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Jeffery E. Sells, ed. *God and Country: Politics in Utah*.

Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005

Reviewed by Jacob W. Olmstead

In this volume, editor Jeffery E. Sells, former associate priest at the Cathedral of St. Mark in Salt Lake City and current rector of St. David of Wales Church in Shelton, Washington, has assembled an impressive array of legal, religious, and historical scholars along with political and community leaders to contribute essays to a “multi-faceted scholarly investigation of the issues” accompanying the overshadowing political presence of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Utah (xi). The handsome dust jacket, depicting Brigham Young wearing the cupola of the state capital as a crown, cleverly depicts the book’s underlying position. Many authors in this volume argue that Utah functions as a theocracy in a nation where the separation of church and state is sacrosanct; the arguable breach of the First Amendment in Utah is particularly repugnant to those who find themselves outside the Mormon and Republican majority. *God and Country* is primarily intended to represent the views of the religious and political minorities in Utah who feel disenfranchised because the political system is dominated by Mormons. Though not advocating that the LDS Church or any other sect should have no influence on politics in Utah, Sells asserts the essays contained in *God and Country* are intended to offer suggestions for the future interaction of religion and politics.

The essays are divided into two sections. Part one comprises primarily historical treatments of the development of the First Amendment and Utah’s political past. In part two, the essays are geared toward identifying “the social consequences of religious dominance” (vi). As with any volume containing contributions from numerous authors, the quality and relevance of the scholarship varies from essay to essay. Because this tome contains some twenty contributors, I shall discuss only examples that are indicative of the strengths and weaknesses of this compilation.

In part one, the essays authored by notable Mormon historians Jan Shipps, Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at Indiana University–

Purdue University at Indianapolis, and D. Michael Quinn, recent Beinecke Senior Fellow at Yale University, will likely be of most interest to scholars familiar with Utah's political history. Shipps's essay, "The Persistent Pattern of Establishment in Mormon Land," poses a new orientation for evaluating the conflict between the Mormon theocracy and the federal government during the nineteenth century. She argues that both the Mormons in Utah and the Protestant-based civil religion in America can be viewed in relation to each other as conflicting *de facto* religious establishments. For Shipps, the Reed Smoot hearing is the best example and culmination of this nineteenth-century conflict. Because the Protestant establishment dissipated after World War I, Shipps suggests the Church is allowed to go unchecked in Utah. With the Mormon establishment tied to Salt Lake City, she ultimately suggests that, although the Church is growing nationally and internationally, its power to influence politics will likely not expand beyond the Mormon heartland. Though compelling, the approach outlined in her essay is only a research itinerary and not a fully developed analysis.

Taking the opposite viewpoint, Quinn, in "Exporting Utah's Theocracy Since 1975: Mormon Organizational Behavior and America's Culture Wars," argues that the Mormon theocracy is expanding its reach beyond Utah into a number of western states. Citing the LDS efforts to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the 1970s as a model for LDS political mobilization, Quinn claims that the Church has continued to manipulate politics in a number of instances since that time. These cases include issues such as pornography, same-sex marriage, and selected state lotteries in Oklahoma, California, Idaho, Hawaii, Colorado, Alaska, Nebraska, and Texas. The greatest weakness of Quinn's essay is his methodology. Rather than drawing upon source materials documenting Mormon political action, Quinn infers hierarchical orchestration based upon the Church's organizational structure coupled with the voting pattern and political actions of Mormons at the regional level. In addition, the use of charged language such as "political hysteria," "plausible denial," and "homophobia" to describe the actions and motivations of the LDS leadership is also distracting (133, 138, 139).

The other essays in part one will provide those unfamiliar with the history of the First Amendment and Utah's political history with some valuable insight, but most offer little original scholarship and are not heavily grounded in primary source material. For example, the essay by television journalist Rod Decker, titled "The LDS Church and Utah Politics: Five Stories and Some Observations," is devoted to offering various episodes of the Church's encounter with politics since the 1890s. These

included Moses Thatcher's 1895 senatorial campaign, Reed Smoot and the Federal Bunch's support of Prohibition in 1916, Utah's support of Prohibition and the New Deal in the 1930s, Legislative Reapportionment in the 1950s, and the Church's 1970s national anti-ERA campaign. Unfortunately, the essay lacks a strong interpretive thesis to direct the reader and give a purpose for the inclusion of each vignette. Moreover, these episodes have been examined elsewhere in much greater depth.

The essay authored by former Utah governor Calvin L. Rampton, "Toleration of Religious Sentiment: Helping It Work from the Governor's Chair," presents a simplistic view of Utah's political past and demonstrates a lack of familiarity with the secondary source literature on the subject. However, the article's value is in the portions describing his personal recollections of the relationship of the LDS Church with state politics during his own administration.

With the exception of University of Utah emeritus law professor Edwin B. Firmage's article "Why Did the Watchdogs Never Bark?" which argues that the moral influence of religion is essential to good governance, most of the essays in part two perceive the LDS Church's influence as a malignant force upon Utah society. Though the chapters in this section are intended to discuss social issues, most contain extensive historical components. These essays are not strongly rooted in primary or secondary research—a major weakness of this section of the book. For example, former owner of the *Salt Lake Tribune* John W. Gallivan Sr.'s essay "The Other Voice in Utah: The Role of the *Salt Lake Tribune*" recounts the historical impact of that newspaper in Utah but draws solely upon O. N. Malmquist's book *The First Hundred Years: A History of the Salt Lake Tribune*.

In at least one instance, additional secondary source research could have resulted in a more refined analysis. In "The Ethics of Marginalization: The Utah Example," John J. Flynn, the Hugh B. Brown Professor of Law Emeritus and Professor of Law at the University of Utah, describes the political marginalization of non-Mormons and non-Republicans in Utah. Flynn's underlying assumption is that the LDS Church is the sole reason for the recent dominance of the Republican Party in Utah. To the contrary, Utah historian Thomas G. Alexander demonstrated that the GOP dominance in Utah has been a far more complex evolution, involving economic and political developments in Utah and the greater American West.¹

Other essays in part two, however, offer valuable and interesting perspectives relating to religion, politics, and society in Utah. For example, "The Only Game in Town?: An ACLU Perspective," by Stephen C. Clark, Professor of Law at the University of Utah and former Legal Director of

the ACLU of Utah, offers an insightful account of the ACLU's perceived role in the controversy surrounding the LDS purchase of a segment of Main Street in Salt Lake City in 1999.

In the essays "Living a Jewish Life in Utah Society," and "A Muslim Family in Utah," Frederick L. Wenger, Rabbi Emeritus at Kol Ami, and Maqbool Ahmed, a prominent business owner in Midvale, describe life in Utah from the Jewish and Muslim perspectives respectively. These essays provide a unique, and seldom heard, view of life in the Beehive State. However, discussions of the impact of the LDS Church on politics as it relates to their experiences are limited.

Coming mostly from the political left and from non-Mormon perspectives, *God and Country* succeeds at advancing numerous views and ideas concerning the impact of the LDS Church and its members on politics in Utah. Though some have a polemical tone, the essays generally will expand readers' understanding of both current and historical issues. Unfortunately, the unbalanced scholarship prevents this work from becoming essential reading for scholars interested in Utah's political history.

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1. Thomas G. Alexander, "The Emergence of a Republican Majority in Utah, 1970–1992," in *Politics in the Postwar American West*, ed. Richard Lowitt (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 260–76.