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Dave Hall, *A Faded Legacy: Amy Brown Lyman and Mormon Women's Activism, 1872-1959*

Reviewed by Susan Sessions Rugh

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Dave Hall. *A Faded Legacy: Amy Brown Lyman and Mormon Women's Activism, 1872–1959*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2015.

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IN THIS LONG-AWAITED BIOGRAPHY OF AMY BROWN LYMAN, author Dave Hall capably sets her life in the context of what he calls the “Second Generation” of Mormon women, the daughters of the pioneers. Raised in the Victorian age, Lyman and her cohorts became progressives whose goal was to build up a church social service agency inside the Relief Society. Hall also contends that Lyman’s life is a case study of the rise and fall of Mormon women’s tradition of activism in the early twentieth century.

The book opens with a short essay, “Mormon Women in an American Context.” Then Hall sets the stage for the women’s emerging activism by tracing Lyman’s life from girlhood to marriage. Her education at Brigham Young University, early teaching career, and marriage to engineering professor Richard Lyman led her to be trained in the methods of the modern social work movement. Inspired by social work pioneers such as Jane Addams and Frances Perkins, Lyman and her cohorts envisioned the Relief Society as a vehicle for modern social work.

In Part 2 (chapters 3–5), Hall examines the rise of women’s activism by chronicling Lyman’s service to the Relief Society as board member and secretary to the president. Lyman and her friends adapted the methods of women’s club organizations to their work of promoting church charity work. The Smith-Lever Agricultural Extension Act in 1914 spurred the Relief Society to promote home economics activities, and in the wake of the Sheppard-Towner Act (1921), the Relief Society focused its efforts on improving infant and maternal health. A true progressive, Lyman successfully ran for the state legislature and was an active member of the National Council of Women and developed a national reputation in social work. The unexpected death of her son’s

wife from illness in 1925, followed by her son's own accidental death, left the care of their daughter in Lyman's hands. From that time forward, Amy Kathryn was raised by her grandparents.

In the final four chapters, Hall explains why the movement of Mormon women's social activism waned. Lyman's personal power within the Relief Society organization was diminished by serious health problems and changes in leadership to those who did not favor women's social activism. During the Depression, the LDS Church appropriated the social service workers to help with its welfare program, and Lyman's well-trained workers found jobs in state agencies. By April 1936 the church's welfare plan had displaced the Relief Society's program, and the women lost all control of poor relief to priesthood leadership committees. Lyman was removed from the scene in September 1936 when her apostle husband was abruptly called to be president of the British Mission and de facto leader of all non-US missions. She taught social work principles at mission leadership conferences and worked to adapt Utah-oriented curriculum to the European church. The Lymans, granddaughter in tow, had a chance to rub shoulders with British elites and tour the capitals of Europe.

The public image of this Mormon power couple jaunting about Europe disguised their troubled marriage. When Amy Lyman was called home in 1938 on the eve of World War II, her years of preparation culminated in her ascendancy to the long-coveted position of Relief Society president. Hall argues that although J. Reuben Clark's advocacy of domesticity and piety curtailed Lyman's ambitions, they were derailed as much by wartime conditions. The scandal of her husband's extramarital affair and excommunication in November 1943 further diluted her influence, and her term ended in April 1945. For Amy, it was a tragic fall from grace, the end of her ambitions, and, in Hall's view, a faded legacy.

As Hall intended, the biography of Lyman provides a window into the birth and stunted development of Mormon women's activism. Their ambitions were audacious, and that they never fully achieved autonomy should not distract us from recognizing all that they did accomplish in

furthering the health and welfare of women and children. In hindsight, the women's voluntary social programs were not robust enough to deal with the devastating effects of the Depression. Women's voluntary social work was being eclipsed by paid professionals and a federal state committed to a broad safety net for its citizens. Still, the loss of oversight of welfare work to priesthood committees remains a sore spot in Mormon women's history.

Beyond the book's significance as a biography, it contributes to the study of Mormon women's activism, the Relief Society, and the growth of the welfare state. Hall's work illuminates the history of the early twentieth-century church as it transitioned from its pioneer past to its future role as an American church in an era of global Christianity. The book is informative and well researched, but not all smooth sailing. The convoluted sentence structure tends to put the brakes on the narrative drive, and the book bears the marks of a dissertation as it labors to set Lyman's story into a wider context.

Underneath the public façade, the private life of Amy Brown Lyman still remains in the shadows. Hall relies extensively on interviews to ferret out the details of her private life, but the reader is not fully satisfied that we know why the marital disaster occurred. We have here only her side of the story, and that in fragments. In public the Lymans were modern, but in private they were constrained by her Victorian attitudes toward sex and his belief that polygamy justified his affair. Unfortunately, Hall does not explicitly solve this puzzle for us, in part because of his sympathy for his subject. Perhaps only when a full biography of Richard Lyman is written will we understand how the couple became so alienated from each other.

Finally, is "faded legacy" the right phrase to describe our view of Lyman? *Faded* implies that time has dimmed our view. Faded maybe, but it might be better to say that her legacy was tarnished by the stain of her husband's infidelity. The successful woman whose husband looks elsewhere for sexual solace is an enduring trope, and we must not be too quick to assign blame. Lyman may not have been a victim of patriarchy, but obviously the limits of her authority were sharply circumscribed by

her sex. Betrayed by her husband, her humanitarian ambitions stymied by powerful male church leaders, her life could be seen as modern tragedy. In any case, her efforts were heroic and deserving of the full history that Hall has written to revive her legacy.

Susan Sessions Rugh is professor of history and dean of Undergraduate Education at Brigham Young University. She specializes in the history of tourism in twentieth-century America. Her book *Are We There Yet? The Golden Age of American Family Vacations* (2008) received national attention for moving beyond nostalgia to tell the history of a middle-class summer ritual. She is currently writing *No Vacancy: The Rise and Fall of American Motels*, about family-owned businesses in an expanding tourist economy.

Ignacio M. García. *Chicano While Mormon: Activism, War, and Keeping the Faith*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015.

Reviewed by Rudy V. Busto

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THE *WHILE* IN THE TITLE OF IGNACIO GARCÍA'S MEMOIR is an interesting, if ambivalent, word choice. Written by an accomplished and well-regarded BYU professor of Western American and Latino history, *Chicano While Mormon* is the first installment of a planned series of self-disclosing volumes, the rare Chicano voice in the vast corpus of Mormon autobiography. Forgoing a more neutral "Chicano and Mormon" as his title, García intends *While* to convey the notion of simultaneity ("Chicano *and at the same time* Mormon"), although his story suggests a contrastive sense ("Chicano *even if* Mormon"). *Chicano While Mormon's* time span covers García's family roots on the Mexican