared. The Dibble panorama resurrected an image of the dead prophet for communal consumption. Especially with reports of revenant Smith’s appearing to his followers, the panorama’s ability to capture Smith’s afterimage did important cultural work to drown out competing visions.10 Dibble even claimed Smith appeared to him in a dream and called him to the work of panorama displays.11 A vision of the dead inspired the paintings of the past. Dibble’s marketing evinced his intended aesthetic necromancy in making “a Joseph and a Hyrum appear and speak to the eye and heart of the thousands of Saints assembled.”12 The medium could mediate subjective spiritual vision(s) and translate it into shared objective vision, as a collective and affective experience. Panoramas (both static and moving) called for specific modes of bodily attention and promised prosthetic vision. Panoramas visualized and stored memories, as they offered low-tech tele-vision, seeing across space and time.


12. Philo Dibble, “Brother Philo Dibble’s Sceneries, Museum, &c.,” *Millennial Star* 11 (January 1849): 11. The image of Smith was even displayed next to an image of Jesus raising Lazarus. Stout journal, March 7 and April 10, 1845, Church History Library.
We might claim that the panorama helped standardize the Mormon gaze.

Where a vision of the dead prophet Joseph in 1844 inspired the first Mormon panorama, the realized technology of television in 1948 inspired Clifford Young’s imaginary hope to one day see spirits in the next world. At the first televised general conference, Young stated (into the microphone and camera) how the “achievement of television” made him wonder “if perhaps the time will not come when we can see our loved ones on the other side. That is not beyond the pale of possibility.”

Young saw in the technology an alternative spiritual future in a long line of Mormon leaders using new media to imagine religious possibilities. Acknowledging this spectral tradition in Mormon thought should foster an openness to dead media and recover a forgotten sense of possibility. Mormon materialism nudges media archaeology to remember the ghost in Holy Ghost.

Especially in Mormonism, which elevates perfected existence to body and spirit, both must be in the equation (see D&C 93:33). After all, it’s all matter. Spirit is just finer and purer (see D&C 131:7). Exca-vating the Mormon past through media theory needs to leave room for—and even expect—angels and spirits. The same technologies that render specters manageable, or even reproducible, also multiply spectral possibilities. In a sense, all mediated messages are “communication with the dead, insofar as media can store ‘phantasms of the living’ for playback after bodily death.” Or as Kittler put it, “The realm of the dead is as extensive as the storage and transmission capabilities of a

13. Young was serving as Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; see Conference Report, April 1948, 38.
given culture.” Unearthing religious media networks will also likely release technical and metaphorical ghosts of the past (or past futures).

Excavating forgotten networks of media, bodies, and spirit requires work, especially archival research and creativity. Technologies, once alive and well, are often, at some point, put aside and become overgrown with dust, sediment, and time. Material media become slippery—like the treasures at hunts or when the Nephites grow wicked—and slide from historical view (see Helaman 13:31). This can make digging a chore. But a Mormon media archaeology would infuse this cultural work with the spiritual potential to recover buried Mormonism(s) and conditions of being. This echoes more closely the earliest forms of digging in Mormonism, which were far from the violent side of mining and closer to the romantic tradition, which saw excavations as paths toward enlightenment. To dig deep in the earth was to seek celestial treasures and true religion. Both “prayers” and “precious knowledge” enabled miners, as “underground heroes,” to receive “heavenly gifts” by digging. To be sure, as Thoreau quipped, the head, too, can be an effective “organ for burrowing.” Recuperating and analyzing matter of the past, Mormon media archaeology could do what Mormonism has always sought to do: properly treat the dead and buried.

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17. Lewis Mumford, Technics and Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 68.
18. Novalis, Heinrich von Ofterdingen (Berlin: Reimer, 1837), 84.
Jell-O Medium

Kate Holbrook

Lapel pins are a part of the Olympic cultural experience produced to represent the hosting community, and generally one pin becomes more popular than the others. For the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City, the runaway favorite pin featured green Jell-O, and enthusiasts paid $150 or more for pins that originally cost $7.¹ Aminco International, the company that makes Olympic pins, recognized that Jell-O was no status symbol. “We were worried that Utah would be embarrassed about being known as the Jell-O-eating capital of the world,” admitted vice president David Hyman. Yet he somehow came to decide that “Utahans are very proud of it.”² Every few years since 2002, someone writes about Latter-day Saints and Jell-O, and invariably they mention this pin as evidence of some profound truth about Latter-day Saint culinary traditions. The pin is thus a popular medium for expressing messages about Latter-day Saints, and these messages are revealing, inaccurate, contradictory, and apt. For some they reinforce unkind stereotypes while others have found them reassuring.

One misleading message of the pin was its rendering of Utah Jell-O as green squares. Plain squares were not the main way Latter-day Saints enjoyed Jell-O, and not why green Jell-O was popular. Mormon Jell-O consumption has been, overwhelmingly, in salad form, and this was true of Jell-O consumers throughout the US. Molded Jell-O salads were all the rage by the 1930s, and their popularity lasted for decades. In fact, green Jell-O was initially developed in 1930 expressly for use in making molded salads.3 Molded salads were fancy. Today’s American tastemakers with their devotion to whole foods, simply prepared and eaten in season, reject Jell-O outright, and American eaters have forgotten what it meant when their ancestors first became acquainted with Jell-O at the beginning of the last century: a radical democratization of elite culinary creations. Several companies were making gelatin convenience products during the last decade of the nineteenth century, and these products soon came to perform in recipes as gelatin had for the wealthy in centuries past.4 A royal’s servants had to start with calves’ feet or a deer’s antlers, chopping, scraping, boiling, and skimming for most of a day to create the gelatin for her lady’s aspic (savory jelly set in a mold) or his majesty’s kholodets (jellied meat dish). Flavoring gelatin with savory ingredients such as meat or tomato and suspending foodstuffs in a translucent medium were what gelatin was for. Mrs. John E. Cooke won third place in a 1905 Knox gelatin recipe contest for “Perfection Salad,” or cabbage salad suspended in gelatin.5 When Pearle Wait invented the first exciting and affordable gelatin flavors, which his wife, May, named Jell-O, he further

brought elite culinary traditions within the reach of everyday people. And those everyday people often used Jell-O for savory concoctions as the wealthy had done before them. But just because Jell-O made gelatin easier doesn’t mean cooks used it for simple preparations.

Not only did bare green squares of Jell-O on the pin suggest that Mormon Jell-O was plain, the squares also represented Jell-O as easy to prepare. Jell-O in plain square form was what you met in hospitals and grade school cafeterias, but Mormon Jell-O preparations were not so straightforward. True to the gelatin pedigree of venerable, aristocratic tables, Jell-O concoctions were intended to impress and delight. Although Jell-O had been touted since its inception as easy to make, molded salads required expertise, and they took hours to set. To compose and serve a cabbage salad on a platter was clearly easier than to make it and then suspend it in gelatin. Informed practice was necessary to make fruit, vegetable, or meat contents hang throughout a mold instead of all falling to the bottom. Jell-O also had to set just the right amount before receiving additions such as mayonnaise, whipped cream, sour cream, or cottage cheese. When it set too little, the cream would melt or turn into particles; if set too much, the Jell-O wouldn’t combine well and broke into pieces. Unmolding the salad loomed as an additional potential disaster. Thirty minutes before the meal began, with no way to hastily re-create a dish that required hours to set, the cook had to coax the salad out of its mold without leaving any of it behind, without it breaking, and without it ending off-center of the platter.6 Both Jell-O experts and flops knew the ways in which a molded salad was not easy.

Due in part to all this fuss, many women combining professional work and family, or just trying to reduce housework during the 1970s and ’80s, abandoned molded salads.7 Yet often two-thirds of the salad recipes in ward and popular Latter-day Saint cookbooks of these decades were for molded salads. Jell-O lost its chic here, and the opportunity to use Jell-O as a new avenue to belittle Mormons was born. All at once Jell-O salads could represent domestic enslavement, perfectionism,

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6. For reliable tips on successful unmolding, see Wyman, _Jell-O_, 50.
regression, celebration, or community members’ love in tangible form. And Mormons were not the only Americans who continued to eat Jell-O salads. Jell-O traveled well, cost little, and appealed to a wide range of palates, from those for whom chewing or swallowing caused difficulty to those who delighted in its translucent, quivery sweetness. It was ideal for delivery to an ailing community member, a family welcoming a new baby, and especially communal meals. Just as Utah Latter-day Saints recognized its utility in such situations, so did many American Protestants. And they, too, found humor in its consumption. For example, Garrison Keillor’s poem “I’m a Lutheran” proclaims:

We’ve got chow mein noodles on tuna hotdish  
And Jello with cottage cheese,  
And chocolate bars and banana cream pie,  
No wonder we’re on our knees.8

A woman posting a Jell-O salad recipe to an online forum for expectant parents wrote, “I’m Methodist, and we always joke that you can’t have a Methodist potluck without at least a couple of Jell-O salads!”9 And the 1979 Marysville United Methodist Women’s Cookbook does in fact have recipes for Pretzel Jell-O Salad, Asparagus Salad (with green Jell-O), and Mint Salad (made, again, with lime Jell-O).10 Iowa, Utah’s main competitor in Jell-O consumption, is bursting with churchgoers.11 Jell-O and church functions work well together.

When Jell-O consumption seems more related to whether one lives in the middle of the country or on a coast, why the insistence on Mormons and Jell-O? Non-Mormon Scott Blackerby is part of the

answer. Former executive chef of Bambara, a Salt Lake City high-end restaurant, Blackerby playfully objected when Utah came in second to Iowa for Jell-O consumption in 1999. Blackerby waged a “Take back the title” movement that included a Jell-O sculpting contest and put his own Jell-O innovations on Bambara’s menu for a summer. BYU communications major Jeremiah Christenot picked up on the effort and launched a successful campaign to make Jell-O the official state snack food that same year.¹² Blackerby and Christenot thus paved the way for the 2002 Olympic Jell-O pins. They did not make the Utah Mormons and Jell-O connection up—it was evident in Mormon cookbooks, in family traditions, and in insider jokes. For example, the Walter and Hays Band invoked a tradition of Mormon Jell-O (and many other) jokes in their popular 1988 single “The Mormon Rap.”¹³ What the contest, the state Jell-O legislation, and the Olympic pin did was to further a few business careers while projecting a concrete link between Utah Mormons and Jell-O.

The second incarnation of the Olympic Jell-O pin added grated carrots to the Jell-O. The carrot depiction was more accurate than plain squares because it was more like salad and it had shown up at ward dinners. Yet green Jell-O and carrots is what people referenced when they wanted to make fun of Jell-O (or, implicitly, the women who prepared it), and people made fun of shredded carrots in Jell-O far more often than they actually made or ate it. What Utah Mormons liked about their Jell-O was mixing it with cranberries and nuts at Thanksgiving and with fruits and dairy at other times of communal celebration. While it might be funny, the green Jell-O and carrots pin is also misleading, not because no one ever made it as an attempt to get her family members to


eat their vitamins but because reducing Jell-O salad to green Jell-O and carrots is a distortion of the women behind the Jell-O. Green Jell-O and carrots as emblem of their salads makes these women look like they care not at all for others’ culinary pleasure. In fact, the opposite is true. Why bother to Jell-O-ize regular food if not to increase recipients’ delight?

Analyzing this representation of a food is really analyzing representations of a religious culture. When people reference the green Jell-O pin, they perpetuate its assessments of Utah Mormons and judgments about Utah Jell-O makers and eaters. The media of the pin thus provides an analytical opportunity to interrogate meanings in a clearly focused method. This focus, in turn, grounds our discussion in the concrete, in common practice and historical context, while also allowing exploration of the varied religious worlds one Jell-O pin can hold.

Although Jell-O is not the most apt symbol for Latter-day Saints (and homemade whole wheat bread is—stay tuned for a sequel), the cheerful product has signified different meanings at different times in LDS history, from the culinary democratization of elite foods during the 1930s to a consecration of family tradition during the ’70s and ’80s. When a newer generation of LDS women make Jell-O today, they tend to do so with some sheepishness. The popular bloggers from Our Best Bites report in their most recent cookbook’s only Jell-O salad recipe, “If you never thought gelatin and ‘truly impressive’ could ever be used in the same sentence, seeing the looks on people’s faces when you serve this might change your mind.”14 They list the recipe in the index under “gelatin” instead of “Jell-O,” distancing themselves somewhat from Jell-O’s passé associations. The Six Sisters, best-selling authors at church-owned Deseret Book stores, still use older recipes calling for a can of condensed soup or prepared salsa to a recipe. “We wanted to create a collection of simple recipes . . . that could help busy parents and families spend less time cooking in the kitchen and more time creating lasting memories together,” they explain. And they have only one Jell-O

salad recipe (not a molded salad) in their best-selling cookbook. Their recipe for homemade fruit snacks also calls for Jell-O, and it’s hard to see how making your own fruit snacks aligns with the goal to limit kitchen time in favor of family time. But who among us lives contradiction-free? And which of the media we live among is contradiction-free? Like the other media through which we live, Jell-O carries and shapes meaning in myriad ways.

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I began studying media in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 2009 as a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. The field of communication, and more specifically the disciplines of media studies and critical cultural studies, provides important frameworks for a rich understanding of the nuances of religious messaging, including proselytization, ritual, institutional control, identity, and belonging. When I’m asked why I chose Mormonism as the focus of my research, I tend to give an easy answer: Mormonism, more than any other faith, is a media religion. But the truth is more complex: I didn't know the half of Mormonism’s media dependence when I first began probing its depths. Instead, what began as an inquiry into the media artifacts of a uniquely American religious institution became a deep ethnographic exploration of where media itself ends and this particular religion begins.¹

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded when a young man claimed to pull supernatural media from the earth, then used divine artifacts to translate its unknown language. The plates no

longer accessible, the story nonfalsifiable, early Mormons built an entire religious system around this translation, bound into books and distributed beyond the limits of the spoken word. Though Mormonism is today a global faith, its membership is quite minuscule: Official tallies of just under sixteen million Mormons worldwide put members at less than 0.2 percent of the world’s population. Yet, for such a drop-in-the-bucket membership count, the LDS Church has built a media empire that rivals the world’s major religious and social institutions in complexity, expenditure, and polish.

The study of Mormonism—from an academic standpoint such as mine, from the faithful and sometimes skeptical perspective of believers, from the point of view of curiosity- or antagonism-fueled outsiders, or from the spiritual vantage of millions of investigators—is necessarily a study of media. From my first missionary lesson, media artifacts were thrust into my hands: pamphlets, videotapes, magazines. The missionaries led discussions from workbooks and triple combination scriptures. I was implored with the classic challenge to read the Book of Mormon for myself to know if it was true. I soon found countless communities of faithful, heterodox, doubting, and former Mormons united online through media like email, forums, blogs, and social media feeds and groups.

That the church’s primary artifacts are media and (when contrasted to other religions of the Book) not objects, relics, or icons is no coincidence. Though the original plates—the fundament of the Book of Mormon and everything that has followed—are absent, the church has moved through time and space as its media. Absent its media, there would be no Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As the faith evolved, the media artifacts used to promulgate it were both created by and creators of the institutional church itself; its forms and practices constantly replicate the media of the times.

Media scholars may argue that this is the case of any religion and, indeed, any social group where ideas must be communicated. But I mean a conservative definition of the word *media*, not its legitimate but often shapeless use among scholars. In this argument, I am not
embracing media as any meaningful gesture or symbol, whether spoken, written, created, or embodied. Instead, I refer to media as the physical artifacts of media institutions: published books, not oral stories. Pamphlets and videos, not embodied rituals. Though they are all media in the accepted theoretical sense (as too are objects like baskets and signifiers like smoke), what I meant to suggest is that unlike most major world religions, Mormonism is a religion built on—and, importantly, by—institutionalized mass media artifacts.

There was no period when the majority of Mormons practiced a purely oral faith, one that was liturgical, mythical, passed down from generation to generation in story and song. Communication historians note that oral societies in general (and, I’d argue, liturgical religious groups in particular) are marked by specific cultural and social mores: They tend to be collective yet individualistic, with context, interpretation, and lived experience mediating the individual’s relationship to the group. Indeed, as societies move from oral to print cultures, they tend to become more fixed, hierarchical, bureaucratic, authoritative, and depersonalized.2

But Mormonism from its founding was standardized in book form. Its twentieth-century correlation passed down a one-size-fits-all faith that could not maintain its shape upon confronting the digital era. Truly, the medium is the message; Mormonism as a nineteenth-century alternative narrative developed into a bureaucratic institution that reorganized religious power, standardized the faith, and disseminated it broadly—the same aspects of print culture prominently noted by historian Elizabeth Eisenstein that fueled the Protestant Reformation two centuries prior.3

The end of the nineteenth century brought an audiovisual revolution: radio, cinema, and television in particular enabled mass culture, mass audiences, and mass consumption. In America, the upper middle


class secured its social hold through mediated representation. As Neil Postman famously observed, the televi- sional medium reshaped every other sphere with which it engaged: TV as an entertainment medium trivialized all other social institutions, including politics, education, journalism, and religion. With the advent of photography, radio, cinema, and later television, audiovisual culture contributed to the birth of faith commodified, the “marketplace” of American religion.

It also enabled, in ways that mere print could not, communities of affinity and practice beyond the local village or industrial center. Audiovisual media connected disparate regions and revivified in Mormonism the idea of a global church. Even though its missionary efforts were as old as the church itself, seeing and hearing members around the world for the first time reimagined local community and, just as importantly, acculturated global members into a decidedly American faith.

The norms of the audiovisual era are key to understanding correlation, the Mormon institution’s practice of policing media content through a strict process of monitoring church-related media for content cohesion. The church’s global expansion from the mid-twentieth century on put control over its message and potential for cohesion among its many congregations increasingly at risk, forcing the church to consolidate the decentralized structure that had developed in the Mountain West, with church auxiliaries operating independently and manuals, lesson plans, and local practices and teachings varying widely.

In 1960, as a remedy to the problem of waning institutional control, then-President David O. McKay began churchwide efforts to streamline all church media with single-purpose messaging. The Correlation Committee ensured all church output would be streamlined and noncontradictory.

That is the most recited narrative around the impetus of correlation, anyhow. But it is important to note that the rise of audiovisual media

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and the move toward correlation were not unrelated. Just as Catholic boycotts of cinema led to the Hays Code in the 1930s, religious moral panics about the affordances and potential of audiovisual media, media that invaded the sensorium in ways that print did not, contributed to a need for correlation and a division between acceptable and unacceptable faith texts. The interconnection of media panic and correlation is clear in the cultural and institutional, though sometimes tongue-in-cheek, use of the term *uncorrelated* to refer to anything without institutional sanction: whatever is unofficial is both untrustworthy and sometimes dangerous.

In the decades that followed correlation, Mormon leaders at both the institutional and local levels cultivated this culture of fear of uncorrelated media, both implicitly and explicitly. After correlation, the church enjoyed a period of retrenchment and ensuing communal solidarity. In his discussion of nationalism as imagined community, Benedict Anderson notes that the early days of European capitalism saw a standardization of print media that led to a homogenization of culture over dispersed geographic regions. By reading the same newspaper, individuals who would never know one another could imagine themselves unified, holding important things in common. This media-induced homogenization parallels the years of strict LDS media correlation before the internet: official handbooks, teaching manuals, magazines, pamphlets, films and filmstrips, and satellite broadcasting ensured that Mormons across the globe were exposed to the same messages, often at the same times. Simultaneously, faithful Mormons sometimes looked warily upon non-church-approved publications at the behest of their leaders, as my ethnographic research found, for fear of confronting literature that would not strengthen faith. Despite geographic peculiarities or cultural disparities, Mormon imagined

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community meant that belonging to the same church was quite easily mistaken for homogeneity of belief and practice.

Correlation also meant that in some important ways, the Mormon institution evaded much of the personalization and commodification other Christian groups experienced in this period, as denominations proliferated and various churches offered unique worship experiences and a wide range of teachings and practices. While some splinter groups did leave the mainstream church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to offer a standardized church experience determined by a ward system. Mormons don’t pick and choose their church based on the type of music they like or their particular beliefs about finer points of doctrine. They maintain a broadcast model in an age of fragmentation and personalized media choice.

Today, the open text of Web 2.0 allows social media dialogue and user-generated content, which both threatens institutional control and creates openings for new negotiations of what it means to be Mormon. The affordances of internet culture, a culture in which social relationships and texts are open for both access and surveillance, have increased voiced and visible heterodoxy, which then challenge the authority structure of the church. In turn, the institution has subtly altered emerging positions on various issues of social concern (women’s roles, race, history, and LGBT issues, to name a few), enabling discourses of reimagined Mormon community among the heterodox.

But just as the printing press revolutionized lived religion throughout Western Europe, internet communication today poses an unprecedented threat to Mormon imagined community. The church still attempts to correlate its message with its own sophisticated appropriation of the internet, born from its proselytizing emphasis coupled with its need to connect with an increasingly global membership. From public relations campaigns, search engine optimization, advanced market research techniques, interactive church websites, and its ubiquitous presence on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, the institution has invested millions of dollars in staying up to date with current new media trends.
The internet has unsettled the LDS imagined community as a print- and audiovisual-based idea of homogeneity and cohesion worldwide. The digital era changed more than connectivity and the time and space quandaries of previous media eras; it changed the way the LDS institution relays information and undercut the homogeneity of previous eras’ correlation attempts. The open texts of the internet and the social practices that develop around them are beyond correlation, and the church’s ongoing struggle to adapt to this brave new media environment highlights the media dependence of the institution as a whole.

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Communing with Compromise: Mormonism and the Early Internet

Gavin Feller

As an emerging technology, the internet stirred a fascinating brew of excitement, anxiety, and fear for Jew and Gentile.¹ It challenged both grassroots and top-down notions of intimacy, authenticity, and control. For Mormonism, a religion whose chronology parallels uncannily the development of electronic communication technologies, the internet joins a host of media dripping with ambivalence. In tracing the contours of Mormonism’s evolving and uneasy relationship with the twentieth-century internet—from early listserv communities to institutional web development—this brief essay presents only a morsel of the richness the religion offers for the study of technology, culture, and power.

Before the bloggernacle

One of the first hubs for discussion of religion on the internet was through the mailing list UseNet, which by the early 1980s had developed into several forums, including net.religion, alt.religion, soc.culture,

¹ For an extended treatment of Mormonism and media, see Gavin Feller, “Media as Compromise: A Cultural History of Mormonism and New Communication Technology in Twentieth-Century America” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2017).

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.18809/msr.2018.0108 Journal DOI: https://doi.org/10.18809/mimmsr.21568030
Thrilled to connect with others of their same faith, Mormons began creating their own news groups, forums, and listservs as early as 1986, starting with LDS-L: the “Internet First Ward.” Before long, dozens of networks emerged engendering varying shades of Mormon orthodoxy and interest: ZION-L, EYRING-L, ALMA-L, SAMU-L, and most notably MORMON-L, to name a few.

A group of Mormon women particularly put off by, as one user put it, the “extreme hostility” they experienced from men on platforms like MORMON-L created the Electronic Women’s Caucus (ELWC) listserv as an alternative gathering space. As “the only ward in the church that is led by mostly women,” ELWC gave its participants “a place to say what is sometimes difficult in a ward setting.” Lynn Mathews Anderson, the listserv’s creator, said the “virtual ward” reproduced “what goes on in the hallways [of an LDS Church]. We can go from the heaviest doctrinal discussion to fluff.” Though geographically separated, ELWC participants felt part of a powerful feminine community safe from the threat of ecclesiastical discipline.

Once closely connected through niche (and sometimes exclusive) forums, many look back on the pre–World Wide Web days of the internet with romantic nostalgia. For these users, the bloggernacle—an emic term used to describe contemporary internet spaces by and for Mormons—could never replace the early years of online community.

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4. White professional men with access to expensive computer technology tended to dominate the internet up until the mid-1990s.
7. The term bloggernacle is an evocative portmanteau of the words blog and tabernacle, alluding to the mundane and the miraculous that accompany the wandering
Ordering the cosmos

While some Mormons anxiously engaged the technical affordances of the internet, imbuing cyberspace with a utopian rhetoric of sublime, many within the institution trembled. According to Richard E. Turley, managing director of LDS Public Affairs, accounts of pornography destroying marriages and children being lured into virtual chatrooms frightened church administrators to the point that many referred to the internet ominously as the “I word.” For several years, in LDS general conference, the church's semiannual worldwide gathering/public broadcast, the term internet was nearly synonymous with pornography, and pornography was a poison to be avoided like the plague. After its timid launch in 1996, the LDS Church's primary website LDS.org remained nearly unchanged for three years. It was as if the institutional church was dipping its toes into the ocean of the internet before running out of the water again, even as some Mormons swam and others sank in the depths.

The creation of FamilySearch.org in 1999 brought a sea change in how LDS leaders perceived the internet. Instead of pornography, pedophilia, and a counterculture ethos, leaders gradually began seeing technologies capable of fulfilling Joseph Smith's cosmological visions of an interconnected human family extending to back to the biblical Adam and forward into eternity. The church began moving forward precisely by looking backward. If pornography stained the internet for church administrators, it was online genealogy that slowly sanitized it.

Even after deciding to move forward, however, there were other problems the institution faced: with most virtual real estate already purchased, there was little room to put down new stakes in cyberspace.


For instance, when Warren Osborn, a Utah Valley Mormon bishop, stumbled upon Mormon.com in the mid-1990s and found “a Web site filled with pornography and vile alterations of scriptures,” he was understandably appalled. After negotiating with a site owner “more interested in annoying people with the site than selling,” Osborn spent “tens of thousands of dollars” to buy the domain name, which he ultimately donated to the LDS Church. There were several tech-savvy Mormons with enough foresight and benevolence to give up domain names they’d purchased and developed to assist institutional church web growth without a hint of recognition or praise.

As the new millennium approached, accompanied by the apocalyptic rhetoric of the Y2K scare, the LDS Church established a for-profit tech start up called Millennial Star Network (MSTAR). The company president described MSTAR as an effort to “colonize an electronic global community of members and friends of the church.” Soon the LDS Church began shutting down local ward websites and chasing after copyright infringers. With infrastructural controls taking root, the seeds were planted for a new vision of Mormonism online, and the creation of Mormon.org in 2001 was the first harvest—a site whose name, which signals an awareness of search engine optimization (SEO), came about through unexpected revelation.

Today, the LDS Church sponsors dozens of websites, which often appear curiously unaware of each other. With seemingly innumerable

14. See “Michael Hemingway,” interview by Jordan Watkins, History of Media in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, folder 2, 21, Church History Library.
sites competing for eyes and clicks, the goal to colonize has perhaps backfired.  

Mormonism as media

At the heart of both heterodox listserv communities on the early internet and the LDS Church’s institutional goals to develop effective websites are fundamental concerns with authenticity and control. ELWC participants sought authenticity through disclosure, of their best and worst selves. Their “skinny-dipping,” a metaphor they used to describe their experience on the listserv, made them “both daring and vulnerable,” and therefore able to form meaningful interpersonal bonds. For the institutional church, sanctioned sex was threatened by digital pornography—the devil’s counterfeit to authentic sexuality and a destroyer of marriages, families, and ultimately community.

Those who felt marginalized by Mormon culture or church policies found a new level of personal control over their identity on ELWC. Participants felt they could finally speak their truths, with no hierarchy or patriarchy to stop them. LDS leaders, weary from painful public relations blunders, hoped the internet would allow them to “set the record straight.” They wanted control over information, over copyrighted materials, over the news media narrative. One sought control through isolation, creating invitation-only groups to foster intimacy; the other through publication, hoping accurate information from an official source would protect its public image and its members. Both

15. Peggy Fletcher Stack alluded to this in “The Changing Role of the LDS PR Office: How Spokesmen and an Occasional Woman Have Often Become the Voice of the Church” (address at Mormon Media Symposium, Brigham Young University–Hawaii, Laie, Hawaii, November 3, 2016).


underestimated the stubbornness of technology and its inseparability from culture.

Mormon internet history is another iteration, building on earlier efforts to adapt radio and television to the religion’s needs, of the unsuccessful struggle to separate medium from message. The ultimately futile effort to control the internet, whether through isolation or publication, whether in the name of intimate dialogue or of impersonal dissemination, is a reflection of the paradox of all media. We often wrongly believe media are conduits—neutral channels for the content we hope to push through them—but their enabling power is always accompanied by constraint. Media give and media take away.\textsuperscript{19} The media with which Mormonism has repeatedly compromised—from telegraph to TV to Twitter, as friends or as enemies or as both at once—are privy to the best and worst the religion and its people have to offer. The more we converse with them, the more they will reveal.

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There is a growing scholarly field, crucial to Mormon studies, that scholars of Mormonism have yet to engage with: the history of genealogical practices. Mormon studies contains a robust and mature literature on the history of temple theology and the importance of kin to Mormon teachings.¹ The connections between this flourishing scholarship and genealogical practices are largely missing, however. Scholarly history of genealogy is currently enjoying a rebirth—a renaissance that comes at a fortuitous time for Mormon studies. It brings with it possibilities of mutually beneficial conversations. Without these

conversations, the history of genealogy, including Mormon genealogical practices, will develop without any contribution by those trained in Mormon history and culture. With these conversations, scholarship on Mormonism and on genealogy, as well as LDS Church writings on genealogy, will benefit.

There are three strands of scholarship relevant to Mormon genealogical practices. Current scholarship about genealogy, when it discusses the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, invariably encounters Mormonism’s genealogical project and attempts to situate it within the larger framework of Western genealogical practices. Recent scholarship on early Mormonism has offered a varied and rich discussion of Latter-day Saint temple rituals and beliefs about kinship’s mortal, spiritual, and eternal ramifications. Also, LDS Church institutional publications about genealogy (meaning work produced by the church or by authors and institutions affiliated with the church) have provided narrative accounts of temple work and institutional histories of the church’s official genealogical activities. None of these strands of inquiry, however, have systematically engaged with one another. Such historiographic isolation is no longer sustainable; the lines of inquiry have matured to a point where they need to be braided together to illuminate both the history of genealogical practices and the development of Mormonism. Samuel Otterstrom noted in 2008 that “the academic literature has only scattered references to the importance of genealogical research within the theology of the Church.”12 The moment is ripe to fill the gap Otterstrom identified—to use the history of genealogy to expand and enhance scholarship about Mormonism and to use Mormon studies scholarship to enhance scholarship on genealogical practices. Bringing those two fields together can also inform genealogical publications authored by, or affiliated with, the church. This essay suggests places where literature on genealogical practices and Mormon studies scholarship can enrich

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one another. It then suggests ways that such fortified scholarship can fruitfully contribute to LDS Church publications on genealogy.

Possibilities for Mormon studies

Though there were occasional histories about the genealogical profession written in the first half of the twentieth century, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that professional genealogical and library publications began to tell a thorough history of American genealogy.3 Most of these accounts were straightforward narratives about the shift from elite families’ genealogies in the eighteenth century to the more professional and popularizing genealogy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.4 These decades also saw a flurry of historical scholarly activity around family history, meaning both a history of families and genealogy. There were some early and useful entries into this field. In particular, Robert M. Taylor’s excellent work on the parallel rise of family reunions and genealogy in post–Civil War America asserted that such activities represented “a kind of mini-social movement, . . . a moral crusade among middle-class white Protestants, who . . . sought to comprehend their [changing] situation and control their future.”5 Unfortunately, this and other works did not generate a long-lasting historiographical tradition. Aside from Taylor, scholarly work on genealogy was largely confined to pedagogical models for incorporating genealogy into social history curriculum.6 The connected work of historical demographers using

family reconstruction to understand historical populations was also held up as a place for fruitful connections with genealogists, but the initial enthusiasm from genealogists for collaborative work did not catch on with historians and did not survive beyond the early 1980s. Despite the waning of scholarship exploring the history of genealogy after the 1980s, in the last dozen years it has experienced a revival.

Neither the 1970s/80s nor current strand, however, has entered the historiography on Mormonism. However, recent literature on historical genealogical practices offers many potentially rewarding avenues for Mormon studies scholars. Current scholarship sees Western genealogy’s expansion in the early nineteenth century as tied to the rise of a more inclusive and democratic society and a gradual turning away from genealogy’s earlier elitist and racist propensities. For example, Michael Sharpe’s 2011 *Family Matters* offers a narrative account of English genealogy largely concentrating on institutional trends and detailing genealogy’s increasing professional status and expanding popularity. Similarly, François Weil’s 2013 *Family Trees* describes a history of American genealogy that consistently included more groups of people, more professional standards, and more access to documents.

Other scholars have emphasized genealogical influence on the development of national, political, and social identities across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, Karin Wulf argues that what she terms “genealogical literacy” was intertwined with systems of social and political power, creating a genealogical worldview that shaped early American law and religion; Francesca Morgan teases out how gendered political and religious construction of genealogical knowledge reified social hierarchies; and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

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and Margaret Bendroth assert that historical and genealogical knowledge were crucial to northern Protestant social formation in the early republic.¹⁰

These works cover the time before the founding of Mormonism, but their work is about the world that produced Joseph Smith’s family and many early converts from New England. There is much to explore about what their arguments mean for understanding early Mormon genealogical thought. Scholars of early Mormonism have traced the religious language of adoption and family—but none have considered American genealogical practices’ influence on Mormonism’s appeal or development. Wulf’s and Morgan’s work inspires questions about how much early Mormons’ participation in a culture that already inculcated genealogical literacy supported their enthusiasm for proxy work for the dead.¹¹ Ulrich’s work could inspire work about how early LDS converts’ material cultural practices of genealogy carried over or changed after their encounter with Mormonism. According to Bendroth, nineteenth-century mainline Protestantism moved away from seeing history as central to faith. Did early Mormons’ sense of history and memory transform in different ways than mainline Protestants’ did, owing to genealogical practices? In a similar vein, Susan Tucker’s work on New Orleans could be used to situate genealogical practices in the South that may have complemented, or perhaps contrasted with, Mormon practice. She argues for genealogy’s ability to perpetuate and


generate cultural renewal, but it remains an open question whether it functioned in the same way for Mormons.12

Scholarship about genealogy explicitly connects with Mormonism once it covers the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Recently Morgan has argued that early Mormonism’s genealogical impulses were informed by a democratic and universalist approach that other American genealogists did not adopt for several decades.13 Alternatively, while Morgan detects genealogy’s nineteenth- and twentieth-century democratic flavor, Philip Barlow has argued that it was precisely democracy’s ability to “fracture” families that made Joseph Smith’s revelatory conceptions of eternal, expansive kinship so appealing.14 These ideas are not necessarily mutually exclusive—Mormonism could have been attractive because it fostered both egalitarian impulses and bolstered family ties. How it did so via genealogical practices could be explored further.

While early Latter-day Saints were influenced by their cultural milieu, they did not engage with the genealogical establishment. Early Mormons performed proxy temple ordinances based not on genealogical research but on personal knowledge of deceased family and friends.15 While professional American genealogists, mostly centered in the Northeast, were arguing for rigorous and academic standards from at least the 1840s, Mormons were not preaching genealogical practices as much as they were rewriting the importance of genealogical literacy. This raises questions about why the burgeoning discipline of genealogy did not attract numerous nineteenth-century Mormons interested in connecting to their kin. This can be explained in part because early proxy temple work did not require genealogical research;


ordinances were performed for deceased friends and immediate family or by adoption. Undoubtedly the mid-century exodus from Nauvoo and the struggles to establish communities in the Intermountain West also played a dominant role. Also, genealogical research was not essential to temple worship; once the Latter-day Saints settled in Utah, other than baptisms, proxy ordinance work for the dead was not available until the completion of the St. George Temple in 1877 and adoption theology emphasized linkage to LDS priesthood holders more than to biological kin.¹⁶

Though adoption sealings continued after the dedication of the St. George Temple, its construction made available, for the first time, all temple ordinances for the deceased (excluding those of African descent). Church members flooded the temple with proxy work for their ancestors and friends. In 1877 alone there were over thirty thousand baptisms for the dead and over thirteen thousand endowments for the dead. That final figure for ancestor-based temple work would more than match the total number of adoption sealings that would occur over the next sixteen years.¹⁷ This suggests that while the church was not substantively supporting genealogical research in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and even as adoption work continued, rank-and-file members’ genealogical knowledge and desire flourished. Wilford Woodruff’s 1893 revelation that shifted LDS temple ordinance priorities away from adoption to a focus on one’s own ancestors increased this effort among members, but there was not immediately an official churchwide effort to facilitate rigorous genealogical practices.


Even when LDS genealogy missionaries were sent east in the 1880s and 1890s to research their family lines, there was not a sustained engagement with or interest in the genealogical establishment and profession.\textsuperscript{18} LDS leaders were engaged in women’s rights activism and encouraged advanced academic and artistic training for Latter-day Saints, but they did not facilitate such a meaningful connection with professional genealogical training.\textsuperscript{19} They did not see a need for such interaction, for as François Weil put it, “impressive though they were, the [genealogical] programs developed by the church were meant for the church and its higher goals” and not for the broader genealogical community.\textsuperscript{20} The reasons for this disconnect deserve further analysis from Mormon studies scholars.

Though Woodruff’s revelation spurred the creation of the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU, now the Family History Department of the church), it is striking that it was individual members’ passion for genealogy and its connection to LDS theology that sustained the effort in a quasi-official capacity.

Accounts about early twentieth-century genealogy within Mormonism do not explore much beyond Susa Young Gates’s personal efforts. In a 1991 \textit{BYU Studies} article, and in a 1994–95 book-length issue of that journal titled \textit{Hearts Turned to the Fathers}, authors Jessie Embry, James Allen, and Kahlile Mehr remarked on Gates’s tireless efforts in the early twentieth century to build a systematic and rigorous approach to genealogical work and temple ordinance indexing, highlighting her comment that she would “provoke the brethren” to greater involvement with genealogical labor.\textsuperscript{21} Strikingly, Embry and Allen’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Weil, \textit{Family Trees}, 178.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Jessie L. Embry and James Allen, “‘Provoking the Brethren to Good Works’: Susa Young Gates, the Relief Society, and Genealogy,” \textit{BYU Studies} 31/2 (Spring 1991): 115–38; Allen, Embry, and Mehr, \textit{Hearts Turned to the Fathers}.
\end{itemize}
account suggests that central church leadership and LDS wards and stakes were at best uninterested in, and at worst resistant to, a church-wide effort at genealogical education. Attributing this obstacle not to “genealogy per se” but to the “continuing question of whether church headquarters should impose any classwork upon local Relief Societies,” their argument raises questions about how genealogy connected with debates about gender and central versus local church governance in the twentieth century. Genealogy did not permanently settle into church structures until the 1920s and 1930s. In the same period, however, temple worship was central to Mormonism. To date there is no in-depth analysis of these two trends—genealogy and temple worship—let alone their connections or disconnections with turn-of-the-century genealogy beyond Mormonism.

Also underexplored is what the first and second manifestos meant for genealogical practices among members, especially as they were issued near the same time the church discontinued adoption sealings and biologically based sealings took precedence. The stretch from the 1890s until the church microfilming program in the late 1930s is a complicated story about not only the end of polygamy but also LDS Church–sponsored genealogical activities and members’ genealogical understanding that has much to offer current scholars of Mormonism.

Possibilities for genealogical scholarship

There are also implications for the history of genealogy as it grapples with various strands of Mormon scholarship. Numerous additional scholarly fields have touched on Mormon genealogy in ways that

22. Embry and Allen, “Provoking the Brethren,” 125.
Mormon studies scholars could further illuminate. How Mormon genealogical systems compare with other kinships systems and how they interact with racial and gendered practices are just two areas where Mormon studies scholars could further the conversation about genealogy. Scholars of memory, art, archival practices, public history, and cultural anthropology have all touched on genealogical practices in general and Mormonism in particular. Specifically, they have analyzed various kinship systems and how Mormon genealogy fits within, or outside, those systems. They offer intriguing insights and critiques about Latter-day Saint genealogical practices, particularly the effort—currently embodied in FamilySearch’s Family Tree—to create one large family tree and to account for all of humanity (or at least the portion of humanity for whom records survive). In doing so, many quote extensively from Donald Akenson’s 2007 *Some Family: The Mormons and How Humanity Keeps Track of Itself*. While Akenson’s discussion of the different ways humanity has organized genealogical knowledge is insightful and his point about Mormon genealogical logic is intriguing, his understanding of LDS genealogical practices is sometimes

problematic and often inaccurate. Given that so many others rely on Akenson, this has led, unintentionally, to some unsophisticated analyses that conflate crowd-sourced and undocumented family trees with official church temple practices and record-preserving efforts but do not fully explore the implications of either aspect. Therefore, this portion of the conversation about Mormonism has largely been surrendered to those not extensively trained in Mormon history and practice.

This does not mean Akenson and others have not raised interesting questions for scholars of Mormonism. One scholar described the Mormon genealogical effort as “a daring feat, a continuing and seemingly always advancing act of genealogical imperialism.” And another argued that LDS “use of religion-based information and technologies implicitly frames genealogical research in a narrative of salvation” and, via the church’s online databases and record collections, imposes that frame on non-LDS users. If these statements are accurate, how they came to be needs to be traced by scholars trained in Mormon studies.

Scholarship about genealogy would benefit from further engagement with other aspects of Mormon historiography. In particular, scholarship about race within Mormonism has much to offer scholars of genealogy. Armand Mauss’s 2003 *All Abraham’s Children* insightfully demonstrates how racial attitudes became embedded in temple practices (and who could participate in them) and therefore had genealogical implications. He masterfully links a discussion of racial identity to GSU policies and practices. While scholars of genealogy have traced the general American trend to embed within genealogy racist attitudes and racial identity following the Civil War, they have also seen such practices waning during the last half of the twentieth century. How

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do Mormon understandings of race and its connections to temple and genealogical practices inform or complicate that story?

Gendered aspects of genealogical practices and LDS women’s history also offer potential lines of productive inquiry. Tucker and Morgan’s recent work has begun to explore these ideas by addressing how women’s control over genealogy and kin-keeping more generally is a place of power and influence.30 Morgan also underscores the important role LDS women played in the early twentieth-century development of Mormon genealogy. In many ways, LDS women were the bedrock of genealogical record keeping via the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, the Relief Society, and Susa Young Gates’s steady leadership in both organizations’ genealogical activities. Gates also influenced early twentieth-century American genealogical activities.31 Despite the shift to priesthood quorum oversight of genealogy in the 1930s and the incorporation of the GSU into the church organization in the 1940s, genealogy gathering and record keeping remained, and remains, largely a female domain within Mormonism. Little of the literature on LDS women’s history touches on this history or recognizes its importance. Institutional accounts of LDS women’s history similarly miss women’s participation in, and even leadership of, church genealogical programs. The official introduction to the history of the Relief Society, Daughters in My Kingdom, does not mention any genealogical activities from the 1910s and 1920s, even as it details the Relief Society’s efforts to provide welfare services, build a hospital system, and continue the struggle for suffrage—the former two activities later adopted by the church much as genealogy was.32 LDS women’s history could speak to this gap in genealogical scholarship and could push it to consider the gendered aspects of genealogical practices within and beyond Mormonism.

32. Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011).
Possibilities for institutional publications

Beyond scholarly conversations, there is more than just an academic debate at stake for Mormon studies and the history of genealogy. A Mormon studies enriched by engagement with genealogical scholarship has implications for LDS (and non-LDS) genealogical practices. Parallel to genealogical scholarship and academic scholarship on Mormonism are various institutional accounts of genealogy. These official church publications, or publications by church-affiliated entities, have focused on narrative accounts of record keeping and preservation, submission of family trees, and temple work and building. *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, an institutional history of the GSU, remains the most detailed account of LDS genealogy. In many ways, Allen, Embry, and Mehr told a story that matched the story of Western genealogy told by recent historians. Similar to the history traced by Sharpe and Weil, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* traces Mormonism’s official efforts to expand genealogical research and record preservation and to improve the accuracy of the genealogical records kept by members. Though it did not generate sustained scholarly production about LDS genealogy, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* is quoted extensively by scholars of genealogy and is echoed or cited in other church publications.33

Other church or church-affiliated authors and journals have produced numerous accounts about Mormon genealogy. Church Educational System manuals, Sunday School manuals, Gospel Topics essays, *Revelations in Context* essays, and FamilySearch.org have all produced official or quasi-official accounts of Mormon genealogy. Many of these sources provide a detailed account of Joseph Smith’s revelations about work for the dead, but they often stop there, or skip forward to consider current genealogical practices, without considering the long-term implications of those revelations nor the changes in how those revelations were implemented in genealogical practices over the ensuing two

centuries. This is not their job, of course, but Mormon studies scholars could bring genealogical scholarship together with institutional histories in ways that would be useful, accessible, and meaningful to authors of institutional publications.

Given the church’s interest in publically engaging with its history, and given the rigorous scholarship about that history, it is crucial that the world of genealogical practices be brought into that work. As historical scholarship has informed the work of the Church History Department, so too could scholarship on genealogy inform the practices of Family-Search. The church has implicitly, and increasingly explicitly, created a narrative about all of human history that has drawn attention from outsiders who need more context for the history and purpose of such a project. One unintended consequence of the record-preservation efforts of the church is that the Granite Mountain Records Vault, where all those records are stored, has become a de facto repository of humanity’s history from the last five hundred years. Over time, that unintended consequence became more celebrated until the development of Family-Search Family Tree in the early 2000s and its official launch in 2013 established it as an overt goal. Family Tree is crowd-sourced and open to anyone who creates a free account, partly in the hopes to “organize the family tree for all of God’s children.” Because of such ambitious genealogical goals, the LDS Church has attained, in one observer’s opinion, “authority over the past.” Mormon studies scholars who provide history and context for this development do a service to both genealogical

35. Shoumatoff, Mountain of Names, 288–93; Allen, Embry, and Mehr, Hearts Turned to the Fathers, 256.
37. Tucker, City of Remembrance, 134.
and Mormon historiography as well as a service to authors of church publications.

There is also a large non-LDS practitioner audience who would benefit from such work. The church’s genealogy project draws upon millions of volunteers. The 3.45 million contributors to FamilySearch.org’s crowd-sourced Family Tree in 2016, whether Mormon or not, participate in the Mormon genealogical project. Additionally, the non-Mormon genealogical world puts enormous weight on LDS practices. As one observer put it, “The LDS Church is central to a national culture of genealogy, and ultimately an international one, because it has allowed access to large collection of records.” A story about genealogy buttressed by a greater connection to Mormon studies would provide a greater context for non-LDS users of LDS genealogical products and systems.

Conclusion

This review has hopefully exposed some areas where Mormon studies could connect with, test, and respond to the existing literature on genealogical practices—and potentially find places to offer a more illuminating story. There are possibilities to situate Mormon genealogical teaching and practices within narratives about genealogical activities and to simultaneously complicate the story about those activities. Scholars interested in family history will have a better sense of Mormon genealogical practices, and in this way Mormonism could become an illuminating prism through which to test scholarly assertions about Western genealogy and genealogical knowledge more generally. Similarly, for scholars of Mormonism, an understanding of broader considerations within genealogical history (both that produced by scholars and that produced by the LDS Church) will help place teachings about

39. Tucker, City of Remembrance, 27.
temples and eternal kinship into a context of lived genealogical practice. Knowing how Mormonism reifies or refutes the existing literature on genealogy is a story worth telling.

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Reviewed by Leigh Eric Schmidt

Through the lens of photographer Charles Ellis Johnson (1857–1926), Mary Campbell captures the subtleties of Mormon visual culture at the turn of the twentieth century as the Latter-day Saints struggled to jettison plural marriage and adapt themselves to the demands of American citizenship. In Johnson’s vast stereographic archive, Campbell has a treasure trove, which she frequently alchemizes into interpretive gold on everything from Victorian tourism to chorus-girl sexuality to Mormon historical memory to women’s rights activism. Hers is a visually sumptuous book, filled with close and often sparkling explications of particular images. At its center is the enigmatic Charles Ellis Johnson, whose thick photographic dossier is matched with a correspondingly thin textual record. The gap between what Campbell is able to document about Johnson’s life history and how she speculatively extrapolates from that spare evidence creates a number of conundrums—not least a puzzle about how to interpret Johnson’s religious identity, especially during the last third of his life after 1903 when he starts producing “a fine line of spicy pictures of girls” (p. 59).

Johnson was, as Campbell observes, “pure LDS aristocracy,” with a familial lineage traceable to Joseph Smith’s earliest converts and with marriage ties into Brigham Young’s household (p. 7). These inheritances and connections provided Johnson with enviable access around Salt
Lake City and helped establish him as the photographer of record for everything from Temple Park to the Saltair resort at the Great Salt Lake to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Even with his thriving photography and stereography business, Johnson was also always a bit of a huckster, a wide-awake businessman ready to make a buck on whatever would sell, including patent medicines and cheap souvenirs. Eager to vend all things Mormon, Johnson had a good feel for the respectable images that the local LDS elite wanted and also for the alluring fare that neck-craning tourists desired. By Campbell’s lights, these merchandizing specialties represent two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, Johnson studiously crafted a genteel, refined aesthetic in which Mormons were remade as mainstream Americans—white, middle-class, dignified, cultured, and monogamous; on the other hand, he grandly commodified Mormon Utah—a project that helped knit the LDS world into a nationalizing consumer culture of amusement parks, mass-produced keepsakes, tourist guidebooks, and display-window fantasies. Both endeavors were ways, as Campbell suggests, of making Mormons look familiarly American, far removed from the anti-Mormon horror show that had long dominated popular media representations.

Not that Johnson’s photographs and stereographs were necessarily uncomplicated icons of accommodation. Campbell discerns layers of ambivalence and grief in Johnson’s imagery, a work of mourning for the “sacred polygamous body” that the American political and religious order compelled Mormons to relinquish (p. 15). His pictures, she suggests, register an abiding fear that Joseph Smith’s “original faith” was being transmuted into “the impotent stuff of superficial appearance and easy entertainment” (p. 15). That lament, in many instances, seems to be as much Campbell’s as Johnson’s, however. With an inadequate textual archive, that anguish is necessarily projected more than demonstrated. A savvy entrepreneur, Johnson had as his first order of business pleasing his customers. If the Saints wanted to conceal the lingering presence of plural wives after 1890 by staging in Johnson’s studio the appearance of a simpler family structure, he happily obliged. If gawking tourists sought confirmations of Moorish exoticism, he hustled to provide
images (in bulk) of Brigham Young and his harem. It is not at all clear that Johnson was conflicted about these dual ambitions or that he was consumed by dread at the prospect of a “polygamous Zion” dissolving into “the immaterial, deracinated space of belief” (p. 48). The constrictive norms of monogamous citizenship no doubt came at great cost to the patriarchs of the LDS Church—as the careers of Wilford Woodruff and Joseph F. Smith attest—but it is far less apparent that Johnson, a divorced bachelor with an increasingly irreligious sensibility, brooded over the loss of that materialized Zion.

Perhaps, as Johnson launched into his new venture of erotic photography, he was longing for the “spiritual exaltation” that Joseph Smith found in “the hypersexualized male body” (p. 114). Perhaps he was wistful for his own father’s polygamy, for the apotheosis of male sexuality as a carnal grace—“the origin of sacred creation” (p. 114). Campbell’s interpretive gestures in that direction resonate, but what is clearer from the evidence she gleans is Johnson’s growing alienation from the faith of his youth. Already in 1890 on a pleasure trip to San Francisco, he delighted in the decadent sexuality of the masquerade balls he attended there and talked up his visits to Chinatown’s opium dens. By 1902, his name had dropped from the membership list of his local ward, and the next year he set off with a female companion on a long journey to the Holy Land from whence he wrote home ridiculing the very desire for a “straight way to Heaven” (p. 70). His more pious relatives had, by then, seen enough. As an uncle concluded, his nephew was no longer “at heart a true Latter Day Saint living to the privileges of [his] birth & high calling” (p. 70). It is quite likely that the uncle reached that conclusion without knowing about his nephew’s nascent interest in creating a mail-order business featuring risqué images of traveling actresses and chorus girls. Should those endeavors have become publicly known in Salt Lake City, Johnson’s religious career would almost certainly have ended in decisive excommunication rather than gradual disaffiliation. Instead, for at least a four-year period from 1904 to 1907, Johnson built a lucrative mail-order trade in spicy photographs, while continuing his respectable Mormon enterprises from his studio in Salt Lake City. By
the middle of the next decade, he had sold off his Utah business and had headed to San Jose, California, where he died in 1926, a lone bachelor far removed from the LDS fellowship. Hearing of his death, one Utah family member remarked that Johnson had spent his last years opposed to all “religious flapdoodle” (p. 71).

Johnson’s mail-order business for erotica benefited from being outside the orbit of Anthony Comstock’s anti-obscenity crusades in New York and elsewhere. His wares—high-art nudes, voluptuous models posed bare-shouldered or bare-breasted, and Orientalist images of hip-dancers—were of the sort that routinely caught Comstock’s eye and frequently ended in crushing arrests and fines. While Johnson may have been less risqué than some of his competitors, Comstock and his allied agents would surely have marked him down as a dealer in obscene and indecent materials. That Johnson was a Mormon and also a purveyor of smut would not have surprised Comstock (and not simply because, as an upstanding evangelical, he would have associated Mormons with unbridled lechery). The vice fighter kept a detailed ledger on the offenders that his society arrested, which included a column noting the religious affiliation of each. The vast majority were identifiable to Comstock in religious terms—Roman Catholic, Jewish, Protestant (of multiple varieties), spiritualist, or freethinker. Only a small minority were without a religious marker, those who warranted notice as having no religion in particular or none but to serve the devil. For Comstock, it was all in a day’s work to report on two brothers who were simultaneously Methodists and sellers of obscene books, or to discover an Episcopalian chambermaid who had teamed up with a Congregationalist photographer to produce nude images of herself to peddle on the streets of New York. In other words, Comstock would have been unfazed by the notion that Johnson was both religious and wayward, both connected to a religious community and yet drawn to the sale of illicit images. Sin, he knew from long experience, was everywhere—from the turpitude he witnessed among fellow soldiers in the Union Army to the wickedness he saw infiltrating every corner of the city’s commercial life. Was it any surprise, under such circumstances, to find
a man who attended a mission chapel in the Bowery and who also ran a mail-order contraceptive business? In an everyday world of mixed motivations and fractional allegiances, Johnson could certainly be both a Mormon and a dealer in erotica.

Yet it is also possible that Comstock’s ledger overstated the fixedness of religious identity: that is, a denominational marker adheres to an offender even when that label ceases to be particularly constitutive of his or her identity. Johnson, by the time he embarked on his new line of spicy photographs, seemed intent on disentangling himself from the church, one more late Victorian losing and then discarding his faith. His most vital interests were elsewhere—in theater, travel, and art. The seductive sexuality he was exploring through his intimate and sometimes haunting portraits seemed to have far more to do with bohemian yearnings than polygamous nostalgia. As his own church was beginning to fall into line with Comstock’s Protestant moralism, Johnson wanted none of it (except perhaps to hold on to his LDS business). He may have looked back to Joseph Smith’s fecund sexuality for inspiration, but he was most assuredly looking forward to new sexual arrangements, including romantic companionships entirely outside church-sanctioned marriages as well as an open eroticism that did not require God to bless it. “YOU SEE JOHNSON ALL OVER THE WORLD” was his advertising slogan, and he presented the word Johnson, American slang for penis, with an arrow thrusting through it (p. 54). Perhaps the photographer was doubling down on phallic innuendo because he missed the rugged masculinity of Mormon origins, or perhaps Johnson was looking forward to freeing the bawdy and the body from its religious inscriptions. With Campbell’s rich and fascinating book as guide, both angles of vision come into revealing focus.

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Reviewed by Kathleen Flake

A long-awaited publication, *The Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846* does not disappoint. It comprises contemporaneous notes, most of them verbatim, of deliberations by a religious council charged with devising a millennial government for the Mormon faithful and the non-Mormon righteous. *Minutes* gives a uniquely intimate view of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ efforts to account for religious diversity in its idealized kingdom of God to be organized in preparation for Christ’s return. Council members became demoralized by the death of founder Joseph Smith, and the record quickly turns into an account of the Council’s efforts to respond to, survive, and escape the dangers and betrayals within and without the church between 1844 and 1846. As documentation of Mormonism’s practical and principled abandonment of the United States, it is unparalleled.

First convened by Smith three months before his death, the Council of Fifty was a governing body composed of many Mormon leaders and very few nonmembers. It was given the formal title of “The Kingdom
of God and His Laws with the Keys and Power thereof, and Judgment in the Hands of His Servants, Ahman Christ” (p. 48). For obvious reasons, the more informal reference to its number as a “Council of Fifty” became its common appellation. Notwithstanding the grandiosity of its official title, the Council was given a very practical charge. It was, explained Smith, “designed to be got up for the safety and salvation of the saints by protecting them in their religious rights and worship” (p. 128). These political intentions arose from the Saints’ conviction that the United States government had failed to show any interest in protecting them from vicious, even state-sponsored, persecution. Initially, the Council’s focus was on Smith’s spring 1844 campaign for the national presidency. With his assassination that summer and increasing hostility toward the Mormon settlements in and around Nauvoo, Illinois, where the church was headquartered, the Council’s attention turned to ensuring safe evacuation from the United States. Like the Puritans’ “city on a hill,” the Mormon “Kingdom of God” was to stand in contrast to and as a rebuke of tyranny, religious and political. Only, for the Mormons, the holiness did not require religious conformity, but liberty. “We act upon the broad and liberal principal [sic] that all men have equal rights, and ought to be respected, and that every man has a privilege in this organization of choosing for himself voluntarily his God” (p. 97).

Governed by oaths of secrecy when recorded, and withheld from public view ever since, the Council of Fifty minutes has long been deemed mute evidence of early Mormon treachery and desire for theocratic dominion. Likewise, the Council demanded secrecy “in consequence of treachery and plots of designing men” (p. 49). Thus, as typical of Mormon history, the minutes are a record of conflict about which there are conflicting historiographies. Those who expect to find skeletons in this closet, however, will be disappointed. Though they contain many rants about America’s sins and hurrahs for millennial rule, more often these pages evidence the fear and fractiousness that reigned during Nauvoo’s last two years, giving an otherwise purely administrative record considerable pathos and some comedy. The record reveals Mormon leaders in extremis, detailing their many audacious efforts to
adapt church government to the assassination of Smith, to defend Nauvoo after Illinois’s revocation of its right to self-defense, and to safely lead thousands of believers into a wilderness.

Under these circumstances and its own frustration at the attempt, the Council soon abandoned its efforts to draft a constitution for “the Kingdom of God.” But the attempt makes the minutes probably the best articulation of ideals that underlay Brigham Young’s “theo-democratic” government in the Utah Territory. This could be said of a number of topics. Either because of the length of the deliberations or the freedom that expectation of secrecy gave them, the minutes convey with remarkable clarity, detail, and immediacy the plans and character of men whose names are well known but whose personalities and intentions are typically flattened by institutional histories. As preserved here by clerk William Clayton, the individuality of their opinions and cadence and even the pitch of their voices are perceptible, including the more bellicose among them.

The ferocity of Council members’ speech is more bombastic than strategic and belies the fear underneath that sometimes worked its way to the surface in their frankest conversations. The record shows them alternately fearful that Illinois would do what Missouri had already done to them, frustrated that not all the Latter-day Saints lived up to their name but were fractious and petty, and impatient with their own differences of opinion about what to do. The questions before the Council were big ones and the individual assignments onerous: How to order the church after Smith’s death? How to respond to the revocation of the Nauvoo Charter that left them without legal authority to record deeds, perform marriages, and maintain a police force or militia against increasingly hostile neighbors? What to do about powerful schismatics whose accusations were aggravating these hostilities and destabilizing the church? Should they abandon Nauvoo, and if so, do all need to go? And if so, how to finance the removal? Where should they go—among the Indians, to the deserts beyond the Rockies, to Oregon, to the San Francisco Bay? When should they leave? How could they outfit everyone, especially the poorest among them? What about the British membership and those scattered in the East and South? And, in the face of
all these demands, should resources—time and money—be committed to finishing the much-desired temple, Nauvoo’s raison d’être?

Ultimately, the majority of the Council voted to answer all these questions according to what its members understood of Smith’s intentions, though there was no little debate. Two among them argued for immediate removal from Nauvoo without finishing the temple. Some went so far as to dismiss the authority of the others and said the endeavor to complete the temple was so foolhardy that God would reject it, if ever finished. Eventually, the naysayers departed, taking some believers with them. The majority continued to build the temple and research alternative settlements and political alliances while resisting vigilantes. By March 1845, all had agreed to go it alone in isolated western country. This, too, was based on a shared sense of what Smith had prophesied. Brigham Young summarized by saying, “My feelings are, if we cannot have the privilege of carrying out Joseph’s measures I would rather lie down and have my head cut off at once” (p. 257). The minutes, which consistently evidence the Council’s and especially Brigham Young’s attentiveness to “Joseph’s measures,” may constitute the missing link between eastern and western Mormonism, often treated by historians as two movements.

In January 1846, the Council held its final meetings in the now-completed temple, where Young told them, “When we leave here [my] mind is to go just beyond the Rocky mountains, somewhere on the Mexican claim and the United States will have no business to come there and if they do we will treat them as enemies” (p. 513). Three weeks later the wagons began rolling out of Nauvoo. Having morphed into heads of wagon companies, Council members would not reconvene for another ten months; and when they did, it was in the “Omaha Nation, on the west bank of the Missouri River,” where the entire church was bivouacked as “the Camp of Israel in their journeyings to the West.” Whatever millennial expectations Smith had for his “Kingdom of God and His Laws” or Council of Fifty, this record shows it to have been the practical means by which Mormonism’s complex ecclesiastical structure—its layers of councils and quorums, its functional committees and offices—was compressed and stripped down to administer the
orderly evacuation, transit, and resettlement of thousands of believers. Not included in this volume is an account of the Council’s subsequent mobilization in later years. But what is here suggests the Council was brought to order whenever the church was under particular threat or in need of flight from hostile forces, literal or legal. Or, as Smith put it, the Council was the chief instrument for ensuring “the safety and salvation of the saints by protecting them in their religious rights and worship” (p. 128).

Minutes is a must read for any serious historian of Mormonism’s origins and evolution. Notwithstanding its focus on a single administrative body over a two-year period, when combined with the expert notation provided by its editors, it provides a remarkably expansive view of Mormon history. In addition, one finds in its pages the classic themes of early republic history, not the least of which are religious liberty and the religious dimension of state building. Equally important themes, which have been muted by the academic turn to social history and its focus on individual religious practices, are illumined by this volume of primary sources. These themes include but are not limited to the significance of territory (and frontiers) to religious diversity and ethos, denominational structures and their politically adaptive capacity, and even the contest between models of “free church” and “visible church.” Produced with the high level of editorial professionalism and historiographic detail one has come to expect from the Joseph Smith Papers, Minutes contributes much to the study of nineteenth-century Mormon and American history. And, notwithstanding its being an administrative record, Minutes is a surprisingly good read.

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Reviewed by Seth Perry

When Ann Taves’s last monograph came out, in 2009, the journal *Religion* ran a review of it by Finbarr Curtis entitled “Ann Taves’s *Religious Experience Reconsidered* is a sign of a global apocalypse that will kill us all.” Curtis was worried about the effects of Taves’s unapologetically reductive approach to religion. Taves is well known as a proponent of using cognitive science and related methodologies to explain what really happens when people have religious experiences. This sort of thing, as indicated by Curtis’s title, rubs a lot of people the wrong way.

This book is a companion to that last one. Taves applies her “building block” approach to religious experience to three very different case studies of, as the title indicates, revelatory events: early Mormonism, Alcoholics Anonymous, and A Course in Miracles. Each case study involves, in Taves’s phrase, “a key figure whose unusual experiences and/or abilities led to the emergence of a new spiritual path and to the production of scripture-like texts that were not attributed directly to them” (pp. 3–4). The differences among the case studies have to do with the claims made within each group about the origins of the respective “unusual experiences,” the sort of text produced, and the type of group founded. The events constituting the founding of Mormonism are well known to the readers of the *Mormon Studies Review*. Alcoholics

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Anonymous, developed a hundred years later as a therapeutic fellowship, had as part of its origin story a visionary experience of cofounder Bill Wilson. A Course in Miracles is not really a single movement at all, but “a self-study course and a loose network of students” organized around a text generated in the 1960s by clinical psychologist Helen Schucman, who said that Jesus dictated to her through an inner voice (p. 151).

The revelatory events at the center of each of these three groups took place in dramatically different historical moments and cultural contexts. The “building block” model is designed to facilitate drilling down into each event and subsequent path to find common, comparable constituent parts so that the shared mechanisms of their interactions can be analyzed. This is what Curtis had a problem with: the moment when particularities, “jagged or fragmentary edges[,] are sanded away to make smooth blocks that can fit together” (p. 289). Curtis argued that this standardization, this loss of subtlety in approaching religious experience, gives cover to and participates in the forces of global capitalism that would do this to every aspect of human being. Acknowledging the importance and the nuance of Curtis’s critique, I am interested in a more proximate question about the relationship of Taves’s building blocks to historical context specifically as it concerns her sources as products of discursive exchange.

It cannot be said that Taves ignores the historically specific aspects of the revelatory events and resulting new paths she is comparing. On the contrary, most of this book consists of historical description. These descriptions, which make up part 1, are impeccably researched and describe the specific circumstances of each revelatory event in painstaking detail. Beyond that, Taves is committed to analyzing both the development of each case and the story that believers told about that development: Taves’s attention to the historical contingencies of her sources is an inspiring model for historiography. There is an Escher-like quality to her analysis of the sources on which she builds her own stories that almost obscures those stories. Even historians, who should know better, at some level want to be told a simple narrative, and there are no simple narratives here.
Mormonism is Taves’s signature case study and receives an especially thorough and complex treatment. She presents a detailed and valuable account of the most important sources for the earliest moments of Joseph Smith’s career as a prophet. In the book’s first chapters, she carefully and inventively retells the founding events of Mormonism. Along the way, she compares and overlays each account of the first vision, Smith’s 1823 visit from Moroni, and the discovery of the golden plates (three charts at the end of the book visually compare the various parts of these accounts). Insisting on a co-creative model of the evolution of revelatory claims, her account of early Mormonism is populated with members of Smith’s founding circle who contribute to, rather than merely follow along with, his early claims. The other two case studies are subject to a similarly careful treatment.

The challenge, though, lies in attempting to connect this deep historical analysis to Taves’s real goal. Taves identifies this goal as explanation, which is certainly a goal most historians would reflexively claim to share. As Taves defines it, however, explanation is distinct from history. “Many scholars of religion have been content to analyze the events people consider revelatory without attempting to explain them. Indeed, purely as historians, we have little basis on which to do so.” Here Taves is reasserting the connection between explanation and reduction that troubled Curtis. In this view, historians cannot explain, because they tend to make things more complicated, and explanation must involve reduction. Those of us who approach the past from the perspective of the humanities, Taves observes, are “wary of reductionistic approaches to explanation” (p. 300). For all of the detailed history in this book, Taves’s brand of explanation is not accessible to scholars “purely as historians” because her fundamental interests are not historical. This is because her answers to the question of what actually happened—the things to which the readable words and observable actions with which historians study must be reduced—are things that happen inside brains.

Taves’s explanation for the revelatory events discussed in this book is that people with unusual mental abilities saw things that other people did not see and, having related special abilities of explanation, made
these things compelling for other people in such a way that those people changed their own self-conceptions in order to align with the consequences of the seer’s vision. The first and the last part of this sequence—a visionary’s vision and the changed self-conceptions of followers—are mental phenomena, unobservable to the scholar. Taves presents the histories in this book as answering for the middle part—the processes by which a vision becomes compelling for others. Understood this way, these case studies are “case histories” in a clinical sense—the gathering of information in order to make a diagnosis. The gnawing problem with this approach is that treating historical records in this way amounts to treating artifacts of discourse as evidence for the working of a mind in the same way that a doctor would treat, say, a beating heart as evidence for the working of a body, and discourse is just not as straightforward as a beating heart.

Historians, myself included, will likely have no real ability to evaluate Taves’s diagnoses. What I do know, though, is that another person’s experience, whether of something that happened to a friend yesterday or to a research subject two hundred years ago, is inaccessible to me outside of that person telling someone else about it or acting on it in some observable, recordable way. Such moments of telling or acting—inasmuch as they are utterances, moments of human interaction—are necessarily rhetorical acts. Experience as an object of historical study is fundamentally rhetorical. Taves’s approach, though, has difficulty making space for rhetoric. Her subjects can only report; they cannot claim.

In Taves’s reading, the revelators and the wider founding communities here cannot direct their accounts of experiences—theirs or others’—toward any particular audience for any particular reason. Creating cognitive-science building blocks out of historical sources would seem to require, in the end, this stripping away the particularizing aspects of the human interactions in which those sources were created. In keeping with her attention to history, Taves does acknowledge the role of context in revelatory moments. She writes, for example, that “hypnosis research would suggest that the ability to incorporate a suggestion depends not only on the subject’s abilities, but also on the way the suggestion is
framed and the relationship between those giving and receiving the suggestion” (pp. 308–9). She readily acknowledges that some cultural contexts are more fertile for gifted minds than others. Further, she names as “a central claim of the book” the necessity of discursive exchange for the creation of new spiritual paths: visionaries alone do not make new paths, because “if an emergent group does not accept the presence of the suprahuman entities, no group will form and no path will emerge” (p. 239). Framing and context nevertheless always appear incidental to experience here, not as constitutive parts of it. Even as she obsesses over the changing forms of the founding stories she tells, Taves is interested only in the changing self-understandings of these individuals and groups, never their self-presentations.

Taves’s avoidance of the realities of discourse is directly tied to what I think she sees as the real payoff to her model. Riffing on Jesse Smith’s comment that his nephew Joseph had “eyes to see things that are not, and then . . . the audacity to say they are,” Taves wonders what exactly this might mean. “Does it mean that the things do not exist, that they are imagined or made up, as Jesse Smith believed? Does it mean that there are things that do exist that are not visible to those who do not have the eyes to see them, as Joseph Smith’s followers claimed?” (p. 269). Taves rejects each of these as the poles of the “charlatan-true prophet dichotomy” that Jan Shipps lamented in 1974 (p. 50). Taves’s third way positions Smith, Schucman, and Wilson as “skilled perceivers”: individuals with “unusual mental abilities” that gave them “eyes to see what could be and the audacity to give what [they] envisioned tangible form” (pp. xii, 269). This view, she says, dissolves the question of sincerity by allowing “us to acknowledge that some people may perceive these possibilities through insights or inspirations that seem to come from beyond the self without dismissing them as self-deception or delusion” (p. 269).

In the end, readers will find this answer interesting to the extent that they find the question to which it responds interesting. Reasonable people can disagree on the value and the stakes of questions of religious sincerity. For my part, I think that insisting on such questions occludes many others that are both more interesting and more answerable. I
think that knowing—through their actions and their words—that prophets want to be believed is about as much interiority as is either interesting or discoverable. Laboring to put a name on their feelings about themselves, moreover, seems to me really about naming our feelings about them. It is an insistence that whether we think our subjects are deluded or nefarious or divine matters to our work, to the extent that we must make a choice. By this reading, Taves is giving those of us who take naturalistic approaches an out, an alternative to judging our subjects harshly, but this option is not self-evidently necessary. It is rightfully out of fashion to claim scholarly neutrality, but I am not willing to cede scholarly indifference. I don’t believe that it is possible to know what Joseph Smith thought of himself; what’s more, I don’t care.

All of this said, the scholarly heft that Taves brings to this project makes it important reading. With candor and precision Taves makes important interventions into the most buzzed-about areas of the field. Her use of the concept of presence should be put in dialogue with Robert Orsi’s. Her notion of materialization, elaborated in her discussion of the golden plates, is essential reading for the ever-growing set of scholars interested in material religion and book history. The questions that this book raises—while maybe at risk of killing us all—are exactly the sort of questions that are healthy for the field of religious studies to continue discussing.

Matthew Garrett begins his history of the Mormon Indian Student Placement Program (ISPP) with a narrative about his own family’s participation and what it meant for him to find an old picture of a young Native American student among his family photos. Thus, Garrett starts his history through this personal connection. Like many historical monographs, however, it moves toward a more seemingly objective stance that provides information without much reflection. While there is peppered subtle critique of the LDS Church’s representation of Native Americans in its doctrine, the ISPP is rescued from much reproach. The book does provide a much-needed account of the recruitment/missioning efforts of Mormons in Indian country in the name of education and upward mobility; however, it requires familiarity with LDS Church history, leadership structure, and terminology. A reader unversed in the church’s organizational structure or leadership history might find some difficulty in the concluding chapters.

Garrett’s focus, as stated in the introduction, is to provide a space for those who participated in the program to speak and relate their “agency” and “choice” to enroll in this effort. Of course, the realities of that “choice” are certainly debatable. That is, given the grossly underserved nature of education programs on the reservation, one has to question the validity of using the word choice to describe the circumstances that Native parents found themselves in when faced with
providing their children an education or not. Garrett does account for the lack of opportunity on the reservations in later chapters, but he still does so through the aim of justifying the ISPP and its benevolence.

Throughout the book there is much tension with this approach toward agency and critique. This is where historical objectivity clashes with critical race theory (CRT). CRT work favors open conversations surrounding injustice over a false reliance on scholarly objectivity. Operating from the given that no scholar can ever be objective, CRT prioritizes a need to address an inequity over assuming a balanced debate on clearly unsettling topics influenced by race. Readers navigate the church’s doctrinal approach toward Native Americans laden in white supremacy. Garrett writes, in raw honesty, about the church’s early stance that Native Americans are “wicked and loathsome” and White Mormons are “white and delightsome,” but he does so in such matter-of-fact tone that it leaves the readers, not the author, with the responsibility of critiquing these deeply problematic representations. Though many members of the LDS Church are aware of this appalling racial binary within church history, there remains a distant disregard to the severity of those statements by a membership who would rather move past, as opposed to confronting, its racism. I would have appreciated a more direct critical engagement with the benevolent racism embedded in this historical moment. The past is not just some valueless topic to be reported on; history scholars need to account for the atrocities of the past more directly and guide their readership toward a more open critique of these moments. Leaving some of these painfully dismissive quotations floating in the narrative without critique can read as objectivity or apathy on the part of the author. The reader is left to wonder if the author chose to sprinkle them in for color or entertainment. To include these quotations without a willingness to dissect them only objectifies this community further, for it relegates the Native community to a group worthy of dismissal both then and even now.

Garrett attempts to subtly address the issues, but once more he presents bigoted notions of Native inferiority through a tone of historical objectivity that I found disturbing. For instance, noting the church’s
stance that Native Americans “might be redeemed from barbarism” accurately portrays the approach members had to this community. Still, one cannot simply drop these positions in without unpacking how deeply repulsive they are or how they could account for present-day judgements on communities of color. The audience is assumed to be already tuned in to the problems of Mormon evolutionary representations of race. Otherwise, why would they pick up a book on the history of the ISPP? Still, the book might also be used in the classroom and read by students who may not immediately present a critical eye toward this past. In that regard, *Making Lamanites* becomes a difficult read, for it wavers between appropriate critical examination of benevolent racism embedded in the ISPP and salvaging the altruism of the program and its creators.

There are moments where Garrett’s key observations relate the difficulties of writing on such a divisive topic. Chapter 2, “Reimagining Israel,” explores the history of a “Lamanite” imaginary in the LDS Church and how Native Americans went from partners in salvation to wards of altruistic members with the moral authority to look after their native brethren. The shift toward salvation through assimilation was influenced by famed Carlisle Boarding School founder Richard H. Pratt’s dictate to “kill the Indian, and save the man.” The ISPP effectively modeled this approach, albeit with a blunter blade. This violence, however, is downplayed in the book’s narrative. Seen as an alternative to the violence enacted in the boarding schools, the ISPP fostered a kinder, gentler program of annihilation. For Garrett, moving the Indian toward Mormonism and Western individualism or bootstrap mentality was written almost as a necessary emancipatory act. Indeed, Garrett’s perhaps unintended reading of assimilation as an inevitable project can be gleaned in the way that the Red Power movement is discussed. The critique by Red Power activists to this assimilation project is depicted as disconnected from the needs of the community. In this setup, assimilation, or the annihilation of a Native way of life, is treated as a non-problematic happenstance of natural progress.

Garrett describes in great detail the role that Spencer W. Kimball played in advocating for the ISPP and the role of the church to “help”
nurture the Indian into Western ideals of “civilized” man. Here Kimball was caught between a US government/Bureau of Indian Affairs program that neglected education on the reservations and church leaders who were far from enthusiastic about continuing this effort. Chapter 7 sets up the role of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and other Red Power advocates of the 1960s and ’70s who questioned the role of ISPP as “assimilationist propaganda.” Here we see the divisions and inner conflicts of authenticity between Red Power advocates and ISPP graduates who fiercely defended the role of ISPP in their educational training. This “individualized uplift” message controlled by the LDS Church sowed divisive politics between Indian communities. For instance, Garret quotes some ISPP recipients who vocalized being better off, or more “civilized,” than other Indians in the evolutionary trek toward intellectual and spiritual salvation. Once Garrett establishes intra-Indian tensions between Red Power advocates and ISPP graduates, chapter 8 provides an in-depth exploration of church authorities and their position on “ethnic programs” that served both Native American and other “Lamanite” communities worldwide. Here we see how the church systematically shut down special ethnic programs and standardized instruction worldwide to sidestep the very peculiarities that ethnic Mormons were creating. Rather than confront the claims of Red Power activists who critiqued Mormon Indian cultural representations, the church would simply wash its hands of difference and attempt to generalize membership into one single identity.

Though the book moves carefully between salvific recollections of the ISPP and critique of the benevolent racism that undergirds it, the conclusion still promotes a slightly celebratory tone that once more presents the benefits of the program. One of the book’s stronger points is the detail by which it explores the rise, growth, and decline of the ISPP. Scholars of LDS Church history will enjoy the book’s look at this moment in time. Students, however, will be left without certainty of how to read the ISPP’s role in history. That is, the book adequately presents the deeply complex issues of both benefits and critique of the program. Still, I felt that contemporary students of history and religious
studies need to explore this topic with more direct evaluation of racism and white supremacy than is presently included in an otherwise tacit critique blended with benevolent admiration. In addition, though it was not his focus, I found Garrett lacked a basic knowledge about the “Lamanite” communities beyond the United States and the activities of the church in the making of these other Lamanites. His claims that nonwhite members from Central and South America were nonexistent dismisses entirely the importance of the Third Convention in Mexico in 1936 and how these Mexican “Lamanite” Saints broke away from the LDS Church because they felt otherwise marginalized and stunted. The fact that “Lamanite” Saints in Mexico were fighting with the church for their own autonomy a few decades before the ISPP program is, I feel, instrumental to understanding the “making of Lamanites” across time and space.

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*Reviewed by Elise Boxer*

*Real Native Genius: How an Ex-Slave and a White Mormon Became Famous Indians* adds to the growing body of literature that probes the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and religion in the study of Mormonism. Author Angela Hudson considers how Mormons constructed ideas of “Indianness” and how the reinforcement or subversion of those ideas “influenced nearly every aspect of antebellum culture, often in surprising ways” (p. 3). She uses the lives of “professional Indians” Warner McCary and his wife, Lucy Stanton, as a lens to explore not just how they, as non-Native Americans, accessed indigeneity, but how they constructed and shaped nineteenth-century antebellum notions of Indianness. While Hudson has “tried not to get bogged down in questions of authenticity that emphasize the genuine or spurious nature of individual claims to indigeneity” regarding McCary and Stanton’s claims of Indianness, these important questions within the framework of American Indian studies would have better informed her understanding of “playing Indian.” Hudson fails to problematize how non-Native claims of indigeneity can also be seen as an expression of white privilege and whiteness (pp. 9–10).

The process by which McCary and Stanton become and play Indian is also an expression of how they accessed whiteness. Their adoption of Indian identity was about power, the power to create and define the racialized “other.” McCary and Stanton contributed to the construction
of indigenous identity by playing Indian before audiences. Hudson uses these two performers to complicate how Indianness “was understood and performed by Native and non-Native people during a period of rapid social and economic transformation” (p. 10). Yet, instead of extending her analysis about “playing” Indian, she focuses on the notion of “passing”—that is, passing off as Indian—because it “is almost always seen as indicative of high-stakes, high-risk behavior in which discovery could lead to ostracism, imprisonment, or death” (p. 11). Because of this focus, Hudson does not fully explore the problematic ways in which McCary and Stanton constructed a racialized identity that reinforced widely held stereotypes of American Indian peoples. She also does little to demonstrate how McCary and Stanton’s experiences as “Indians” did not accurately reflect the lived experience of American Indians in the nineteenth century.

Hudson begins her book by introducing the reader to the bustling port city of Natchez, Mississippi, in 1810. A diverse group of people called Natchez home, including American Indians. Natchez bordered the western boundary of Choctaw territory and was seen by migrants as a place of opportunity. Given the rich Choctaw history in Natchez, Hudson examines various possibilities that might account for McCary’s claimed Choctaw heritage, all of which do little to clarify the origins of “Okah Tubbee,” the Choctaw name McCary adopted. In his autobiography, McCary focused on his father’s origin rather than his mother’s because her status determined whether he was free or enslaved. He referred to his mother as “the slave woman . . . [or] his ‘unnatural mother’” (p. 23). By denying his mother, McCary was denying his own upbringing as an enslaved, black child, enabling him to re-create his own history. His childhood recollections reflected popular Indian captivity narratives during this time period but still helped cement his claims to Choctaw heritage—that is, a Choctaw child stolen and sold into slavery. McCary’s enslaved status could thus be explained away and provide a way in which he could escape slavery by becoming Choctaw. While the question of Okah Tubbee’s Choctaw roots can never been fully and satisfactorily resolved, Hudson observes that McCary’s
complex origins reflect “the role of slavery in the colonization of the American South, intertwining the lives and fates of Native, European, and African-descended people” (p. 22). One major weakness of Hudson’s approach is the neglect to fully consider the enslavement of American Indian peoples and the ways that McCary’s biracial identity complicates notions of indigeneity. McCary’s preference for his Choctaw identity over being black could be useful in exploring internalized colonization and complexities of being mixed-blood in Native communities. Hudson acknowledges the fluidity of Indian identity but does not fully address how being enslaved influenced the way McCary would lay claim to indigeneity.

William McCary’s professed Indian heritage would eventually lead him to marry Lucy Stanton and convert to Mormonism. Daniel Stanton, Lucy’s father, converted to the faith in 1830, shortly after Mormon missionaries arrived in Ohio. His five daughters, including Lucy, eventually converted and became active within the Mormon religious movement. Unlike other religious movements, Mormonism welcomed everyone, including people of color, to not just convert but to develop and express their faith via “exuberant and even ecstatic exclamations of feeling, speaking in tongues, and trancelike states of possession” (p. 48). Stanton distinguished herself from other converts by “getting the power’ during prayer meetings . . . [by] practicing spontaneous tongue-speaking and other forms of enthusiastic worship” (p. 49). It was not clear whether she had any meaningful interactions with Native peoples or simply borrowed popular culture representations of American Indian peoples that were simultaneously reinforced by Mormon religious doctrine.

Stanton’s desire to claim Indianness was very similar to McCary’s claims of Choctaw identity. She questioned her father’s identity and believed that both her Anglo-American parents were actually of Mohawk and Delaware heritage. Stanton played Indian when she spoke “Injun” during her spiritual expressions of faith (p. 49). Stanton’s preoccupation with American Indians echoed Mormon religious beliefs that Lamanites, or American Indians, must be saved through conversion to Mormonism. Mormons “accorded them [American Indians] special
status within their religion and hung their hopes on Indian millenarianism, even as they participated in the displacement of these peoples from their homelands” (p. 49).

Hudson would have done well to interrogate how Mormons, including Stanton, were part of a larger process of American Indian removal and dispossession. Instead, she is concerned with how Stanton became “Indian.” For example, Stanton’s spiritual gift of healing, like her ability to speak “Injun,” could be explained by her claims of Indianess and shown to fit with her belief that Lamanites must be saved. Early Mormons believed that the Book of Mormon was a history of American Indian peoples whose salvation was central to God’s plan. Stanton’s marriage to McCary, a professed Indian, fulfilled not just her own personal mission of Lamanite salvation but also Mormon religious rhetoric that called upon adherents to save “‘fallen’ Lamanites” (p. 67). The marriage also gave her access to power in the Mormon church that grew increasingly restrictive toward women.

While Hudson attempts to engage American Indian history, her argument could have benefited from attention to settler colonialism theory. Patrick Wolfe’s study “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” is helpful here inasmuch as it provides a necessary framework for interrogating indigenous identity and removal, or what he terms “the logic of elimination.” Wolfe argues that the “restrictive racial classification of Indians straightforwardly furthered the logic of elimination. . . . [Race] is made in the targeting.” McCary and Stanton’s passing as Indians is problematic not just because it can be seen as erasing the lived experiences of American Indian peoples in the nineteenth century, but also because it contributes to a very limited notion of Indianness as a performance that must be palatable for public consumption.

“Indianness mattered,” Hudson’s book concludes, “but it mattered (and still matters) to different people in different, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory ways, depending on the contexts in which it

is expressed and received.” In its exploration of how Indianness mattered in the nineteenth century to two people who crossed religious and racial boundaries, *Real Native Genius* illuminates how Mormons viewed and constructed notions of antebellum Indianness. In broader terms, the book also contributes to the growing body of Mormon studies informed by serious attention to intersecting issues of race, gender, sexuality, and religion.

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Reviewed by Emily Anderson
1960s. While earlier studies of Mormonism in Japan have tended to focus on North American missionaries and church leaders, Takagi’s study is welcome and groundbreaking in its extensive use of Japanese-language primary and secondary sources, meticulous contextualization, attention to the complexities of linguistic and cultural translation, and perceptive accounts of native Japanese church members.

Takagi places great emphasis on situating Mormon activities within the broader social, economic, and political changes ongoing in Japan and offers substantive overviews of background information for readers unfamiliar with Japanese history and culture. At the same time, however, he assumes an insider audience familiar with the intricacies of Mormon history, controversies, and church ritual and structure, meaning that readers eager to learn how the Mormon church was different from other American-influenced Protestant denominations in Japan, or just not familiar with these details, may struggle. Ultimately, this study focuses on documenting the process of evangelization and presents an institutional history of how the mission was organized, structured, and maintained through official relationships and networks.

Despite its many impressive contributions that dramatically raise the bar for future research, the work falls short of offering a framework and focus that would help situate the Mormon mission within the broader context of religion in Japan and, more specifically, of Protestant evangelism and the establishment of Protestant Christianity in twentieth-century Japan. By the time the first Mormon missionaries arrived in Japan, other mainline Protestant missions—and a handful of less prominent ones—were well established and most Japanese congregations were led by Japanese ministers eager to assert their independence from foreign missions. The broader contextualization that Takagi provides throughout the study may situate the Mormon mission’s establishment and eventual growth within Japanese society in general and alongside other Japanese religious institutions to a certain degree, but it does not sufficiently address how the reputation and influence of more prominent Christian denominations and their leaders may have
helped to shape the reception (or lack) of LDS missionaries, especially in pre–World War II Japan.

In his introduction, Takagi establishes the historical context for the dual focuses of his study: Mormonism and Japan. One challenge of a study such as this is that both the LDS Church and Japan were undergoing rapid and significant changes at the moment of their initial encounter. As such, Takagi attempts to place each in its respective historical trajectory before approaching the encounter itself. The introduction also presents the reader with the main concerns of the study. He asserts, “By trying to understand the economic, intellectual, legal, political, religious, and social contexts in which Mormon missionary work took place, this book attempts to present a more holistic interpretation of the Mormon experience than would be possible with an approach based solely on the Mormon side of the story” (p. 11). This acknowledgment that the greater social and cultural context must be taken into account when examining the establishment and subsequent history of the mission is crucial. At the same time, the corollary question—what exactly it means to be a Japanese Mormon—perhaps becomes diluted in this effort.

The lingering question of what makes somebody a Japanese Mormon emerges almost immediately and is never resolved. In chapter 2, Takagi focuses on the stories of who he considers to be the first two Japanese Mormons, Tomizo Katsunuma and Tokuijro Sato, both of whom were immigrants to the US and were converted there instead of in Japan. Describing them as path breakers, he recounts their early experiences as immigrants and their general history as longtime residents in Hawaii. While both men present interesting case studies and certainly represent important aspects of Japanese immigrant history, their relative inactivity after their initial conversion begs the question: What is Mormon about them? And how do their stories help deepen our understanding of the LDS Church’s relationship with Japan? Also, since both lived out their adult lives outside Japan, does it make sense to call them Japanese Mormons?
The actual establishment of a Japanese Mormon mission occurred in 1901 with the arrival of the first missionaries. Over the following six chapters, Takagi traces the ebbs and flows of the first effort to establish a Mormon mission in Japan. In each chapter, he is careful to establish the broader context in Japan, from the political and social upheaval transforming Japan into a modern empire to shifts in perceptions about religious belief and practice. He also examines the Japanese reception of the first missionaries with a survey of press and media coverage of the missionaries’ arrival in both national and regional news sources, as well as some early publications by scholars who, while not Mormon, nonetheless presented the church in a favorable light. He also recounts the missionaries’ early efforts, from completing a full Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon and publishing other materials to early conversions and baptisms. Despite these efforts, the first phase of the Japan Mission ended in 1924, when the church decided to call all missionaries home. The conventional explanation for the abrupt departure of the missionaries is that the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act in the US led to sufficient hostility against Americans in Japan that maintaining the mission became impractical. However, Takagi argues that a consistent shortage of missionaries, the difficulty of language acquisition, and other factors contributed to ineffective outreach, which was the real reason for the mission’s closure.

Takagi’s assessment of the shuttering of the formal mission in 1924 raises several issues that could have been pursued much further. In his dismissal of the conventional view that anti-American hostility made missionary work no longer feasible, he points out that other American missionaries in Japan—while facing temporary resistance and animosity—continued their work as before, and most maintained robust missions until the onset of war made it necessary for them to leave. Not only does this cast doubt on the claim that the Mormon mission’s departure was inevitable, but it also raises the question of why it struggled so much when other missions were able to maintain their work there.

While Takagi also discusses early baptisms and conversions, there is little on the day-to-day operations of congregations, how membership
was determined and participation was assessed, the degree to which
Japanese converts were assigned responsibilities and granted authority,
and various other factors that help shed light on the reach and impact
of the mission. Knowing that missionaries, with the help of bilingual
Japanese, were able to publish and distribute pamphlets and tracts, and
even the Book of Mormon, provides only a partial view of the mission's
activities if we do not have a sense of who read these things, how the
messages were received, what discussions were like, what circumstances
led to church attendance and even eventual baptism, and other markers
of active engagement. Why, ultimately, did Japanese converts in this
eyear lean period find the missionaries’ message attractive and invit-
ing? What difference did it make in the way they lived? How did they
integrate this message into their lives, or their lives into the church?

One recurring issue is that in Takagi’s efforts to offer detailed
contextualization of the different moments of significance in Japan
for the Mormon mission, he has made choices in what to focus on or
what sources to rely on that can be problematic. The occasional dis-
connect between context and LDS activity not only adds length to an
already-substantial study but also has the effect of muddying the link-
ages Takagi is attempting to establish. One possible cause for this may
be the sources he has relied on in guiding his overviews of Japanese
history. They are a mix of older English-language studies, Japanese-lan-
guage studies written for the general public, and many out-of-print
or difficult-to-access works. His use of unconventional or uncommon
sources is not just a matter of personal choice, particularly when it
comes to a study like this in which the assumption is that the typical
reader will not know about Japan at all. This, after all, is why he provides
these contextual interludes. But his choice of sources is occasionally
puzzling, and the focus of these interludes does not always offer the
reader unfamiliar with Japan the most helpful context.

As Takagi makes clear, the brief existence of the first mission and
the sporadic contact between Japanese converts and the church in Utah
have made answering many questions challenging. The second phase,
beginning with the Allied occupation of Japan following the end of
World War II, is the focus of the second half of this study. It was also much more promising. This second effort was spearheaded by service-men who were stationed as part of the occupation. Critical among them were Americans of Japanese ancestry, many of whom were from Hawaii, who were interpreters and translators with the US military. Discovering Japanese members who had retained their faith in the intervening years since 1924, these servicemen—especially Army chaplain Warren Richard Nelson—worked informally as missionaries. When the LDS Church received permission from General MacArthur’s office to send a representative missionary, a new Japan Mission was established, with tenuous but existing ties to its pre–World War II predecessor.

With the end of the occupation in 1952, Japan entered a new era, and the Japan Mission did as well. Starting with a rigorous effort to purchase properties for member use, the postwar mission also enjoyed a labor force unimaginable to any of the few missionaries who had worked in the first phase. This period saw other critical developments, such as the publication of not only a new translation of the Book of Mormon but also, for the first time, translations of the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price. The mission expanded significantly. The introduction of the new method of outreach that emphasized personal connection over doctrinal debate, according to Takagi, also contributed to a significant increase in conversions and baptisms. The study concludes with the reorganization of the mission into two missions in recognition of its growth into an unwieldy size, a promising and hopeful moment in the mission’s history.

In the final main chapter (the book also contains numerous so-called annexes with additional information), Takagi addresses what he calls demand-side reasons for the promising growth of the LDS Church in the immediate postwar years: the shift of the population from rural to urban areas and a sense of not necessarily outright religious freedom but freedom from “Edo Buddhism” that allowed people to consider other religious affiliations. He makes a brief reference to the parallel surge in popularity of “new religions,” particularly Soka Gakkai, and acknowledges that the LDS Church was a small player by
comparison. Nonetheless, he attributes the mission’s relative successes to similar factors.

An excellent case can be made for ending the study at this particular point, but there are still important questions that remain unanswered. Again, what did it mean—in this period, after Japan had been soundly defeated in World War II and when its baby-boomer generation was just coming of age—to be a Japanese Mormon? Were these conversions a reflection of the age of the majority of the population—that is, a youthful moment that would be followed by a return to more conventional and conservative life choices—or were these permanent changes? Did these changes persist into the booming 1980s and the endless recession that has continued since the 1990s? How does the mission compare with long-term trends among the new religions Takagi mentions? How about with Protestant Christianity?

The more ambitious and comprehensive a study of any kind, however, the more questions there are to ask. Takagi is to be commended for embracing the vital undertaking of telling a story about Japanese Mormonism that captures the richness and complexity of its local context. Future historians of Japanese Mormonism are lucky that Takagi has done so much heavy lifting in bringing together a trove of material that could serve as the foundation for additional inquiry. With *The Trek East*, Takagi has provided a valuable starting point that will benefit anyone with an interest in LDS missions in general or the Japan Mission in particular.

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*Reviewed by Neil J. Young*

*depending on how one feels about the 2016 election, reading a book titled* Why Liberals Win (Even When They Lose Elections) *might seem like either a deluded endeavor or much-needed balm. In his latest work, Stephen Prothero argues that liberals stand on the victorious side of history, if not always the ballot box, because they have won every culture war battle since the nation’s founding. Liberals win, Prothero contends, because conservatives launch culture wars to preserve a way of life that has already begun to change, an ill-fated effort that cannot turn back the progressive forces of history that churn ever forward toward fuller inclusion. That process not only grants victories to liberals but also mainstreams liberalism as the embattled liberal causes of one era become the accepted “American values” of the next.

Prothero, the author of several acclaimed books on American religious history, explains in his introduction that he came to this project because of the uproar over the so-called Ground Zero Mosque, the Islamic community center opened in lower Manhattan in 2011. Rather than seeing the contemporary crisis as shaped by the recent events of 9/11 and the rise of American anti-Islamism, Prothero looks to the earliest battles “over moral and religious questions” (p. 2) in the nation’s history to understand how one group of Americans have repeatedly denied other groups full participation in American public life and sought to impose their own values and beliefs on the country. “I would
need,” Prothero explains, “to explore the culture wars before ‘the culture wars’” (p. 2).

In historicizing America’s culture wars, Prothero’s book joins a small group of esteemed recent works, including Andrew Hartman’s important A War for the Soul of America.¹ While Prothero notes that Daniel K. Williams’s history of the religious right traces the culture wars back to the 1920s, the bulk of this scholarship, however, has repeatedly told a story that begins in the 1960s. Disrupting the historical narrative of America’s culture wars as a post-1960s phenomenon is the book’s most significant contribution.² Prothero also challenges another dominant trope of the literature, one established by James Davison Hunter’s landmark 1991 book, Culture Wars, and reinforced by Patrick Buchanan’s barn-burner speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention (both cited by Prothero), namely, that the nation’s culture wars represented a series of skirmishes between religious conservatives and secular progressives.³ Prothero’s longer view of the culture wars—he begins his account with the election of 1800—dismantles these governing frameworks and upends guiding assumptions. The book’s expansive time line means for Prothero that most of America’s culture wars played out between religious Americans and other religious Americans. These were fights for the soul of America indeed, but they were waged by religious people who could not allow minority religious beliefs and practices to take root in a Protestant nation. Before the 1960s, Prothero argues, America’s culture wars erupted over the challenges of pluralism, not the struggle between religion and secularism.

Prothero’s reconceptualization of the culture wars is inventive, but does it work? Unfortunately, the book’s structure and focus suggest not. Rather than a long history that examines how America’s culture wars

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arose and developed since the Early Republic, Why Liberals Win presents five carefully selected case studies that Prothero argues prove his debatable thesis. The first episode treats the election of 1800 that saw the Federalists and their Congregationalist minister backers square off against Jeffersonians and “infidels,” while the other four include the anti-Catholic crusades of the nineteenth century, the anti-Mormon era that followed, prohibition in the 1920s and 1930s, and, finally, the infamous culture wars that have taken place since the 1970s.

Prothero acknowledges that his approach is “episodic rather than exhaustive” (p. 8), but the selections highlight more brightly what is missing than they illuminate his thesis. The Civil War, the Scopes “Monkey” Trial, the New Deal, both world wars, and the civil rights movement, to name just a few battles that, at least in one case literally, tore the nation apart, are relegated to the sidelines or not mentioned at all. In their absence, the episodes under examination strain to support the argument drawn from them.

They also indicate the risk of projecting contemporary terms or usages onto the past. This becomes especially clear in the case of the book’s two most important terms, liberal and conservative. For Prothero, conservatives are the white (male) Protestant establishment, atavistic belligerents who defend their cultural and political dominance against each wave of demographic change in the nation. In this setup, nineteenth-century Catholics and Mormons thus become “liberals” because they represent the forces of change that spur the nation to more deeply embrace its democratic values, despite the fact that most Catholics and Mormons in the 1800s would hardly have identified as liberals. Prothero is right that Catholics, Mormons, and other persecuted minorities called upon the nation’s liberal principles, especially those expressed in the Constitution, to stake their claims to full citizenship and participation in American public life, but their causes were scarcely championed by liberals. With longer views of both anti-Catholicism and anti-Mormonism that extend beyond the discrete events of Prothero’s account, the scenario becomes even more complicated. In the name of progressivism, certain white Protestants backed all sorts of causes in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from public health initiatives to religious freedom arguments, which were inspired by latent if not outright hostility to Catholics and Mormons.

The book’s chapter on the “Mormon question” may be most useful to explore, not only because it will likely be of greatest interest to readers of this journal but also because Prothero admits that of the five episodes under examination, “this one was the closest to a draw” (p. 135). In Prothero’s telling, the nation really wrestled with two Mormon questions: polygamy and theocracy. Anti-Mormons branded polygamy as immoral and evil, an anti-Christian perversion that had to be driven out of the nation. But Mormonism’s theocracy also threatened the American system because absolute loyalty to Joseph Smith or Brigham Young undermined individual conscience—the basis of a functioning democracy—and fostered tyranny and political corruption. No less than the fate of both Christian civilization and the American republic were at stake, Mormonism’s critics loudly and violently contended, and Prothero correctly shows how nineteenth-century anti-Mormonism drew directly from the deep well of anti-Catholic and anti-Muslim arguments used in earlier moments.

None of this history will be new for readers here. Yet it is to Prothero’s credit how he renders so many elements of early Mormonism so efficiently and engagingly. (Indeed, this is true of all the book; it is highly readable and often engrossing.) But, as in other chapters, the weight of examples does not amount to a persuasive argument.

Facing persecution and violence, Mormons defended polygamy with theological, sociological, and Constitutional arguments. In these efforts, “liberal defenders of religious liberty largely abandoned them” (p. 129), Prothero acknowledges, an admission that would seem to undermine the book’s central argument while also suggesting that LDS polygamy looks liberal only when viewed from a contemporary political context that upholds sexual freedom as a cornerstone of liberalism. The resolution of the “Mormon question,” however, presents the most damaging challenge to Prothero’s thesis. Rather than winning the battle over polygamy, the LDS Church “finally bowed to government pressure”
and “conformed to the norm of monogamy” (pp. 135, 136). Prothero is right that the ban on polygamy paved the way for American acceptance of Mormons, although, as J. B. Haws has expertly demonstrated, this process continued late into the twentieth century with nearly as many setbacks as forward steps.4 But the inclusion of Mormons into the American mainstream after the end of polygamy signaled the accommodation of Mormonism to traditional American values of sexual propriety and church-state separation, not a liberal culture war victory that marked the transition to a new norm of tolerating sexual diversity. That Mormons became some of the most steadfast defenders of sexual conservatism in the twentieth century, including spearheading critical political efforts against the equal rights amendment, abortion, and same-sex marriage, complicates both how we understand the polygamy battle as a “culture war” and how Mormons figure in its longer history.5

In his history of theological battles within the Southern Baptist Convention, Barry Hankins observes that “nuance . . . is the first casualty of culture war.”6 This may be the case for culture war’s combatants, but it cannot be true of its chroniclers. In Why Liberals Win, Stephen Prothero reports that he “discovered a ‘culture wars cycle’ that propels the nation from one cultural conflict to the next” (p. 18). Locating historical patterns remains a fundamental task for scholars of the past, but history does not move in cycles, nor is it a propulsive story of secured progress, as Prothero concludes. Instead, as history shows us over and over again, everything is contingent; nothing is certain. Our job as historians is to wade into that messy past, armed with questions of causality, context, and change over time. At the same time, our obligation as citizens, it now seems increasingly clear, is to notice how the world constantly shifts under our feet and to understand not who ultimately

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wins but instead how different peoples are made vulnerable by each new adjustment.

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*Reviewed by Brent M. Rogers*

In two hefty and wide-ranging volumes that represent the culmination of some sixty years of dedicated and careful labor, William P. MacKinnon delivers the most thorough investigation into the complex history of the Utah War to date. Readers will have to wade through more than eleven hundred pages of documents and editorial commentary—as well as more than fifty pages of bibliographic data—to realize the benefits of MacKinnon’s sleuthing, but anyone who takes the time to carefully sort through the unexpected turns and intrigue of MacKinnon’s presentation will ultimately be rewarded with a deeper
understanding of a significant federal-territorial conflict that arose in a tumultuous time in the nation's history.

In 1850 Congress created Utah Territory out of land it acquired from Mexico in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, a place already peopled by American Indians and Mormons. But westward expansion and the creation of new territories brought still greater challenges to a nation teetering out of balance on the slavery issue. *At Sword’s Point* highlights the role and impact of Utah within these national and even international contexts. Over the seven years following the Compromise of 1850, MacKinnon states, “corrosive incidents, deteriorating relations, and grossly differing philosophies of governance—one secular, conventional, and republican while the other was authoritarian, millennial, and theocratic”—created enough discord between Utah Territory and the federal government that it led to an armed confrontation in the late summer of 1857. Two months into his presidency, James Buchanan, without Congressional consent, ordered twenty-five hundred US Army troops to Utah to install a new governor to replace Mormon leader Brigham Young (10:44). Religion played a significant role to be sure, but in antebellum America Mormons were not the only territorial population anxious to trade their territorial status for statehood so they were no longer subservient to the federal government’s authority. Utah Territory certainly had its unique issues among other western territories; the territorial population’s desire for self-government was not one of them. Nevertheless, as MacKinnon points out, “when Buchanan made his initial decisions about Utah in the spring of 1857, he faced a serious problem of territorial control and gubernatorial insubordination. It was a situation fully warranting Buchanan’s decision to replace Brigham Young, but not yet one constituting rebellion” (11:603). In the end, President Buchanan changed “the government in Utah and was intervening there with an unprecedented exercise of force” (10:137). *At Sword’s Point* is composed of a large selection of sometimes eclectic documents that tell this “story of what the Utah War was, how it came about, how the two sides prosecuted the war, and its results” (10:35).
MacKinnon’s study of the Utah War offers many contributions. First and foremost, he solidly presents in a readable form hundreds of previously unpublished, inaccessible, and largely unknown sources. These fantastic and fascinating documents unveil, among other topics and matters, the workings of the Buchanan administration and the global implications of the Utah conflict, while also providing a multitude of perspectives, including women’s voices. In surrounding the primary sources with editorial commentary, *At Sword’s Point* makes a historiographical contribution in bringing the Utah War out of a solely Mormon history context and placing it alongside contemporary western, national, and international issues and events. Second, MacKinnon masterfully untangles many of the rumors and myths about the Utah War. In particular, these books bust the myth that this was a bloodless confrontation. Part 1 in particular contains documents and commentary that highlight the violence in Utah Territory and how it differed from brutality elsewhere in the West (10:298–325). MacKinnon also clearly explains how Brigham Young first heard of the coming of the army, a tale shrouded in Mormon lore that indicates the news interrupted a peaceful July 24th Pioneer Day celebration (10:223–29).

However, MacKinnon does not address all of the rumors and myths of the Utah War. For instance, a variety of documents wildly speculate about the strength of a Mormon-Indian military alliance, but the commentary and documents are largely silent on the actual martial relationship of Mormons and American Indians during the Utah War. There is a general lack of nuance in the presentation of the Mormon-Indian relationship, especially in the first volume. “In all of this material,” MacKinnon editorializes when referring to a collection of Mormon communications, “Young signaled not only his unwillingness to restrain the territory’s tribes, but that he stood ready to unleash than [them] to bring about a bloody halt to transcontinental emigration” (10:322). MacKinnon here suggests that Brigham Young had some kind of immense power to control the actions of Great Basin Native peoples. He did not. Neither volume provides sources from the Native perspective, though some do exist, even if many of those sources are filtered through white
scribes. Nevertheless, perhaps acknowledging the lack of Native agency in the study, *At Sword’s Point* does ultimately make an important call for others “to consider the actions of the region’s American Indians. For their own advantage, some of the tribes were prone to play ‘Americats’ against Mormons and vice versa. Other bands simply tried to protect their endangered rights, cultures, and traditional hunting territories by even-handedly distancing themselves from the blandishments of both sides. These differing behaviors by the members of more than a dozen tribes impacted by the Utah War were interpreted in multiple ways by Anglos lacking even a rudimentary grasp of tribal languages and cultures involved” (11:158). Indeed, understanding Native realities in the Utah War would prove to be a fruitful research topic for an enterprising scholar in the future.

These two volumes also include a variety of new insights on the spread and impact of the conflict. One interesting and little-known aspect of the Utah War is the army’s Joseph C. Ives expedition to determine if the Colorado River could be navigated upstream as an invasion route into southern Utah (11:113–41). The example of this military reconnaissance demonstrates that the Utah War created a multitude of opportunities for the federal government to build its general knowledge of the West. MacKinnon includes a variety of these heretofore neglected military aspects of the Utah War, including the daring and arduous trip of Captain Randolph Marcy to New Mexico to purchase needed supplies and animals for survival and mobility. One of Marcy’s letters sheds light on an important aspect of the conflict: rhetoric versus reality. Marcy perhaps said it best when he wrote to his brother, “I do not believe the Mormons dare attack us, and, if they do, I believe we can whip them. . . . The Mormons boast a great deal of what they intend to do, but they do not execute their boasts” (11:64). So much of the history of the Utah War is informed by rhetoric, especially that of Brigham Young. The Mormon leader and territorial governor and superintendent of Indian affairs is often painted as an all-encompassing mastermind who whipped his followers into a frenzy with his speeches and controlled every aspect of Utah Territory. That idea is hyperbolic.
Documents presented throughout these two books show the nuance, unevenness, and complexities of Brigham Young, who was, at more times than one might suspect, ineffective and unaware (see, for example, 10:350 and 11:509).

The venerated Thomas L. Kane, who served an important role as unofficial mediator between Washington and Utah, is a major figure in both volumes. Other historians have devoted many words to Kane in narrative form, but the portrayal of Kane here through documents provides an important reminder of the power of primary sources. Kane’s letters, notes, and memoranda show some of his true feelings about the conflict and James Buchanan: “As a private individual I consider Mr. Buchanan an honorable good citizen, but in his public capacity his conduct has proved him both injudicious and hasty. . . . His action respecting the affairs of Utah shows that he can act in blind conformity to the prejudices of others” (11:222). In addition, MacKinnon introduces Sam Houston into this history. The Texas Senator helped “Mormonism on the floor of the U.S. Senate” (11:36). This reviewer wished more congressional voices were included in these two volumes but understands the limitations of the bound book for such a complex history.

The reaction to President Buchanan’s “Proclamation tendering general amnesty to the people of Utah for all seditions and treasons of the past” is also fascinating as revealed in the documents and commentary as rendered by MacKinnon (11:413). Soldiers and other Americans had varied opinions on the president’s pardon; one of the more intriguing responses came from Elizabeth Church Craig from Athens, Georgia. Craig wrote to the president and chastised him for not taking a harsher stance toward the Mormons and Brigham Young in particular. “If I were the Government,” Craig proclaimed, “Brigham should pay the penalty of traitor before I would listen to terms” (11:417). Still others expressed gratitude “that Congress had not allowed Buchanan to ‘bayonet ‘them’ Mormons” (11:418). In the end, MacKinnon shows that diplomacy won the day. From new territorial governor Alfred Cumming’s conciliatory speech to the Mormons upon his arrival in Salt Lake City to the June 1858 arrival of the president’s peace commissioners, the federal
government accomplished its mission of restoring federal authority to the territory and ensuring Mormon acceptance of the pardon (11:522–34). By the time the army subsequently arrived in the summer of 1858, the balance of power had shifted to the federal government.

Detailed documentary work such as *At Sword’s Point* is the bedrock—and therefore a sturdy foundation—for future studies of the Utah War. In the preface to part 1, series editor Will Bagley astutely notes that MacKinnon has provided “enough new source material to keep historians busy reinterpreting the conflict for a generation” (10:15). MacKinnon himself calls for future scholars to understand and integrate the Utah War into larger contexts, themes, and events in the decade that led to the American Civil War: “A complete, accurate understanding of this extraordinary territorial-federal conflict still beckons those interested in the history of Mormon Utah, the American West, and even international relations in a wide range of unlikely places” (11:650). It is doubtful that another scholar has or will come to know the magnitude of the Utah War sources as exhaustively as MacKinnon, but he has provided a warm welcome to use and build on his life’s work. The plethora of documents presented in both volumes of *At Sword’s Point* create an essential resource for antebellum federal-territorial relations, Utah history, Mormon history, and the nation’s acceleration toward disunion. Let us hope that historians continue to build on MacKinnon’s foundational work and better situate the Utah War in American historiography.

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Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook, eds. *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women*. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2017.

*Reviewed by Beverly Wilson Palmer*

In *At the Pulpit*—an annotated collection of fifty-four discourses given by Mormon women between 1831 and 2016—editors Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook clearly achieve their stated goal of “representing the varied ways that Mormon women have addressed public audiences” (p. xxvii). The earliest speeches included in this book were delivered in the American Midwest until the mid-1840s; after 1852 these addresses were almost entirely given in Utah (exceptions being Liverpool, England, in 1861; Chicago in 1893; Washington, DC, in 1895; and Mexico City in 1972). The fact that speakers came from places like New Zealand and South Africa, for example, reflects the geographic expansion of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Indeed, in 1996 Chieko N. Ozaki stated that more Mormons lived abroad than in the United States (p. 256).

As noted in the book’s prefatory sections, “many types of pulpits exist in the Latter-day Saints culture,” suggesting that Mormon women have always had opportunities, even if limited, to speak in public settings (p. xvii). These “pulpits” range from the meeting sites of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association (later changed to the Young Women’s Mutual Improvement Association) to the Relief Society sessions of general conferences, as well as to locations of various organizations connected with Brigham Young University. On one occasion, Sarah M. Kimball’s 1895 address to the National Council of Women,
the audience consisted of both Mormons and non-Mormons. Only at Brigham Young University did the audiences appear to consist of both males and females (e.g., see Belle Spafford’s address, p. 185).

Many topics covered in the early discourses in this book reflect broad themes and traditional concerns shared by many nineteenth-century religious women: prayer, faith, temperance, education, and charity. Indeed, other women orators who were contemporaries of these Mormon women, like the Quaker Lucretia Mott, spoke on similar subjects. Mott and her LDS contemporaries also addressed issues beyond religion, such as suffrage (p. 80), the conflicting roles of women (pp. 157–58, 185–86, 242), and political activism (p. 128). As the discourses in the book continue into the mid-twentieth century, it becomes clear that Mormon women spoke on events in the US such as World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. After 1950, the speakers’ subjects shifted primarily to the practices and beliefs of the Mormon religion.

A theme of special interest to this non-Mormon reviewer is the women’s emphasis on the power of the Spirit, or how the voice of God has spoken directly to them—a theme that echoes the experiences of female preachers in the Quaker, Methodist, or Baptist traditions, for example. In their introduction, Reeder and Holbrook write, “Ultimately, Latter-day Saints believe that the Holy Spirit both prompts speakers to address topics of divine importance and confirms to listeners the authority of a speaker who preaches by genuine inspiration” (p. xxiv). A number of powerful examples of this type of inspiration, ranging throughout the nineteenth century and into the twenty-first century, are included throughout the book. In 1852 Phoebe Angell announced that “in the night she received the following receipt [recipe] as though a voice spoke to her” with instructions on treating chills and fever (p. 28). Likewise, Gladys Sitati told her audience that to avoid conflict, they would “humbly go to Heavenly Father. . . . He will send the Holy Ghost to provide a confirming witness and to guide us on actual things to do” (p. 337). Rachel Leatham in 1908 stated, “I know the gospel is true because God has revealed it to unto me” (p. 105). Annie Noble
described how while on her way to a Mormon meeting in Nottingham, England, she could at last declare that “Joseph Smith was a true prophet of the Lord. And in a moment it seemed like a voice said, ‘You can say it now and I said, Yes, I can say it’” (p. 113). Others, like Elaine Cannon, emphasized women’s special gendered role as “a daughter of God” (p. 207). In 2001 Sheri Dew asked the women of the church to “imagine that God, who knows us perfectly, reserved us to come now, when the stakes would be higher and the opposition more intense than ever? . . . Can you imagine that he chose us because he knew we would be fearless in building Zion?” (p. 269).

Several conversion stories in this volume emphasize the impact of such experiences. As a child, Jutta Baum Busche suffered the deprivations of wartime Germany. Shortly following her marriage in 1955, Mormon missionaries arrived at her home in Dortmund. “I was impressed with many things about these young men. . . . There was no façade,” she explained (p. 235). Similarly, Mormon missionaries gave Irina Kratzer, a doctor living in Barnaul, Russia, in 1996, a copy of the Book of Mormon to help improve her English: “The more I read this book, the more I saw the gap between the teachings of Christ and the way I lived” (p. 262). Most vividly, Judy Brummer described the dialogue with her family after being visited by two women missionaries in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1979. From her family she received “an avalanche of anti-Mormon literature,” she stated. “I asked God to please tell me if the Book of Mormon was the word of God, and the Holy Ghost witnessed to me, in my heart, with such power that I could not dismiss it as an emotion” (pp. 315–16). In these descriptions we see the profound influence of the Mormon church’s missionary movement in awakening a religious consciousness.

And yet personal salvation is not the only theme laced throughout Mormon women’s discourses: a variety of topics hint at larger themes that religious women, and women in general, emphasized at various points in time. As early as 1869, Eliza Snow advocated good works, a cause promoted by many other religious leaders, including Lucretia Mott, who, at a Quaker meeting held in the same year, declared, “We
have been taught to manifest our faith by our works, by our fruits, by our everyday life.”1 Snow told her listeners at a ward Relief Society meeting, “In administering to the poor you have already aided your bishop and lessened his cares, and every labor that comes within the province of woman devolves upon the Female Relief Society” (p. 44). Throughout several discourses, various speakers praise the accomplishments of the Relief Society, a vital outlet for LDS women's activism. By 1950 Margaret Pickering was alerting her sisters to the “great opportunity” the Relief Society offers: “It does not do much good to talk about such big things as ‘humanity,’ ‘democracy,’ and the ‘brotherhood of man’ unless we can bring them down and apply them to our next-door neighbor” (p. 163). Stressing the women’s accomplishments, Elaine L. Jack asked her audience in 1993, “Can you imagine the good that has been done in over a hundred nations by thousands of Relief Society sisters? Can you imagine the blessings that have come into the lives of these women?” (pp. 248–49).

Editors Reeder and Holbrook have, with only a few minor exceptions, succeeded in the challenging tasks required to produce a comprehensive scholarly edition: searching, selecting, transcribing, annotating, and indexing. In their introduction Reeder and Holbrook provide an impressive narrative of the growing participation of women in the Mormon church’s various agencies. As they write, “The available records powerfully demonstrate that women have contributed to Latter-day Saint devotion through sermons, speeches, prayers, songs, and stories” (p. xv). Moreover, the introductory material clearly describes the procedures they followed for each step of the editing process. They selected “speeches that were well written, that contained theological analysis, and that illustrated women’s faith” (p. xxix). However, in several of the early chapters the texts seem to have been selected not for their rhetorical quality but rather for the purpose of calling attention to the speakers’ lives. For example, the discourse of Phoebe Angell, a single mother who migrated to Utah in 1848, is represented by a single paragraph that

is overwhelmed by the chapter’s five introductory paragraphs (p. 28). Similarly brief is the discourse on faith by Mary Isabella Horne, another migrant to Utah with a fascinating life outlined in three long paragraphs (p. 38). One is left to question if these choices truly meet the standard set out by the editors.

The thorough verification of the transcriptions (each discourse was read aloud to another editor three times) is commendable. Annotation understandably consumes most of any editor’s time, and Reeder and Holbrook provide expert scholarly apparatus. Helpful to any reader are the notes explaining the history and terminology of the Mormon religion such as “schools of the prophets” (p. 390n23) and “noble birthright” (p. 429n35). In fact, a list of terms (familiar to Mormons of course but not to outside readers) like sealed and stake patriarch would have been a useful addition, similar to the glossary of Quaker terms like disownment or minute that was included in The Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott.

The editors carefully document the texts with speaker interviews when available, as well as with references to recent Mormon scholarship, for example, Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of the Relief Society (2012). They also cite other highly regarded authorities outside the Mormon religion, such as Lori Ginzburg’s Women and the Work of Benevolence for women’s participation in reform movements (p. 356n21) and Thomas Borstelmann’s The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality (p. 415n20) for events in that decade. I do question, however, some of the excessive notes, which can at times distract from the addresses. Reeder and Holbrook could have omitted all references to biblical quotations, a decision made by the editors of Lucretia Mott’s speeches and sermons. Almost any reader in the twenty-first century can easily locate these sources if needed. And do we need an extensive note on the various publications of an Isaac Watts hymn (p. 389n16), especially when Watts isn’t included in the index? Or a description of the capitol grounds in Salt Lake (p. 419n29)? That said, the thorough index is very helpful. Frequently occurring subjects
like “Relief Society” are usefully broken down into the subtopics “early membership” and “purpose of.”

This moderately priced collection, while primarily aimed at a Mormon audience, offers non-Mormons valuable insights into a woman’s role in the Mormon religion, a role that, until this volume, has received scant attention. In so doing, At the Pulpit contributes significantly to understanding and interpreting women’s experiences in American religious history and US history overall.

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Reviewed by Stephen C. Taysom

ADAM J. POWELL’s Irenaeus, Joseph Smith, and God-Making Heresy is not a book for the faint of heart or those allergic to theoretical musings. In just over two hundred pages, Powell manages to produce not only a fascinating comparison between Joseph Smith’s nineteenth-century Mormonism and the religious thought of second-century church father Irenaeus, but also introduces an innovative application of the work of Max Weber and Hans Mol to the question of religious conflict management. This is a book about the dynamic nature of religion—how it makes and remakes itself while colliding with ever-present cultural forces.
The book’s basic argument is that religions tend to develop a certain mode of soteriology (apotheosis) in response to a specific environmental stimulus (heresy). In simpler terms, Powell argues that, when faced with opposition, some religious traditions respond by developing a model of salvation that results in the deification of individual practitioners. Powell supports this basic assertion by marshalling evidence from two apparently dissimilar religious traditions from different parts of the world, sixteen centuries apart. He argues that sufficient similarities exist between the two historical cases to warrant his comparison. Most importantly, Smith’s Mormons and Irenaeus’s Christians responded to external opposition that threatened both “solidarity and social stability” by developing and elaborating theological tactics that conferred “stronger identities.” Both groups, Powell argues, could do this because each nurtured an “inbuilt flexibility in the belief system.” At the heart of the comparison is the presence of “remarkably resourceful religious leaders” who offered the solution of “deification” to their various “existential crises” (p. 78).

Powell acknowledges that he is far from the first scholar to examine how various religious traditions, including Mormonism, have used “tension” between themselves and broader host cultures to their benefit. As one who has worked on this problem myself, I was interested to see how Powell added to the discussion, and I have identified three major contributions of this study to the literature. First, most previous comparative work on Mormonism has set it beside other religions in the nineteenth-century American milieu. My own work compared Mormons and Shakers, and the work of both Lawrence Foster and Louis J. Kern compared Mormonism to both the Shakers and the Oneida Community. Powell takes leave of both the continent and the century by bringing Irenaeus into the mix. Second, and probably more importantly, Powell explicitly addresses the responses of individual practitioners as well as the “collective” to severe persecution. Although he deploys the work of Hans Mol to great technical effect here, Powell’s approach also clearly reflects the broader interest in the more impressionistic concept of “lived religion” that has surfaced in the field of religious studies in
recent decades. Finally, Powell devotes a significant amount of space to a painstaking reconfiguration of the category of “heresy” as it has been, and currently is, used in various academic disciplines.

In my estimation, Powell fully justifies his comparative choice. It is true that his work may be subject to criticism on the grounds that he lends probative weight to similarities and dismisses differences in order to support his conclusions. But that is the common criticism of nearly every comparative endeavor. If a reader rejects the value of comparative studies on such conceptual grounds, then, of course, such a reader will not find Powell’s comparisons justified. But that is a general rejection of a method, applicable to comparisons of any or all groups. I can find no reason why, if one accepts the legitimacy of the comparative enterprise, the specific comparison of Mormonism and the religious thought of Irenaeus is anything but enlightening and apt. I am, perhaps, biased on this point since I believe strongly in the primacy of categorical, theoretical, and conceptual thinking over the parochial, specific, and interpretatively impoverished work that has for so long dominated the field of Mormon studies. Comparative studies are difficult to pull off. To do so effectively requires that the author be in control not only of the history and the historiography of the comparative constituencies—no mean feat in this — but also of the theoretical literature that frames the comparison. Powell acquits himself admirably here. In fact, one of the few criticism I have of the book is that it is too comprehensive in its literature reviews. This is a common issue with books based on dissertations, as Powell’s is. When writing for a dissertation committee, the candidate must include explicit nods to a vast sea of scholars in order to demonstrate a firm grasp of the literature and the place of his or her work in it. But books are not dissertations, and a firmer editorial hand could have shorn many of these references away and tucked many others into footnotes where inquiring minds could find them, where they would not get underfoot of interested nonspecialists who will likely make up the majority of the book’s readers. A related concern is that Powell’s writing is highly abstract and overly technical. All too frequently, readers are left to puzzle over sentences like
this: “Heresy must be incorporated into the process of cosmization; the social experiences must be objectivated into a comprehensive nomos” (p. 104). While Powell's considerable erudition is beyond dispute, the complexity of his thinking deserves greater clarity of expression. Again, the transition from dissertation to book generally requires a stronger editorial hand that preserves the complexity of the author's thought while rendering it accessible to educated nonspecialists.

There are some minor problems with Powell's comparisons. In comparative studies, it is common for the author to find one of the comparative elements more familiar, more easily documented, and easier to master than the other(s). Powell appears far more comfortable with Mormonism than with the second-century Christianity of Irenaeus. Part of this stems from the imbalance of source material between the groups. In the Mormon case, there is abundant documentary evidence about Mormons and the various groups that “persecuted” them. Powell has a harder time with Irenaeus. This is particularly evident in his rather impressionistic treatment of “Gnosticism” that overlooks some of the more recent scholarship on the subject. The other potential problem in Powell's comparison is that Joseph Smith was the founder of a religious tradition and was largely responsible for the doctrinal and theological content and ritual practices introduced in the first decade and a half of the church’s existence. Irenaeus, on the other hand, served as the bishop of what is now Lyon, and while the influence of his writings was indeed wide and persistent, there is a different quality to the positions occupied by the two men. Powell blunts the impact of these differences by focusing on a single idea propounded by both men rather than on the men per se. This may not be sufficient to satisfy every critic, but I am convinced that the various imbalances do not materially impact the overall argument. What's more, Powell's mastery of Mormon history is second only to the insights he offers into its dynamics. For instance, consider his observation that “from the outset, Joseph Smith seems to have placed an emphasis on . . . binary opposites in the human experience and the advantageous effects of one force being countered by another” (p. 145). This insight raises important questions about the
degree to which a belief in the cosmic centrality of opposition influenced later Mormon experiences with persecution.

Powell’s efforts to address the dynamics of individual identity within the larger collective is impressive, although readers of Mormon studies may not find it particularly useful. As a scholar of religion as a cultural construct, however, I find this dimension of the book deeply interesting and provocative. The inspiration for his argument is the relatively obscure sociologist of religion mentioned above, Hans Mol. Mol, who was most productive in the 1970s, developed a theory that defined religion as any system that provided identity by means of myth, ritual, and emotion. Further, Mol viewed religion primarily as a way of negotiating the opposing forces of differentiation and identity. For Mol, as Powell reads him, the central challenge of religion is maintenance, “the ability to produce meaning and identity while remaining adaptable to the group’s needs” in the face of an ever-changing cultural environment (p. 39). There are two basic axioms that are true of historically persistent religious traditions: they are always changing in response to cultural dynamics, and they expend considerable rhetorical energy trying to deny or marginalize those changes. Scholars have long had evidence for how this process works on the level of the social organization. What Powell offers in this book is a detailed and well-grounded theory for how that process works for the individuals that constitute the collective. Powell’s insights in this vein will have immediate application to my own work and, undoubtedly, the work of scholars far outside the field of Mormonism.

Powell’s final contribution comes in the form of his reinvention—or reclamation, depending on one’s point of view—of the term heresy. For many centuries, the term has referred to a belief that is unauthorized by or otherwise in opposition to a more dominant religious culture. Powell rejects that and defines heresy as “opposition from any or all directions against the solidarity, identity, and the existing worldview of a collective” (p. 27). Elsewhere he defines it as “religious conflict” and as an “ideal type of religious opposition comprised of societal, doctrinal, and personal elements” (p. 5). His conclusions about heresy—that it...
has the salutary effect of testing the “conceptual elasticity” of a religion as well as “enhancing dynamism and solidarity when they are needed most”—are not terribly original (p. 222). What is original, however, is his willingness to recast such a well-entrenched term as heresy. This is an act of scholarly courage that is likely to draw fire from many quarters, but it may be worth the risk if his reasoning behind his new use of the term gains traction. It has the potential for changing the way scholars think and write about religious oppression, opposition, persecution, and dissent, and that makes it a valuable contribution.

Although I have some minor quibbles with the book, I think it deserves a wider audience than it is likely to get. The broader academy has yet to fully embrace Mormonism as a tradition of sufficient gravitas to merit comparison, and this will prove difficult for Powell to overcome. Readers interested in Mormon studies may be put off by the technical prose or the subjection of data about Mormonism (the stories we are so fond of telling) to the service of a much broader argument about religion and culture. However, books like Powell’s are important, pioneering steps toward a more mature notion of how Mormonism can function as a suitable subject of study for scholars interested in the nature of religion as a concept and as a fully integrated cultural agent.

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**Reviewed by Matthew Avery Sutton**

*Mormon Studies Review*, vol. 5, 2018, pp. 143–47

Patrick Q. Mason opens the introduction to *Out of Obscurity* with a few short words and phrases. They include Joseph Smith, polygamy, golden plates, *The Book of Mormon* musical, Mitt Romney, and Proposition 8. Mason’s point is that Americans know a lot about the controversial origins of Mormonism and a lot about the impact that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has had on recent American politics. They don’t know much about what has transpired in between. Mason is exactly right. This book represents the efforts of Mason, coeditor John G. Turner, and thirteen other scholars to explain how Mormons, in the decades since the end of World War II, have emerged as one of the world’s most influential religious movements with over fifteen million members who are transforming cultures in the United States and abroad.

This is an excellent collection of essays. The editors did a masterful job of selecting both more experienced professors as well as newly emerging scholars including a few graduate students for this assignment. Many contributors are practicing Mormons, and some are not. Their goal was to offer a more “robust, multifaceted, and analytical” analysis of this period of Mormonism’s “greatest growth, acceptance, and success as an increasingly global church” (p. 5). Furthermore, this is not just a book about the LDS Church. The editors wisely pushed the contributors to use Mormonism as a lens into making sense of more general American history. This study, Mason explains, “gives insight
into religion in a modern age of mass industrialization, near-universal literacy, urbanization and suburbanization, shifting norms of gender and sexuality, civil rights and youth movements, corporatization, globalization, Americanization, and technological revolutions” (p. 7). They do this using primarily a historical approach, but numerous authors are well versed in and draw from a variety of other disciplines as well.

The editors divide the fourteen essays into four categories: internationalization, political culture, gender, and religious culture. But this collection really could be more aptly characterized as two chapters on internationalization, and then culture, culture, and culture. But perhaps having distinct sections makes the book easier for readers to follow. The essays on politics offer much to digest. Some of the chapters offer insight and analysis on topics that have received a lot of attention recently. Neil Young, in a smart piece, explains the long history behind LDS efforts to oppose same-sex marriage in California and shows how the church is evolving in its dealings with those attracted to others of the same sex. J. B. Haws uses the varying successes of George and Mitt Romney to demonstrate how in some ways George’s religious faith was less controversial in the 1960s than his son’s was in the twenty-first century. Other essays on politics deal with less well-known topics. Mason’s essay is a brilliant exploration of the ideas and influence of former secretary of agriculture and church prophet Ezra Taft Benson, whom he identifies as “one of the primary shapers, if not the chief architect, of late twentieth-century Mormon political and economic conservatism” (p. 66). James Dennis Lorusso explores how and why Mormons became such big boosters of free market capitalism, especially since early Mormons were not. “Pro-business rhetoric,” he writes, “gave the church a means to sustain its distinctiveness for its members while simultaneously endearing itself to the broader American public” (p. 122). Max Perry Mueller offers a compelling, and somewhat troubling, account of the battle between the church and protestors over the use of Temple Square.

The two essays on internationalization offer important insights into narrow topics. Nathan B. Oman looks at the ways in which the church has handled legal conflicts abroad, often choosing to submit to local
authorities so as to avoid conflict. “The dominant theology of the state in Mormon discourse,” he argues, is “quietist and nonconfrontational, a marked contrast from the theodemocratic ambitions of the nineteenth century” (p. 18). Taunalyn Rutherford explores how LDS missionaries translate the faith into the idioms of foreign cultures such as India. “The next major horizons of LDS church growth,” she explains, “will require greater understanding of and engagement with religious cultures outside of western Christianity” (p. 51). While these two chapters highlight the internationalization of the church, it is clear that much more work needs to be done on this topic. The authors offer little more than a tease about the ways Mormonism is evolving outside of the United States and the impact it is having on other cultures. Sara M. Patterson focuses on internationalization in a different way. She offers a fascinating discussion of the sesquicentennial of the Mormon trek and arrival to Salt Lake City. She shows how dramatically the church has evolved from treating Utah as the Holy Land to focusing on grafting outsiders, regardless of their location, into the history of the church.

Numerous essays also examine issues of gender and family, topics that have been at the center of public perceptions of Mormonism in recent years. Amanda Hendrix-Komoto offers a thoughtful analysis of the church’s Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawaii, where women reenacting supposedly traditional rituals wear native clothes that Mormons would otherwise consider inappropriate. Caroline Kline focuses on a different kind of gendered performance. She examines the ways in which Mormon couples split up their obligations in the family. For Kate Holbrook, housework is an important arena through which to make sense of LDS gender ideologies. Kristine Haglund investigates yet another kind of gendered LDS performance—the rise of the mommy blog, which has proven to be a prominent space for laypeople to work out debates about the proper role of women in the church and family. Finally, Rebecca de Schweinitz tries to make sense of the Latter-day Saints’ record of success at keeping Mormon children in the church as they enter their teens and beyond. She argues that church leaders “drew on pre-existing doctrinal principles (about human society, freedom, and
identity) that corresponded with contemporary youth values, and successfully appropriated some of the rhetoric and the spirit of the sixties to revitalize the church’s messages, structures, and programs” (p. 301).

Two final essays deal with the ways Mormonism is presented to the public. First, Matthew Bowman offers an intriguing analysis of the rise of the anti-Mormon countercult movement. Finally, in the last essay in the book, John Turner focuses on the role of the church in shaping its history and protecting access to its archives. However, he explains, in recent years, the church has become far more open to serious, rigorous scholarship, which this book both acknowledges and models.

As a whole, this collection of essays offers a variety of insights for scholars and students alike. First, they show that post–World War II Mormonism is certainly much more than what can be summarized in an episode of South Park. Despite the top-down ecclesiology of the church, success is bringing challenges that are leading to increased diversity. Second, Mormons are at the forefront of American life at dealing with challenges and changes to gender roles. Mormons’ emphasis on “family values” has been one of its most attractive recruiting pitches, but defining what those values are is in constant flux as the culture evolves. Third, the church has had a substantial impact on American politics but continues to rethink its strategy and which issues should be most important. With Trump assuming the presidency, the church is going to have to work even harder to balance its commitment to a politics that celebrates individual character and integrity and one that celebrates the free market. Something may have to give. Fourth, the growth of the church abroad may yet offer another challenge to the church’s politics. The less white and the less consumerist the church becomes as its members increasingly come from foreign lands, the more soul-searching the church will likely have to do to separate what is truly an issue of faith from what is simply a product of the American way of life that has been packaged as faith. Finally, the church has made excellent strides in recent years at dealing honestly with its past history. This is a challenge that will continue as more and more young Mormons are discovering some of the thorny parts of Mormon history via Google searches. The
church will need to continue to wrestle with how to deal with its past, especially when scholars still have many questions about the historical accuracy of elements of the Book of Mormon. Nevertheless, the church has for decades trained an army of truly top-tier historians who teach in some of the best universities in the country. I have no doubt they will continue to offer many insights into how best to deal honestly with and make sense of the church’s past.

In sum, this is an excellent and provocative collection of essays. The editors have done a superb job of putting it together, choosing the topics, and ensuring that every piece is clear and well organized and makes a significant argument. It will, I am sure, inspire much debate and new scholarship for many years to come.


Reviewed by Jennifer Graber
and American history. Mason’s volume, *What Is Mormonism? A Student’s Introduction*, focuses on the Latter-day Saints and explores the tradition’s historical development, global expansion, daily practice, and function as a response to existential problems. Howlett and Duffy’s book, *Mormonism: The Basics*, surveys the Latter-day Saints, the Reorganized Latter Day Saints (RLDS, now Community of Christ), and fundamentalist groups with an emphasis on Mormon history, relations with non-Mormons, ritual life, and worldwide reach. Both texts respond to the “Mormon moment,” in which the tradition has been represented in presidential elections, Broadway musicals, global sporting competitions, and popular fan fiction. For the nonspecialist professor, they provide useful information, chapters that can be easily integrated into a syllabus, and pedagogical suggestions. The books will prove most useful to teachers when situated within broader developments in the historiography of Mormonism.

Mason’s book includes two chapters of special interest to non-specialists teaching about Mormonism. He opens the book with a recreation of one family’s week. He follows parents and their two teenage children as they participate in family life, school, work, and LDS organizations. The chapter’s rich details offer a look at the day-to-day ways Mormon affiliation shapes individual lives. At the same time, the chapter also includes references to the ways that Mormon families are like any other family. As a pedagogue, I have often started my unit on Mormonism with clips from the 2007 PBS special *The Mormons*. I show sections about young people making decisions about college, missions, family, and love. In this way, I have hoped that my non-Mormon students can move beyond popular culture stereotypes to see Mormon young people as remarkably like themselves. That exercise has paid off for me in the classroom. Mason’s chapter chronicling one Mormon family’s typical week could do similar work.

Mason’s chapter on twentieth-century Mormonism, narrated through the life of Ezra Taft Benson, also offers a lot for pedagogues. First, it provides a coherent narration of the Latter-day Saints in the twentieth century, something I have struggled to find in the past. More
important, Mason does a terrific job narrating Mormonism’s “recalibrations” during the period, touching on internal debates about these changes and the tradition’s changing public image that resulted from them. In this chapter, Mason manages to narrate LDS history between the twin poles of most students’ minimal knowledge, namely, late-nineteenth-century declarations ending polygamy and the 2003 South Park episode “All about Mormons.” It introduces students to the complexity of Mormon life and its particular twentieth-century developments.

From Mason’s book, I turn to Howlett and Duffy’s volume. Also excellent, the text offers different things to the nonspecialist pedagogue. Most commendable is the authors’ coverage of Mormon traditions outside the Latter-day Saints. This breadth helps students understand how the descriptor Mormon might be applied to Mitt Romney as well as to fundamentalist women wearing prairie dresses. It also supports the authors’ larger goal to consider how Mormons both differ and resemble other religious bodies in the United States. Their discussion of how Mormon groups have debated questions of authority and tradition compels students to make comparisons with other denominations. Indeed, Howlett and Duffy’s chapter on gender, sexuality, and the family, as well as their reflections on global expansion, do important work to describe Mormon particularities, even as these developments in some ways mirrored (or at least looked similar to) changes within other religious communities.

Howlett and Duffy also provide some interesting pedagogical recommendations, including the possibility that their book could anchor a course on the history of American religion. To be sure, everyone teaching in the field chooses some sort of organizing theme or question for survey courses. Failing to do so leads to incoherence. While I have typically organized my class around themes rather than particular religious bodies, Howlett and Duffy make a convincing argument for organizing a course around Mormons. The chapters provide a helpful way to place Mormon traditions within national developments regarding church-state relations, religious pluralism, and missionary tactics. Pedagogues
interested in switching up the focus of their survey courses have a viable option in Howlett and Duffy’s proposal.

As I have noted, both texts offer a great deal to nonspecialists. While teachers can benefit immensely from the information and teaching ideas presented therein, they will also be well served by considering where each book stands in relation to recent trends in Mormon historiography. Like me, many nonspecialists have probably received their earliest education in Mormon traditions from works by Jan Shipps, Richard Bushman, and Terryl Givens. They and others worked in what some have called the “new church history,” which includes writing by church insiders less constrained by older orthodoxies that prevailed in earlier forms of church history. Texts produced by scholars working in this vein often explicate Mormon scripture, LDS theology, and institutional life within a broader American context. While these scholars produced several important monographs, a few also produced helpful introductory texts. Both Bushman and Givens have published in Oxford’s Very Short Introduction series. Reflecting earlier developments in Mormon historiography, these authors’ introductory offerings share an emphasis on the Latter-day Saints, issues of theology and belief, and explication of Mormon distinctiveness.

The texts by Mason and by Howlett and Duffy reflect more recent developments in the historiography of Mormonism, what some have identified as Mormon studies. Younger scholars writing in this mode have typically been trained in top-notch history and religious studies programs. They use tools from these disciplines to expand what counts as church history, pushing beyond belief, texts, and particularity to also embrace daily practice and correspondences between Mormon history and other religious groups. These scholars write about Mormon traditions with a decidedly outward focus. While many of these authors, though hardly all, have some connection to Mormonism, they write books of interest to a broader academic and popular readership.

Mason’s introductory book is representative of this trend. As noted above, the book opens with a thick description of one LDS family’s daily life. Chapters follow on the variety of ways Mormons have been
shaped by visions and the kinds of gatherings they created in response to those experiences. The topics of scriptures and beliefs do not appear until chapters 5 and 7, respectively. Mason also focuses on historical context, pointing out Mormon particularities as well as overlaps with other movements. And while Mason puts the LDS at the heart of his study, his last chapter on “Mormonisms” acknowledges the diversity of Mormon experience and provides some explanation of historic splits among practitioners. In all these ways, Mason writes about Mormonism in dialogue with broader conversations in the field of religious studies about ritual practice, sacred spaces, and the vitality created when minority practitioners encounter dominant Protestant traditions.

Howlett and Duffy’s book also reflects trends in Mormon studies. Indeed, their introductory treatment offers no chapters explicitly focused on theology or scripture. The authors aim to identify not only Mormon distinctiveness but also resemblances to other religious bodies. Their chapters on sacred space and ritual life, especially, reflect trends in the larger religious studies academy. Two aspects of their book go further and push the boundaries of Mormon studies. First, as noted earlier, Howlett and Duffy survey three forms of Mormonism. To be sure, an argument based on sheer numbers justifies Mason’s LDS focus. But Howlett and Duffy’s decentering of the Latter-day Saints is refreshing. As a pedagogue, I have not talked enough about the disputes within early Mormonism that led to the RLDS offshoot. This volume gives me more tools for doing so. Second, Howlett and Duffy offer much reflection on gender and sexuality within Mormon traditions. Their focus on the construction of certain kinds of gendered and sexual identities makes a point not only about Mormonism, but also about the ways these constructions have been integral to religious communities throughout American history. As a pedagogue, I see their chapter on gender and sexuality as a way to move my non-Mormon students away from their focus on polygamy and toward a bigger conversation about sexuality throughout Mormon history, as well as in other religious bodies.

Both texts are innovative and well written. They offer nonspecialists a way to update their teaching about Mormonism, bringing their labors
in line with trends in the historiography of Mormonism, as well as with the teaching of American religions.

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Reviewed by Cory Crawford

IN THIS MONOGRAPH NICHOLAS FREDERICK tackles the directional literary relationship between canonical Mormon scripture and the King James Bible with a methodology more secure and transparent than has been applied in the past. He advances substantively the study of Latter-day Saint sacred texts by trying to get an analytical handle on what attentive readers detect easily, namely, that the rhetorical space created and occupied by Joseph Smith’s canonized writings, produced in English, is inseparable from the English of the King James Bible in ways that complicate the question of historicity and translation. For Frederick, detecting and decoding allusion in LDS scripture allows the reader to investigate creative operations performed on the source text. He looks under the hood in sharper focus at the literary engines that drove the new production of old scripture in the LDS tradition, concluding that in general these allusions spoke primarily to the nineteenth-century audiences with whom this literature needed to resonate to be recognizable as scripture.
Frederick brings to bear two main streams of scholarly work in framing the problem and moving forward: the literary-critical research into allusion and intertextuality and the investigation of biblical and postbiblical texts that are taken to be intertextual. He thereby reframes the old bugbear of historicity in studies of LDS scripture by casting Joseph Smith as heir to a long tradition of anachronistic revision-by-allusion that includes the authors of Second Isaiah (chapters 40–55) and Deuteronomy. For the heart of his study he restricts his examination of allusion to the distinctive language and theology of the Johannine Prologue (John 1:1–18, hereafter JP), and he centers on allusivity as the key strategy in the creation of authoritative rereadings of scripture by transforming old texts in ways that allowed new ideas to carry the familiar earmarks of tradition. He shows the rich comparative potential of ancient text production done in paradoxical homage with texts of elevated authority—paradoxical because the new text draws the authority from the older one while at the same time seeking to supplant or even invert it.

The subsequent four chapters take a closer look at different types of intertextual operations through close readings of texts that evoke the JP. Chapter 1 focuses on echoes, or readings that borrow language and therefore authority but not necessarily meaning from a source text (3 Nephi 9; 2 Nephi 9:24; D&C 42:52; 20:29). Chapter 2 treats allusions, which import context or meaning of the original in pointing to it, by examining six phrases, such as “light and life of the world” and “only begotten son.” In order to establish the import of meaning and context, Frederick slips into fairly detailed theological discussions of the JP, including Greek exegetical notes. This has important consequences for understanding Joseph Smith’s role as “author” who “restate[s] biblical language in a different setting” (p. 47). Chapter 3 deals with expansion, in which the textual resonance extends the meaning(s) of a source in ways that go beyond its original usage. Frederick selects phrases (e.g., “grace for grace,” “become the sons of God”) and texts (e.g., D&C 45; 76) that integrate theological ideas not present in JP. Here he finds it “remarkable” to see the combination of Johannine ideas (“becoming
sons of God”) with those not present in the Fourth Gospel (the word *faith*, p. 66). Chapter 4 examines allusive *inversions*—texts that overturn their sources. Frederick selects only one example (D&C 93) and argues that through this contrastive reading “Smith found the pieces necessary to construct a theological position that further distorted the borderlines between Christology and anthropology” (p. 97). This may be the strongest and most interesting of the chapters for LDS theology because it takes account of the vibrant dynamic that obtains between Smith and the Christian textual tradition.

The strengths of the volume are many. The most striking is perhaps located in the way Frederick casually pioneers a route through terrain often deemed too treacherous for faithful Latter-day Saints. Frederick does not neutralize or euphemize scholarship that has been seen as challenging (such as on Second Isaiah), he does not apologize for his use of it, and he does not often avoid potentially controversial conclusions. He points out more than once that the deployment of allusive strategies served primarily Smith’s contemporary, English-speaking context: “Joseph Smith infused Mormon scripture with allusions to the Bible as a way of gaining acceptance in nineteenth-century America[;] the examination of Johannine echo in Mormon scripture perhaps addresses this contention most clearly. In the case of the Book of Mormon, the use of biblical language (such as Alpha and Omega) that would have made little sense to a proposed Nephite audience suggests that a primary purpose for its inclusion was to provide a nineteenth-century audience with a text that sounded and read as biblical” (p. 131; compare p. 22).

Second, and more important, Frederick’s work consciously puts Joseph Smith’s intertextual production of scripture into conversation with ongoing work, especially in biblical studies, on texts that rework older authoritative material. “The myriad . . . ways in which Smith used the language of the Bible mirrored that of writers such as the author[s] of Deuteronomy, Second and Third Isaiah, Matthew and Paul, men who relied upon the language of the established past to construct a realized present and a hopeful future” (p. 132). He shows the importance of Johannine texts in Smith’s emerging theology, especially with respect to
deification. Frederick thus brings Smith’s prophetic self-understanding into dialogue with ancient interpreters in the way that they reread authoritative texts to produce new and sometimes radically different scripture. The issue of intertextuality surfaces in particular ways in an LDS tradition that challenges various Christian concepts of canon and provides an interesting case study for J. Z. Smith’s “redescription” that sees canons as dynamic and flexible precisely because of intertextual engagement with them.¹ It is maybe, and somewhat paradoxically, on this very point that Mormonism may speak with the interpretive traditions of Christianity and Judaism.²

Third, the book presents a model of engagement that strives for methodological clarity. Even when one disagrees with his analysis and conclusions, one finds that Frederick has advanced the study of intertextual relationships in Mormon scripture because of this transparency. Even in his more technical discussions, Frederick writes in an engaging style and is appropriately flexible in his readings and categorizations of allusive devices.

The main problems with the volume are no less instructive. First, as Frederick himself indicates (pp. 131–33), the lines between the categories are fundamentally subjective and cannot always be maintained, especially when such slippery determinations as “original meaning” are categorically definitive. The very notion of expansion, for example, must be identified by degree because every transfer of a biblical phrase to the Book of Mormon is, by definition, expansive. More specifically, some texts seem to have been misidentified within the given definitions. For example, 3 Nephi 9, in which a disembodied voice identifies himself as Jesus just before his appearance and ministry in the Book of Mormon,

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seems a good candidate for allusion to or even expansion of the JP rather than being its mere echo.

Second, in order to measure the gap between LDS scripture and biblical source, Frederick often jumps from Smith’s usage right to the details of Johannine theology (sprinkled with untransliterated Greek), skipping in the process the nuances of the development of the English Bible and—most crucially—the nineteenth-century context of Protestant discourse in English. To take one example, Frederick argues that the phrase “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, pp. 58–61) was transformed on the basis of Exodus 34:6 into “full of grace, mercy, and truth” (Alma 5:48). These three terms, however, are relatively common in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Protestant discourse—both as bare quotations and as extended discussions of the triad—which undercuts somewhat Frederick’s exploration of theological motives for the change and complicates the intertextual picture. While the ultimate source of the phrases in question is the Fourth Gospel, what is its proximate source? In an absolute sense one may compare with profit the theology of Joseph Smith with the author of John, but it seems to me that the more pressing comparison—especially in light of Frederick’s conclusion—is between Joseph Smith and his contemporaries and more immediate predecessors. Frederick’s work has offered us a worthy investigation of the former but only irregularly engages the latter.

a discourse saturated with Bible talk leaves us without a control against which to gauge the employment of these phrases as allusions to the Bible and not to contemporary religious parlance that had also latched on to the gospel with the highest Christology.

Even in its shortcomings, then, this volume raises key issues in the practice of investigating the Mormon canon. The most obvious is perhaps the need for collaboration between biblical philologists and theologians and scholars of early American religious discourse. This kind of interdisciplinary work is rare but growing in Mormon studies; one hopes for the institutional support of such collaboration, such as at the Maxwell Institute, despite natural disciplinary pressures pushing toward isolation. This is necessary to maximize the increasingly powerful resources for textual analysis, which promises to help clarify the process by which these texts came to be.

Frederick’s monograph also shows that the allusive techniques discerned in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants are indistinguishable at the level of biblical intertextuality. That is, Frederick rightly makes no attempt to differentiate theologies and usage of different Book of Mormon authors because no such clear distinction can be made on the basis of his study. It exists instead at the level of Joseph Smith’s interaction with the biblical text and his own contemporary discursive practices. In this way Frederick’s work problematizes some of the so-called new Mormon theology and its reading of the Book of Mormon, which Frederick even cites at one point: “That Nephi feels comfortable weaving his own prophecies into the text of Isaiah is itself a telling thing. That he not only adds his own statements to the Isaianic text but also adjusts the ‘quoted’ scripture freely is still more telling.” 4 I think it not trivial, either for a scholar or a lay Mormon, to determine whether we are talking about Nephi’s rereading of Isaiah or Joseph Smith’s; and this indeterminacy troubles the extent to which one can safely bracket questions of authorship. If Frederick is correct that one of the main purposes in allusion is to create conceptual and linguistic

familiarity for a nineteenth-century audience, the balance tilts toward Joseph Smith—and not Nephi—as author. This recognition is mirrored in the recent institutional weighting of the study of Mormon scripture toward modern historical and literary study rather than toward ancient studies.

This issue of authorship raises other questions that will have to be reconsidered in light of Frederick’s work: First, is there any sort of qualitative difference between Smith’s quotation of biblical passages (i.e., Isaiah in the Book of Mormon) and allusive appeals to the Bible in Mormon scripture? Second, given the increasingly abundant evidence that Smith knew a wide variety of biblical and nonbiblical texts, and given the common thread among them that he drew creatively on available textual resources in producing new scripture, does the text of the Book of Mormon represent a fundamentally different mode of production from Smith’s other writings, or was it merely the first of many? As with all such observations, faithful and skeptic will make different historical sense of this possibility.

In sum, Frederick’s approach is so unabashed and innovative compared to earlier apologetic attempts to deal with such phenomena that the reader will, I hope, overlook some of the residue of dissertation writing, with many dozens of typographic errors and infelicities of language that have not been entirely scrubbed for want of a more careful editorial process. If there are to be future editions, one hopes that, in addition to making the Greek accessible in transliteration to nonspecialists, an index of scriptural citations will not be left out, so as to maximize the utility of the volume. Above any shortcomings of the work, Frederick is to be


6. The most egregious and unusually offensive is his use of the term final solution at the end of a discussion of the apocalyptic clash between light and dark (p. 42). I take it as an unintentional oversight, but one that is exceedingly unfortunate, especially in a volume on intertextuality and allusion to the Gospel of John.
commended for advancing the conversation in a concrete and deliberate way, and for setting a constructive tone for future intertextual research.

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Reviewed by Richard Kimball
Race, Religion, and Sport Collide: Black Athletes at BYU and Beyond takes us well past the Davies dismissal to consider the nexus of race, religion, sport, and economic inequality in American society writ large, using BYU as an exemplar of the nation’s colleges and universities. The school’s sponsoring institution, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, likewise represents the quintessential national white organization and acts as Smith’s “litmus test for the American experience.”

Smith builds his arguments on the “systemic racism theory” of Joe R. Feagin, which posits that racism is built around white “racial frames”—the constellation of “racist images, attitudes, ideology, emotions, habits, and actions” (p. 32) used by white Americans to “perpetuate and obscure matters of racial discrimination.” This tradition of discrimination “limits the opportunities of African Americans while promoting [white Americans’] own continued race-based advantages and control over key societal domains, including education, health care, and certainly the sport-industrial complex” (p. 33). In short, the “white racial frame” is the “the philosophical justification of black marginalization employed by white, privileged decision makers” (p. 29).

Always mindful of the “white racial frame,” Smith describes various “encounters and unequal relationships of power that blacks had with whites” throughout American history (p. 34). The book provides a primer on how the “white racial frame” has operated in American and Mormon history more than an in-depth, robust examination of the relationship between sports and religion at BYU. To contextualize his analysis of African American athletes at BYU around the turn of the twenty-first century, Smith sets the table with a series of sections outlining the origins of racism, the racialization of blacks in sports, the championing of black separatists and the reintegration of American sports, and the demonization of blacks throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition. A chapter dedicated to the “white racial framing of blacks in Mormon theology” is followed by a chapter on campus unrest and the revolt of black athletes in the 1960s. After a chapter on LDS attitudes and teachings regarding civil rights, we finally reach Smith's
wheelhouse—the dismissal of Brandon Davies and the unjust treatment of black athletes at BYU in the last twenty-five years.

Smith should be commended for taking on the herculean task of trying to unravel the complex intertwining of race, sports, inequality, and religion. Unfortunately, the author’s reach exceeds his grasp in one of his central contentions. In order to broaden the applicability of the book’s findings, Smith claims that the Mormon experience is “as quintessentially American as apple pie.” Such a designation will likely stick in many reader’s throats, despite the justification that the “Church shares with other white organizations the same dominant narrative of the so-called protestant work ethic embodied within the framework of individualism” (p. 3). Certainly, the church has moved inexorably toward the American mainstream, but it hardly represents, or even reflects, the standard American sect, let alone the typical American.

When Race, Religion, and Sport Collide hits its stride in chapter 6, Smith’s focus shifts to the exploitation of African American athletes at BYU, particularly the double standard regarding honor code infractions. Black athletes have been treated as “reluctant houseguests at BYU”—purposefully undereducated regarding the honor code and ill prepared for the campus environment (p. 79). In part, they have been set up to fail by coach-recruiters who soft-pedal the strictures of life under the honor code. Ronney Jenkins, a football player in the late 1990s, remembers that while he was being recruited, the honor code “wasn’t something that we sat down and really spoke about, got into detail about” (p. 106). Set apart by race and religion, these athletes faced a familiar double bind without fully understanding the rules of the game.

Much of Smith’s information about honor code infractions is admittedly anecdotal. A handful of quotes, supposition about what happened behind closed ecclesiastical doors, and information reaped from public records provide the bulk of Smith’s evidence. Such limitations, while unfortunate, are understandable in light of the confidential nature of the information the author needs. Some of the assumptions are quite telling and insightful, in spite of the lack of transparency in honor code disciplinary matters. For example, his analysis of the “Baker’s dozen”
incident, when within the space of a year twelve African Americans were suspended from the football team, with several of them dismissed from the university, uncovers a blatant racial double standard. During the same period, only two nonblack athletes received similar punishments—one white and one Polynesian. According to Smith, black football and basketball players are disciplined at a ratio of ten to one in comparison to their white teammates. It seems eminently reasonable to conclude that “blacks and whites are ‘handled’ differently with respect to the honor code” (p. 112). To buttress that assertion, Smith compares the stories of Teag Whiting and Devon Blackmon. In 2001 Whiting, a football player and white Mormon, was arrested for participating in a brawl and fleeing from the police. He was suspended for one game. Thirteen years later, the black and non-Mormon wide receiver Devon Blackmon received a one-game suspension for wearing a pair of earrings during summer term in 2014, an infraction of the university’s dress and grooming standards. Smith notes that BYU spokesperson Carri Jenkins admitted in a 2004 interview, “It’s extremely rare for a player to be suspended for dress and grooming violations” (p. 115). The comparisons speak to a truth that black athletes are disciplined more harshly than their white counterparts, but I am nagged by the composition of the comparison. Is it fair to compare an arrest in 2001 (without noting the final disposition of the case) to a seemingly minor violation in 2014, bridging the gap with a quotation from 2004? There is something there; I am just not convinced that, in this case, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Smith doesn’t leave readers without hope, however. He outlines a series of changes that could help BYU be more welcoming and fair to African American, non-Mormon athletes (only men are discussed in the text, but presumably the changes would help black non-Mormon female athletes too). BYU would do well to heed his calls for change: (1) create and maintain public records regarding the graduation trends of black and white athletes in an effort to promote accountability through transparency, (2) create an inclusive environment designed around helping black non-Mormon athletes to succeed on their own terms,
(3) partner with black churches in Salt Lake City to provide mentors who could shepherd the athletes through the transition to a new culture, and (4) create a volunteer sponsor-family program to provide support and a familial environment away from the playing field. Ultimately, Smith notes, “BYU must get more creative and accepting rather than secretive and punitive” (p. 151).

In many ways, Brandon Davies is held up as the epitome of the disciplinary differential between white and black, Mormon and non-Mormon athletes at BYU. His was the most public shaming, and it objectified Davies into everything that was right or wrong in college sports. His penance played out on the road to the Final Four. Even this case, as clear-cut as it seems, doesn’t fit comfortably into Smith’s argument. Because Davies is an African American and a Mormon, his situation throws a wrench into the theoretical works. What frames of judgment capture the black Mormon player raised in Provo? In the end, When Race, Religion, and Sport Collide convincingly argues for the double bind that black non-Mormon athletes face at BYU. Without the ability to peek behind the curtains of the Honor Code Office and the athletic department, however, we may never know why.

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*Reviewed by Mark Ashurst-McGee and Mark Lyman Staker*

Around the turn of the century, Signature Books planned a series of three volumes that would cover Joseph Smith’s life in detail. Richard S. Van Wagoner was commissioned to write the first volume of the trilogy, treating the period from Smith’s birth to his move to Ohio. Van Wagoner’s *Natural Born Seer: Joseph Smith, American Prophet, 1805–1830* engages Smith’s family and cultural background, his childhood and formative years, his visionary claims, his translation of the Book of Mormon, and the organization of the Mormon church. Much of the work of Mormon history is done by amateur scholars who contribute significantly to our understanding of the Mormon past, and Van Wagoner has been a notable contributor in this realm. Now, several years after his untimely death in 2010, the Smith-Pettit Foundation has published the results of his research posthumously, making another contribution to Mormon studies. In fact, the publisher touts the hefty volume, over six hundred pages in length, as Van Wagoner’s “masterwork” (p. 591).

Van Wagoner begins his book on Joseph Smith’s early years and the origins of Mormonism by attempting to show his readers that Smith was a deliberate deceiver. A large part of the book’s introduction looks ahead to incidents that occurred in Nauvoo—particularly the evasive and obfuscatory statements that Smith made to protect the still-secret practice of polygamy—with the intent to reveal Smith’s dishonest character. Fortunately, Van Wagoner’s reading of Joseph Smith in Nauvoo
is not carried through into *Glorious in Persecution*, the volume of the trilogy that covers the Nauvoo years.¹ But Van Wagoner does project his view of Joseph Smith in Nauvoo back onto the period in which Mormonism was born. He believes that his examples of deception “speak to the character of the man who was once the boy” (p. x). And so, instead of seeking to understand the context and meaning of Joseph Smith’s early religious experiences, or how they were received by those who first followed him, Van Wagoner sets out to determine whether Smith really had the experiences he claimed: “First and foremost,” he explains, “I am an investigative biographer, interested in both truth and falsehood and their ramifications, disinclined to move along a velvet rope with the crowd while keeping a respectful distance from Joseph Smith” (p. xvii).

The first few chapters of *Natural Born Seer* cover Joseph Smith’s childhood in New England. Van Wagoner uses Lavina Fielding Anderson’s monumental edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s family memoir as the chronological backbone of his narrative of Joseph’s earliest years.² Like Smith’s other biographers, Van Wagoner works assiduously with the very small collection of relevant documents. To this scant evidence, he adds a truly impressive amount of historical context, especially in terms of historical geography and material culture. This is the primary contribution of the book. Drawing on memoirs, local histories, and a wide variety of sources, he presents rich descriptions of the towns and counties in which the Smiths lived. He describes the Smith homes and neighborhoods, sketches the physical and historical geography of hills and valleys, relates aspects of local agriculture and regional economy, and vividly reconstructs plausible routes of travel as the Smiths

¹ Martha Bradley-Evans, *Glorious in Persecution: Joseph Smith, American Prophet, 1839–1844* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2016). Bradley-Evans acknowledges the “secrecy accompanying plurality” (p. xix) and admits Smith’s public “denial” of plural marriage (p. 603), but also states that “what looks like subterfuge, intended to obscure one’s vision, may have been embedded in ritual,” which Smith and his followers held sacred and confidential (p. 601).


https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr2/vol5/iss1/1
migrated from town to town. There are many helpful contributions toward understanding the early life of Joseph Smith. At times, however, Van Wagoner’s thick description becomes excessive, as when he lists over two dozen varieties of apple that were grown in Vermont—most not introduced until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century (p. 58). In fact, anachronisms abound in Van Wagoner’s reconstruction of the Smith family’s material culture. To give one example, he describes Joseph Smith Sr.’s 1802 dry goods store in Randolph as an 1870s country shop “displaying an eclectic stock ranging from coal oil to calico to canned oysters” (p. 14). While Smith’s store could offer anything available in Boston or New York City, oysters were not canned until 1812, and coal oil was not widely available in village stores until the 1850s (under the trade name Kerosene).

More concerning is when these errors lend themselves to a portrayal of the Smiths as indigent and incompetent. In the opening lines of the biography, Van Wagoner sets the stage for Joseph Smith as a country bumpkin when he writes that Smith was born “deep in the backwoods of New England’s Vermont” (p. 1). He is probably accurate when he describes the first Smith home in Vermont as a “log cabin” (p. 5). However, he projects this temporary residence, which the Smiths occupied only through their first winter in Vermont, onto Joseph Smith Sr.’s Vermont experience generally. He states that the home Joseph and Lucy Smith lived in when they were first married was also a “cabin” (p. 17). This is apparently an assumption since there is no corroborating manuscript evidence. In fact, recent archaeological excavation at the site of the Smith residence in Tunbridge has uncovered a substantial foundation, a brick fireplace and hearth, and a root cellar—all of which strongly suggest that this was a log home (with square-hewn timbers). The high-end ceramics uncovered in archaeological excavation suggest a life of comfort, even elegance. Van Wagoner also writes that when the Smiths moved to Sharon, Joseph Smith Jr. was born in “the family’s

3. Mark Lyman Staker and Donald L. Enders excavated the remains of the Smith home in Tunbridge during October 2016 and August 2017.
rustic log cabin” (p. 3). Actually, the Smith home in Sharon has long been known to have been a frame home with clapboard siding.⁴

Van Wagoner weaves this thread of a rough-hewn existence into their New York homes as well. He states that the floor of the Smith family’s log home in Palmyra was “puncheon—split logs with the flat sides up” (p. 95). However, there is no evidence for this. In fact, the archaeology conducted at the site suggests a sawn lumber floor.⁵ Van Wagoner apparently presumes the floor was puncheon because it seems more rustic. The thick descriptions in Natural Born Seer often include details derived from Van Wagoner’s ideas about what old-timey life was like, but with no documentary support.

While the dearth of sources about the Smiths in New England is the challenge of the first few chapters, there are many relevant sources for the New York period—and these are now easily accessible in Dan Vogel’s comprehensive collection Early Mormon Documents.⁶ Most of these sources, however, were created years or even decades after the fact and are almost always biased (either for or against Joseph Smith). Van Wagoner draws heavily on the statements collected in 1833 by Philastus Hurlbut and much later sources as well. He routinely presents late and antagonistic sources with little or no qualification.

Van Wagoner insists that it was in the mid-1820s, after Smith’s encounter with the angel Moroni, that Palmyra experienced the revivals Smith wrote about when he introduced the first vision. In presenting the context of the Methodist revivals that attracted young Joseph, he quotes heavily from Charles Chauncy, who described wildly enthusiastic meetings. Chauncy, whom Van Wagoner calls “an early observer of Methodist enthusiasm” (pp. 217–18), died in 1787—three decades before Joseph Smith moved to New York. Moreover, Van Wagoner

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5. The cellar found in the excavation of the site was not accessible from the side of the house, indicating that it was accessed through a trap door in the floor. This, in turn, most likely indicates a sawn lumber floor.
seems oblivious to the notorious elitism of the Old-Light Boston Brahmin and his condescension toward the uncouth Christians of the provinces with their lust for emotional revivalism. Van Wagoner slights the evidence of earlier revivals in the Palmyra-Manchester area and ignores the possibility that Smith mistakenly conflated details of the earlier and later revivals. In terms of chronology, the one thing that is clear from Smith’s narratives of his early visions is that the first vision occurred prior to the first visitation of Moroni in 1823. In any case, Van Wagoner holds that even if Smith did have a visionary experience, it probably wasn’t real. He emphasizes that people have been claiming to have visions for thousands of years—and they cannot all be true. Rather than trying to understand what Smith and other visionaries experienced and how Smith may have understood his vision, Van Wagoner attacks its objective reality.

The narrative of *Natural Born Seer* is broken in Van Wagoner’s chapter on the Book of Mormon, which is neither biography nor history but rather “an overview of critical issues regarding the ancient historicity of the Book of Mormon” (p. 384). The chapter is split into sections on language, genetics, archaeology, and other such topics that have been debated for decades. Instead of providing a helpful guide to the religious ideas found in the Book of Mormon—and what they might have meant to Smith and his followers—this lengthy chapter is devoted to refuting the book’s antiquity. The end of this chapter—Van Wagoner’s conclusion that the Book of Mormon is entirely modern—is the climax of the book, with the following chapter on the organization of the church little more than a denouement showing that the church Smith organized was built on the foundations of invented scripture. Van Wagoner does, however, recapitulate his narrative arc: that Joseph Smith, after enduring years of his father’s incompetence and the family’s resulting poverty, created the Book of Mormon and organized the church in order to ensure “the financial and social security of his extended family” (p. x).

Van Wagoner offers a skeptical interpretation of Joseph Smith that is fair enough yet limited. *Natural Born Seer* may be compared with the book *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New
Spiritual Paths, by Ann Taves, a professor of religious studies. Revelatory Events, published the same year as Natural Born Seer, compares Joseph Smith’s Book of Mormon with Helen Schucman’s Course in Miracles and Bill Wilson’s Twelve Steps manual for Alcoholics Anonymous. Revelatory Events is more rigorously skeptical, combining careful history and cognitive psychology, and yet more generous in its theory and methodology, acknowledging the reality and complexity of religious experiences in the lives of ordinary and extraordinary people. Van Wagoner, in contrast, seems preoccupied with a kind of objective reality that continually forecloses any significant insight into Joseph Smith’s early religious experiences and their historical meaning. He draws on all of the most important sources and more but is woefully inadequate on source criticism. It is abundantly clear that much research and effort went into the book, but with insufficient rigor and care. Van Wagoner’s Natural Born Seer should be used judiciously.

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**Reviewed by Douglas J. Davies**

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.18809/msr.2018.0125  
Journal DOI: https://doi.org/10.18809/mimsr.21568030

**Through eight chapters and four appendixes**, Rasmussen develops a book from a previous postgraduate dissertation on the emergence and organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Great Britain. As with numerous regional-national histories of Mormonism, *Mormonism and the Making of a British Zion* includes basic elements of Mormonism’s emergence in the US, but always with a keen eye on the UK and, more specifically still, on North West England. While Liverpool was the key seaport for early missionaries traveling to the UK, and for the emigration of converts to the US in the last half of the nineteenth century, Preston and its River Ribble Valley environs are shown to have assumed more than geographical or transportational significance. Here we encounter some of the book’s major themes as empirical information derived from considerable historical, archival, local, and oral history research engages with descriptive interpretations of church doctrine, organization, and policy. For this review I single out just two themes, what might best be called inspired tradition, on the one hand, and intergenerational flourishing, on the other.

By inspired tradition, I refer to what emerged as a prophetic charter for viewing the Ribble Valley area as its own form of sacred place, a perspective seen to motivate generations of Latter-day Saints in this area. When one of Joseph Smith’s key associates, Heber C. Kimball, arrived as a missionary to this area in 1837, he met with considerable success that was soon reinforced by nine other key church leaders. Just
before returning to the US in April 1838, he experienced such intense feelings that he “was constrained” to remove his hat while sensing that “the place was holy ground” (p. 4). When Kimball asked Joseph why this had been so, the Prophet explained that “this is the place where some of the old Prophets travelled and dedicated that land, and their blessing fell upon you.” Rasmussen sees this explanation as engendering “long-term significance for British Mormonism” in the sense that the region gained prophetic sanction as its own form of sacred place (p. 5). For example, the area, which contains the longest uninterrupted existence of a Mormon congregation anywhere (including the US), was chosen as the site for the UK’s second temple—the Preston England Temple—at Chorley in 1998. Mormon culture can seldom be understood apart from the interplay of the grandly eternal plan of salvation with local narratives, and this is how the book’s chapters unfold in accounts of Mormonism’s notion of “the gathering” of converts through periods of “establishment and expansion,” “consolidation and decline,” “opponents, apostates, and dissenters,” “revivals and reversals and the struggle for stability in the twentieth century.” All this is clearly documented and with good use of the UK-focused, long-running, and highly significant LDS newspaper-journal the Millennial Star.

As for intergenerational flourishing, two significant points can be made. The first is well represented in Rasmussen’s sketched account of internal UK migration of church members, especially older and retired people, to live near the temple in Chorley. The establishment of such a sacred space within a geographically sacred place is seen to have catalyzed this movement in which “temple work” on behalf of the dead may come into its own. He rightly advocated the need for further research on this topic, especially in an era when older people sense a need to live creative and appreciated lives. This is a valuable point, reminding me of the rise of elderly Christians engaging in hand copying the Bible text in South Korea.¹ But shifts carry consequences, and such an attraction of people can lead to decline in local church strength where these internal

migrants had once lived. A second intergenerational factor concerns the
need for current LDS families to retain their children as active church
members, and Rasmussen identifies the joint necessity of “the temple
and the home” in this process (p. 190). This theme is probably more
pressing in 2017 than it was even during Rasmussen’s period of active
research.

Matthew Rasmussen gives us a good read, incorporating named
local individuals and events within the wider dynamics of US church
strategy. Non-Mormon readers will learn a great deal about the LDS
Church at large in and through this cameo of an unusually “sacred
space.”

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