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Hispanics in the Mormon Zion, 1912-1999 Jorge Iber

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Jorge Iber. *Hispanics in the Mormon Zion, 1912–1999*.

College Station: Texas A&M University, 2000.

Reviewed by Mark L. Grover

Residents of the state of Utah will readily recognize that during the past few years there has been a significant change in the state's ethnic makeup. Manifestations of change can be seen in the increasing number of restaurants specializing in a variety of Latin American foods, designed to serve Latino palates and not the majority population. Families from Latin America are moving into all neighborhoods in the state. Though Mexicans continue to be in the preponderance, many immigrants are from Argentina, Peru, Guatemala, and other parts of the region. Many are two or three generations removed from the immigration experience and are coming from other states in the southwest United States. The majority are not Mormons but Catholics, with a surprising number of Pentecostals as well. This visual demographic change is making people in Utah more aware of neighboring countries to the south.

Most residents are not aware, however, that this demographic change is not a new phenomenon. Though Utah has never had a high percentage of Latinos, there has always been an important and influential Hispanic population in Utah. The history of this community has been examined only superficially by historians, in part because of the challenge of working with non-English documents. An appreciation of this Latino population has finally been chronicled in *Hispanics in the Mormon Zion, 1912–1999*, by Cuban-born Jorge Iber, Professor of History at Texas Tech University. Iber's doctoral dissertation became the foundation for this book. For his documentation, he used the considerable source materials accumulated by the American West Center of the University of Utah, much of them collected through federal grant money in the 1960s and 1970s. Especially valuable in the documents were oral histories of early Hispanic pioneers and records of Hispanic organizations.

The result is a fascinating analysis of the evolution of this minority community. The book compares the development of Latino communities in the state of Utah with such communities in the rest of the Southwest. Iber concludes that, though there are numerous similarities, the fundamental difference in the evolution of the Utah Latino community was the role of religion in the state. Even though the majority of the Latino population in the state was Catholic, a significant Latino Latter-day Saint population affected the development of the Hispanic community, particularly due to the distinctive relationship that Latter-day Saint Hispanics had with the majority population, affording help not available to the rest of the Latino population.

Iber examines what occurred during the Great Depression. When difficult times hit the state, job procurement and basic assistance were available in a greater degree to the Latter-day Saint Latinos through their Church contacts. The immediate consequence was a Latino community divided along lines of religion. A more subtle and long term effect was pressure on other churches, primarily the Catholic Church, to provide similar services. The impact was an interesting parallel evolution of the two religious groups. Iber stresses that the special relationship between Latter-day Saint Hispanics and the majority population did not eliminate racism or prejudice against the Latino population, but Latino members of the Church were able to use the connection to advantage.

Regardless of the word *Zion* in its title, this book is not a history of Hispanic Latter-day Saints in Utah. It is a cultural and organizational history of the Latino population in the state. Iber offers just as much information on Catholic organizations and activities as Latter-day Saint organizations, along with considerable analysis of secular social organizations such as the important Spanish-Speaking Organization for Community Integrity and Opportunity, the first statewide Latino advocacy organization. Iber also suggests that, even with similarities in race and language, the Latino community was not homogeneous. His final chapter laments an end to a period of political activism by Latinos in the state and calls for further study and research.

This book received an award from the Mormon History Association and the Editor's Choice Award from the *Utah Historical Quarterly*. More importantly, it was recently approved by the Utah State Board of Education for use as a teachers' resource. This volume is an important addition to anyone's understanding of the evolution of minority communities within a predominant host culture.

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