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Conflict and Compromise: The Mormons in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Politics J. Keith Melville

Jan Shipps

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MELVILLE, J. KEITH. *Conflict and Compromise: The Mormons in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Politics*. Provo: Printed for the Political Science Department by the Brigham Young University Printing Service, 1974. 121 pp. \$3.95.

Reviewed by Jan Shipps, assistant professor of history and religious studies, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis.

The fresh title notwithstanding, Melville's *Conflict and Compromise: The Mormons in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Politics* is not a new work. A sketchy survey of the political events in early territorial Utah has been added, but in substance, this book is a reprint—apparently from the very same plates—of the author's *Highlights in Mormon Political History* which was originally published in the Brigham Young University Merrill Monograph Series in 1967. I was not aware that this was the case when I agreed to prepare a review for *BYU Studies*, and this unanticipated duplication places me in a somewhat awkward position since I reviewed the work in its earlier form for *Dialogue* (3 [Winter 1968]:103-104). Upon discovery of this situation, my first impulse was to suggest that, because the new book is essentially the same as the earlier one, this fact could be noted and the readers directed to the earlier reviews of the work. However, as I reread the account of "The Mormons in the Frontier Politics of Iowa" and the discussion of "The Mormons and the Compromise of 1850" and read the added section on "The Infant Steps of Territorial Government" for the first time, I realized that 1968 assessments of Professor Melville's work will not serve in 1975. For one thing, the world of Mormon history has changed since this monograph was prepared. For another, a virtual revolution in methodology has occurred in the whole general area of political history in the intervening years. The standards by which a work of this nature must

be judged have changed dramatically, and—evaluated with modern criteria in mind—*Conflict and Compromise* simply fails to measure up as useful scholarship.

The second (and longest) section of the book purports to explain, for example, how and why the U. S. Congress provided the Mormons in the Great Basin with a territorial rather than a state government. Yet the analysis is entirely based on Mormon sources and the public debates recorded in the journals of the U. S. Senate and House of Representatives. The author has made no real effort to place the question in the full context of the complicated national political situation of the time, and has been content, instead, to narrate the story almost precisely as John M. Bernhisel, the Saints' Washington lobbyist, related it to the LDS Church Presidency. Moreover, while Holman Hamilton's *Prologue to Conflict* was published in 1964, no reference is made to this standard work on the Compromise of 1850. Also, no notice is taken of Thomas B. Alexander's *Sectional Stress and Party Strength: A Study of Roll-Call Voting Returns in the United States House of Representatives, 1836-1860* or any of the other works in which congressional roll calls have been "scaled" or "clustered," even though the importance of roll-call analysis in the explanation of the behavior of legislative bodies has been amply demonstrated.

Since the circumstances were less complicated, the fact that the Iowa episode which is described in the first section of the book is likewise presented primarily from the Mormon standpoint does not matter quite so much. Still, this is a twice-told tale which needed telling only once. As for the final section, the one on which the "expanded form" statement in the "Preface" is based, over forty-five percent of it is devoted to maps, reproductions of letters, and other direct quotations. So much emphasis has been placed on supplying material which would give readers "a feel for the original drama involved" (p. vii) that the author's contribution turns out to be little more than a précis of standard historical accounts of Utah in the 1850s.

In the pages of this journal last year Chad Flake complained about the lack of tough reviews of works on Mormonism written by Mormons. He suggested a number of valid reasons for this situation, but he failed to mention that criticizing the work of another student of Mormon history, whether he is a Saint or whether he is not, can be an exceedingly unpleasant task. Nevertheless, someone has to point out when the emperor's clothes are missing. Frankly,

in this instance, I cannot understand why the political science department at a major university would sponsor the reissuing of a work as dated and superfluous as this one.