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## Diary of Two Mad Black Mormons: Finding the Lord's Lessons in Everyday Life

Sydney Hughes

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dramatic Church unit growth in the world. This does not surprise Stewart, because his research-based prescriptions for increased growth follow this “go slow” model.

It is unclear how well received Stewart's ideas are in the Missionary Department in Salt Lake City. His suggestions may be exactly the right course for those churches with robust growth as their only priority, but the Church also seems committed to expending limited resources on reactivation (by definition less useful in growing church numbers than proselytizing for new members), redeeming the dead, and retaining its members by investing vast time and personnel resources in youth and adult programs designed to build faith and by extension prevent LDS disaffiliation. Other factors may be involved: Does the Church simply send missionaries to whatever countries show the most potential for growth, or do they also focus on countries with financial and political stability? Does pioneer heritage, presumed Book of Mormon geography, “blood of Israel” considerations, and eschatological beliefs drive resource allocation?

For any serious Church growth statistics nerd, these volumes are not only indispensable; they are now the only game in town. These publications appear to be a self-financed labor of love, written by an orthopedic surgeon assisted by a clinical psychology graduate student. It would be a mistake to dismiss these publications by pointing out that Stewart and Martinich are not professionally trained demographers, missiologists, or sociologists. Stewart and Martinich have done their homework in these areas. At present, they stand virtually alone by publishing serious work in what could be a much more well-developed area of study.

—Eric Eliason

*Diary of Two Mad Black Mormons: Finding the Lord's Lessons in Everyday Life*, by Zandra Vranes and Tamu Smith (Salt Lake City: Ensign Peak, 2014).

Zandra Vranes and Tamu Smith met through Genesis, a support group for black Mormons. As they moved to separate states, they created their blog *Sistas in Zion* to keep in touch, but it soon grew in popularity and they've been “chattin' about church ever since” (xiii). Vranes and Smith, the sistas in Zion, have become very well known on the Mormon blogging scene and now co-host *Sistas in Zion* Radio. *The Diary of Two Mad Black Mormons* is their first book. Together they have sought to document their experiences of faith and humor as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This book contains entries from their blog that deal with themes of faith, courage, family, and service. They do not write specifically about race, although their life experiences come out in their writing. Especially poignant is a story in which one sista learned that letting go is not a sign of weakness as she finally forgave a boy who had assaulted her years before. As she changed her thought process from seeking revenge to seeking the Lord, she realized that forgiveness is not about winning or losing, but that “letting go means living in God's promise” (141). Their writing style is highly personal and revealing, and their entries include entertaining childhood experiences, heart-wrenching essays, and uplifting gospel musings.

Though not explicitly connected, *Diary of Two Mad Black Mormons* follows closely the approach of the Church's “I'm a Mormon” campaign, which might be seen as an answer to a recent trend: audiences today are often more open to the voices of ordinary people than to institutional messaging.

This book specifically provides personal insights from an LDS minority group regarding how their faith applies to and influences everyday life. This collection of memoirs, published by a nationally focused imprint of Deseret Book, is well suited to any audience seeking to be equally entertained and uplifted.

—Sydney Hughes

*Conversations with Mormon Historians*, edited by Alexander L. Baugh and Reid L. Neilson (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015).

“For a boy growing up on a small farm in northern Utah, it would be quite amazing if I am remembered at all. I’ve had an exciting life. In lots of ways, it’s a life I did not fully dream of when I was thinning sugar beets—better than I could have hoped, I think,” (274) says Kenneth W. Godfrey about his experience being a career historian. For the historians who work hard to ensure that people of the past are remembered, *Conversations with Mormon Historians* works hard to ensure that the historians themselves are remembered also.

This book is a compilation of interviews with some of the eminent past-generation Latter-day Saint historians—interviewed by some of the eminent LDS historians of this generation. Because both the interviewers and the interviewees have a deep adoration for Mormon history, the comradery between the scholars is palpable upon the book’s pages. The list of

distinguished historians interviewed includes Thomas G. Alexander, James B. Allen, Richard Lloyd Anderson, Milton V. Backman Jr., LaMar C. Berrett, Claudia L. Bushman, Richard L. Bushman, Kenneth W. Godfrey, Dean C. Jessee, Stanley B. Kimball, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Robert J. Matthews, Max H. Parkin, Charles S. Peterson, Larry C. Porter, and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. Each historian brings different interests, ideas, personalities, and experiences to the book—and each makes the book an enjoyable and enlightening read.

Each chapter focuses on a different historian and includes questions about the historian’s childhood, family, education, and career. The interviewed historians have a talent for taking the reader back in time through their stories. Milton V. Backman states, “I believe that history is fascinating because it is a series of stories. It is something more than just dates. It is life experiences. It’s unfolding the past. It’s reconstructing patterns of living” (124). These historians have lived long and full lives, and the pages within the book deeply and richly unfold the past through their personal narratives. It is appropriate to acknowledge that these historians—who have spent their lives studying the histories of others—have, in turn, made history themselves. The book is filled with funny anecdotes, impressive accomplishments, and spiritual moments. Overall, *Conversations with Mormon Historians* is an informative and lighthearted read for anyone interested in any aspect of history.

—Allyson Jones