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Early Mormon Perceptions of Contemporary America: 1830–1846

Grant Underwood

Since scholarly study of Mormon history parted company with polemics several decades ago, historians have become increasingly interested in locating Mormonism within the social, intellectual, and religious geography of Jacksonian America.¹ Over the years much has been learned about how antebellum Americans perceived their "curious" counterparts, but far less has been documented about the reverse. It is still largely terra incognita.² One proponent of social history, Christopher Lasch, has criticized Mormon historians for "detaching their subject from its surroundings."³ It seems clear that one of the best ways to relink the Saints with those surroundings would be to examine their perceptions of the ideas, institutions, and events that constituted the Age of Jackson. Extensive scrutiny of early Mormon primary sources ranging from periodicals and pamphlets to letters and diaries has revealed that the Saints commented on a wide variety of secular as well as sectarian aspects of nineteenth-century society.⁴ This paper, however, samples five such strands of their cultural and intellectual history—the Mormon response to contemporary medicine, polite society, reform movements, science, and perfectionism.

MORMONS AND MEDICINE

As it entered the second quarter of the nineteenth century, American medicine was still the embattled site of conflicting theories. No suitable body of comprehensive theory had as yet been developed, and a great many ailments remained uncured. The lack of regulatory laws and the embarrassing variations in standards combined to undermine public confidence. It was in this context that a number of exotic nostrums were invented in the name of science. In addition, an approach of more ancient vintage—botanic medicine—achieved a dramatic resurgence sparked by an enterprising New Jersey farmer, Samuel Thomson. The notion that the art of healing had its origin in the woods rather than in the university appealed to the common
man. If the forest was still the best medical school, then anyone who purchased and perused Thomson’s manual could tap its secrets and cure themselves. For some Saints, at least, modern scripture seemed to sanction such natural approaches within the proper framework. To the Saint who might have missed or misinterpreted the Book of Mormon reference to “the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared to remove the cause of diseases” (Alma 46:40), an 1831 revelation elaborated: “And whosoever among you are sick, and have not faith to be healed, but believe, shall be nourished with all tenderness, with herbs and mild food” (D&C 42:43, italics added).

Clearly, though, there was a prioritization of cures. Joseph Smith reminded Nauvoo Saints “to trust in God when sick, and not in an arm of flesh, and live by faith and not by medicine.” While the power of the priesthood was paramount in the Prophet’s mind, he was not fanatical. The suffering Saint who had called for the Elders and was still not healed was “to use herbs and mild food.”

If the medical monopoly was generally shunned by the Saints, Thomsonian and eclectic herbal cures abounded. Frederick G. Williams, member of the First Presidency, styled himself a “botanic physician” and regularly ran a full column ad in the Kirtland weekly Northern Times. It advertised the complete line of “Dr. Samuel Thomson’s Vegetable Medicine,” including an impressive array of vegetable elixirs, bitters, antibilious pills, peach cordial, and nerve powder. In addition, Williams developed his own cure for the “fever and ague” so common among frontiersmen in the alluvial plains and river bottoms of the upper Mississippi valley. It was even endorsed by a satisfied customer: “I hereby certify, that I have taken Dr. Williams’ Vegetable Ague Drops, after having been afflicted more than 7 months, and . . . found immediate relief, and an effectual cure.” Realizing the liabilities that certainly could have accompanied such homespun remedies, one appreciates his closing comment: “I am happy to add, that my system is not in the least impaired from any effects produced by said medicine.”

The basis of botanic medicine suggested still another approach to the problem of ill health: dietary reform. Although the Word of Wisdom has elsewhere received considerable coverage, less divine direction occasionally found its way into print. The following appeared in the Nauvoo-based Times and Seasons under the caption “Important”:

Dr. Bennett is of the opinion that most of the bilious affections to which our citizens are subjected during the hot season, can be prevented by the free use of the Tomato—we are of the same opinion, and as health is essential to our happiness and prosperity as a people, we would earnestly recommend its culture to our fellow-citizens, and its general use for culinary purposes. Do not neglect it.
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If it seems farfetched to the modern mind, Russel Nye reminds us, "There were so many common nagging ills the doctors could not cure . . . that the ordinary man could hardly be blamed for trying something which promised relief."10 Like other rural Americans, most Mormons were prevented by the lack of cash and confidence from patronizing orthodox medicine during this period. They did not, however, swing the pendulum to the other extreme of faith-healing fanaticism. Rather, the Saints' blend of priesthood blessings and basic botanical cures seems to bespeak moderation and practicality.

MORMONS AND POLITE SOCIETY

Moderation and practicality are also discernible in Mormon perceptions of such facets of polite society as clothing and attire. Significant in this light is Sidney Rigdon's 1836 analysis of contemporary dress:

Indeed among some that would be called wise . . . they think that the cut of their coat and the shape of their hat is of great importance and has a considerable to do with their salvation; hence we have to this day the broad brimmed hat and the long tailed coat, and the vest with skirts, worn as a badge of righteousness; but let the saints know assuredly that their righteousness does not consist in putting on some old antiquated dress: but in enterprise in accomplishing the will of God.11

This is not to say that extravagance was indulged, but Mormons clearly permitted and even encouraged modest fashion. In the same article, Rigdon asked the Saints how they ever contemplated fulfilling their prophetic destiny to become Zion and the showplace of the earth if they wore "apparel untastefully arranged."12 Fortunately, the likes of tailor Peter Whitmer, Sr., were on hand for just such needs, promising the "Latest Fashions" and "neat fits" for all.13

Sometimes, however, a fit could be a little too neat, as, for instance, in the case of the cursed corset. "Of every thousand females who die of consumption," warned the Times and Seasons, "over three-fourths are sacrificed by the prevailing false ideas of beauty of form produced by the continued practice of tight lacing."14

Another inherent feature of Mormonism becomes visible by examining the Saints' pre-Utah perceptions of contemporary recreation and "amusements." An 1833 revelation promised that the Lord would "give unto the faithful line upon line and precept upon precept" (D&C 98:12), and such is plainly manifest in the maturing Mormon position towards recreation. In 1835, the Church newspaper Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate renounced "the frivolous practice of playing ball" as something liable to "bring reproach upon the glorious cause of our Redeemer."15 Two years later, no less distinguished a group

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of Church leaders than the Presidents of the seventies met together in council and resolved, "That we discard the practice of ball-playing, wrestling, jumping and all such low and degrading amusements and . . . have no fellowship with any member of our quorum who indulges himself in the practice of such things."16 By 1844, however, John Taylor, editor of the *Times and Seasons*, would be able to write that "wrestling, running, climbing, dancing, or anything that has a tendency to circulate the blood is not injurious, but must rather be considered beneficial to the human system, if pursued in moderation."17 What had happened? It seems clear that by the Nauvoo period, Joseph Smith himself, never burdened by overpious inhibitions,18 had clarified that contrary to the religious upbringing of many converts, athletics, dancing, and appropriate dramatic and musical events were not inherently evil. As T. Edgar Lyon explained, "This released the Saints from old mores and gave them a new sense of freedom. It opened new avenues for finding refreshing diversion in activities many had been taught were the works of Satan."19 An obvious caveat, then, for students of early Mormonism is caution in labeling as "Mormon" what might only have been a Calvinistic carryover surfaced occasionally until corrected by revelation or prophetic fiat.

The fact that by the 1840s Mormonism was opening formerly forbidden paths did not, however, make them any easier for some to walk in. Orson Hyde's delightful reminiscence of Parley P. Pratt's adventure in adjustment provides the classic example. Hyde recalled how "trammelled" his fellow Apostle's mind was when dancing was first introduced in Nauvoo: "I observed brother Parley standing in the figure, and he was making no motion particularly, only up and down. Says I, 'Brother Parley, why don't you move forward?' Says he, 'When I think which way I am going, I forget the step; and when I think of the step, I forget which way to go.'"20

If dancing was no longer evil, evil use could still be made of it. As a large river town, Nauvoo attracted a sizable gentile population, and not all diversions were either conducted or sanctioned by the Saints. A concerned father wrote a letter to the editor of the *Times and Seasons* asking about the propriety of "balls and dancing as it has lately existed in our city." The reply forthrightly distinguishes between evil by nature and evil by association. Consistent with a Mormon concern for scriptural sanction, John Taylor cites various biblical precedents for dancing and then concludes:

As an abstract principle . . . we have no objections to it; but when it leads people into bad company and causes them to keep untimely hours, it has a tendency to enervate and weaken the system and leads to profligate and intemperate habits. And so far as it does this . . . it is injurious to society, and corrupting to the morals of youth."21
Besides, he added, "Solomon says that 'there is a time to dance,' but that time is not at eleven or twelve o'clock at night, nor at one [or] two . . . in the morning."

The tension between appropriate and inappropriate amusements ultimately required a policy statement from the Quorum of the Twelve who had been leading the Church since the Prophet's death. "If the people were righteous," wrote Brigham Young, "it would do to dance, and to have music, feasting and merriment. But what fellowship has Christ with Belial? . . . All amusements in which saints and sinners are mingled tend to corruption." The conclusion, therefore, was inescapable: "So far at least as the members of the church are concerned, we would advise that balls, dances, and other vain and useless amusements be neither countenanced nor patronized." 22

Occasionally, even Mormon events crossed the line of propriety. In the days before elaborate newspaper advertising, points of interest or special events might be heralded by a staged theatrical or musical exhibition. 23 In late 1844, the Nauvoo library decided to put on a theatrical exhibition in an attempt to renew interest in its presence. The trustees employed several local youth as actors for the evening. One of them recorded the aftereffects: "The next day brother Brigham blew up everything that had evil consequences attending it and frequent exhibitions among the rest." 24

Another contemporary conveyer of "evil consequences" was the novel. As pointedly as any Puritan primer, the Messenger and Advocate warned that novel reading led to "lightness and lechery." 25 Even in the later Nauvoo years, one had to look hard to find what few novels there were in the holdings of the library. 26 The problem was that Mormons, like other Americans, liked their literature to be didactic. An 1832 revelation had admonished them to seek "words of wisdom" out of the "best books" (D&C 88:118), and novels never seemed to qualify. In the words of a John Taylor editorial, they were "as destitute of truth, true science and practical knowledge as Satan's promises were to Eve." Why, continued Taylor, "read the fancied brains of disappointed men and women, and then go the theatre; and ten to one, but you will be just like them." 27

In denouncing social and artistic evils of the day, the Saints were little different from other religious groups. 28 What was unique, however, was that they recognized redeeming value in some amusements and modified them to suit themselves, appropriating for their own use purged versions of what, in other settings, had been the objects of their scorn.

MORMONS AND REFORMISM

Historians have long considered the reform impulse of the early 1800s as one of the major characteristics of antebellum America. These
attempts to shape and transform the national character took many forms and touched nearly every facet of life as they swept across most of the country in the decades preceding the Civil War. Gerald Grob and George A. Billias summarized the prevailing sentiment: "No problem was so difficult that it could not be solved; and no evil was so extreme as to be ineradicable." 29

The Mormons, however, uniformly opposed the reform societies of the day. In their eyes, reformism, whatever its laudable objectives, was destined to fail because it ignored scriptural eschatology. "Though they were ten times as vigilant and their reformations ten to one," explained the Evening and the Morning Star, "still when the Savior comes the people will be as they were in the days of Noah." 30 The intimate relationship between millennialism, revivalism, and reformism is a commonplace. Charles G. Finney, perhaps the most famous contemporary crusader for Christ, confidently predicted, "If the Church will do her duty [and by that he meant to reform and regenerate mankind] the millennium may come in this country in three years." 31 While early Mormons shared Finney's faith in the imminence of Christ's coming, they did not endorse his postmillennialism since they believed that the Bible nowhere spoke of the wholesale reformation of man before the Second Advent. "The ignorance of the religious teachers of the day," wrote Sidney Rigdon, "never appeared more glaring in any thing than in an attempt to create a Millennium by converting this generation." 32 To the Mormons, reformism was a tragic waste—like a climber who spends time and energy to scale the mountain only to discover he has climbed the wrong one.

But even if reform had been the right answer, the organizations of the Benevolent Empire were not the right agents. The Evening and the Morning Star reminded its readers of:

The perfect folly of all the pretended reformations of ancient and modern times, when there were not inspired men at the head of them, both apostles and prophets; for without such, the God of heaven never at any time produced a reformation, nor did he ever bring back an apostate race at any time, by any other means, than by raising up and inspiring men from on high. 33

To think otherwise was ludicrous. With obvious satire, the Messenger and Advocate remarked, "God has done his work and we don't need any more prophets. We have Bible societies, missionary societies, abolition of slavery societies and temperance societies to convert the world and bring in the Millennium." 34

Thomas G. Alexander recently argued that "one method which promises a great deal in furthering our understanding of Joseph Smith and Mormonism is what Robert Berkhofer has called 'behavioralism.' This is the technique of analyzing a particular set of experiences by
Looking at them through the eyes of the actors.'

Through the use of such a technique in this study, it seems clear that to place Mormonism within the realm of contemporary reform movements, as David B. Davis has recently done, violates both the reasoning and rhetoric of the Saints and, thus, presents a major misreading of Mormonism.

MORMONS AND SCIENCE

In the days before Darwin forced geologists to joust with Genesis, Benjamin Silliman—Yale professor of chemistry, mineralogy, and natural history—would customarily commence his classes by paying homage to religion. 'It is,' he would say, 'at the head of all science. It is the only revealed one, and it is necessary to give a proper use and direction to all the others.' Such sentiments were widespread in antebellum America. As George Daniels has observed, 'It was generally held, by scientists and laymen alike, that one of the Scientists' main duties was to demonstrate the 'entire harmony' between nature and revelation.'

Mormon efforts to bring about such a marriage began early and have continued, undaunted even by Darwin, down to the present day. An early example was Parley P. Pratt's *Times and Seasons* article 'Philosophy of the Resurrection.' Consistent with contemporary usage, Pratt employs the word *philosophy* as essentially synonymous with *science* and characterizes the debate over a physical resurrection as the conflict between 'philosophical objections' and sectarian superstition. He refuses to take refuge in the easiest answer that God's ways are beyond human understanding and quickly dismisses religionists' efforts 'to throw a veil of sacredness over the whole subject, as if it were a mystery to be believed without the possibility of understanding it.' He then settles into a rigorous attempt at reconciling natural laws with a bodily resurrection. His conclusion would have earned him honors had he been in one of Silliman's science classes. 'Every truth in theology,' Pratt declared, 'and every truth in philosophy mutually strengthen, illustrate and confirm each other.'

In a cosmology such as that, miracles, as commonly conceived, had no place. 'Hast thou seen no miracle,' queried Pratt. 'Yes, it was all miraculous . . . but it was all upon the most natural, easy, simple, and plain principles of nature in its varied order.' An 1832 revelation had already given resonance to such Newtonian notions when it explained that 'there is no space in which there is no kingdom . . . and unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions' (D&C 88:37–38).

When a brilliant comet blazed across the American skies in March of 1843, Millerites saw it as a sign of the end of the world. On the other hand, certain Bostonians raised $25,000 to buy a telescope...
for Harvard. Irving Bartlett, in his study of the American mind at midcentury, cites the latter as an example of a “growing secular-mindedness, a growing tendency, among educated people at least, to look for natural causes behind even the most extraordinary events.”

The Mormons, however, combined both mentalities, and the union is nowhere more obvious than in two back-to-back articles in the Times and Seasons. Orson Pratt, early Mormon Apostle and scientist, published a very sophisticated article dealing with the astronomical phenomena halos and parhelia. What others would have seen as strange and wonderful heaven-sent signs “doubtless owe their origin,” concluded Pratt, “to the refraction of the sun’s rays through the minute, though differently shaped prismatic crystals of ice and snow, which float in the atmosphere.” Editor John Taylor’s “Signs of the Times” article followed as an intelligent and faithful defense of both Christ and the crystals. “Many of these signs,” he admitted, “can be explained on philosophical principle, and no doubt but all of them could, if we were only sufficiently acquainted with the philosophy of the heavens. But this does not alter the principle that is taught by our Savior, as being a criterion whereby the saints are to judge of the signs of the times.”

That there was a science or philosophy to the heavens had earlier been made clear. In principle, the idea could have emanated from the Enlightenment, but Mormonism left its mark upon it by providing a unique twist rooted in the Restoration and speaking hope to the common man. “Whether considering the creation of a world, the blossoming of a flower . . . or the resurrection of the body, all these,” declared Parley P. Pratt, “were too sublime for an archangel to comprehend by his own capacity,” and yet even “the simplest [mental] capacity . . . aided by the Spirit of God” could understand them all. In the Mormon mind, then, the Holy Ghost was every man’s key to the wonders of the universe as well as theology, but every man had to acquire it in the same divinely designated way by becoming a fellow-citizen with the Saints. In an era in which monopolies roused Jacksonian rhetoric to grandiloquent heights, the notion that God dispensed the Holy Ghost solely through Mormon elders promised little popularity. Nonetheless, determined disciples would not dilute what they considered a cornerstone of restored religion. Foreshadowing similar sentiments expressed by Joseph Smith to Martin Van Buren, the Messenger and Advocate announced, “It is the gift of the Holy Ghost . . . which makes the difference, and it is this alone, and the society which has this power are the people of God and those who have not are not.”

MORMONS AND PERFECTIONISM

Just how deeply the role and value of the Spirit was embedded into the very warp and woof of Mormonism becomes evident in
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...turning to their perceptions of perfectionism. In the estimation of Sydney Ahlstrom, the doctrine of Christian perfection was John Wesley's "most original contribution to Protestant theology" and one of the Methodist denomination's "most distinctive features." Spilling over into secular as well as sectarian concerns, perfectionism had currency far beyond the camp meeting. Such was its pervasiveness, subtle and explicit, that some church historians have called the early nineteenth century "the Methodist Age." Significantly, the Mormons consistently condemned the doctrine. What is even more revealing was their rationale for doing so. It was not the possibility of perfection or even the fact that some claimed to have achieved it in mortal flesh that bothered the Saints. Rather, it was the Protestant procedure. The Mormon periodical Gospel Reflector decried the "hypocrisy" of professing perfection and yet at the same time denying the very vehicle for achieving it—"the gifts and graces of the gospel." If the gifts of the Spirit had long since ceased to exist among men, then so had the possibility of perfection.

Perfection in the Mormon mind was more than the absence of sin; it was the acquisition of power. "Perfection," wrote Sidney Rigdon, "consists in putting [men] in possession of the powers of the Deity." For the Saints, God's spiritual gifts to man were not only vital proofs of the Church's divinity, but the very essence of their ability to become perfected. The process was as ancient as it was irrevocable. "It will be seen," explained Rigdon, "that as soon as the gospel was received, the power which was according to their heirship began to be exercised by them, and kept increasing, and increasing, until they had power over water, and over fire, and could command the very elements...and they would obey them." Ultimately, these endowments of the Spirit culminated in making them "par takers of all power, in heaven and on earth" and therefore "joint heirs with Christ"—in a word, perfect.

Whether discussing the pathway to perfection, or the errors of certain antebellum "isms," the early Saints consistently pointed to the Holy Ghost as their sine qua non. If there is value in a behavioralist approach to Mormonism, it is in bringing to light what was so obvious to the participants and yet so apparently elusive to later observers. When Joseph Smith was asked how his church differed from others, he did not mention communitarian experiments, latent theocracy, or religious authoritarianism. Nor did he focus on new scripture or his own prophetic role, though he could appropriately have discussed any one of them. Instead, he singled out the Holy Ghost, the hub from which all other facets of Mormonism, as so many spokes, drew strength and meaning.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

By way of summary, at least three elements of early Mormonism have been discernible in the present study. First, the Mormons were concerned with moderation and flexibility whether in their approach to sickness or society. Where dogmatists died or fanatics faded, the Mormon middle course made the Church one of the most viable and vital churches to emerge out of the early nineteenth century. Second, Mormons should not be placed within the reformist tradition since it was antithetical to their basic theology. And third, the Saints’ view of the quintessential role of the Holy Ghost informed their perceptions of and reactions to various secular philosophies and features of contemporary America.

Undergirding it all, however, was a bedrock belief in the scriptures. This not only served as the basis for their doctrine, but also as their standard of judgment for all things secular or sectarian. If Paul said that in the last days perilous times would come, if the Savior said that the world immediately preceding his coming would be as wicked as it was in the days of Noah, then it was the duty of every Mormon elder and editor to disclose the overwhelming evidence that such an age was upon them. Thus, their refutation of reform societies and perfectionism, both optimistic by nature, sprang not from the brooding pessimism of dissatisfied souls displaced in society, but rather from a perceived incompatibility with the scriptures. Revelation, ancient or modern, was the ultimate touchstone of truth for the Mormons. Even if the burden of contemporary evidence pointed to the contrary, faithful Saints dismissed it as merely one more example of the discrepancy in judgment between inspired and uninspired men. For them, prophecy was irrevocable history in reverse.

There are those, however, who hold to what might be called the “alienation thesis” as an explanation of Mormonism and its origins. “The people who joined Mormonism,” declared Klaus Hansen, “were by and large... those who had suffered more than most Americans from the dislocations of an America in ferment.”52 The problem with this imaginative thesis is that in some ways it is little more than imaginary. How can it be advanced that the Saints had been displaced if, as a recent demographic study suggests, the majority were never “in place?”53 Where is the evidence that in the age of individualism men blamed their misfortunes on society rather than on themselves? Even more importantly, though, is that a careful scrutiny of primary sources nowhere suggests that the Saints saw themselves as victimized outcasts soured on a society that had cut them out of their fair share. On the contrary, they wanted nothing to do with Babylon. “Gather ye out” (D&C 133:7) was the watchcry.
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If, then, in certain ways the Mormons do not reflect the characteristic Jacksonian ethos, should a fit be forced? Does it not seem more reasonable to argue that the Mormons were motivated more by the Holy Book than the pocketbook? "For every gentleman who read a learned pamphlet," reports Gordon Wood, "there were dozens of ordinary people who read the Bible and looked to their ministers for an understanding of what was happening in America." In an era when the religious press was growing more rapidly than the secular press, can the influence of the religious idea be ignored? The conclusion seems inescapable. Above all else, Mormons were a profoundly religious people for whom God's revealed word was preeminent as the shaper and fashioner of thought and deed, meaning and destiny.

NOTES


2Richard D. Poll notes, in "Nauvoo and the New Mormon History: A Bibliographical Survey," Journal of Mormon History 5 (1978): 117, that for the Nauvoo period the nonpolitical secular aspects have received little attention and that "social history is sparse." This is even more true for the first decade of LDS church history as is revealed by a survey of the annual "Mormon Bibliography" published in Brigham Young University Studies. Most social history deals with the later Utah period for which sources seem more plentiful.


4My research thus far has turned up some thirty facets of antebellum America that drew more than passing mention from the Saints. It should also be noted that all but four of these categories deal with nonpolitical secular features.


7Northern Times (Kirtland Ohio), 2 December 1835.

8The major work is still Paul H. Peterson, "An Historical Analysis of the Word of Wisdom." (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972).

9Times and Seasons 2 (1 May 1847): 404.

10Nye, Society and Culture in America, 344.

11Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate 3 (December 1836): 422.

12Ibid., 421.

13Northern Times. 2 December 1835.

14Times and Seasons 2 (15 March 1841): 356. The warning originated from a Boston paper.

15Ibid. 1 (May 1837): 311.

16Times and Seasons 5 (1 March 1844): 459.


*Journal of Discourses* 6:150.

*Times and Seasons* 3 (1 March 1844): 460.

Ibid. 5 (1 October 1844): 669.


Oliver B. Huntington, *Journal*, TS, 22, Library-Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

*Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1 (November 1835): 223.


*Times and Seasons* 5 (1 November 1844): 697.

Farnes, *The Americans*, 564.


*Evening and the Morning Star* 2 (June 1834): 163. The prediction made in the quotation is based on the Savior's words to his disciples recorded in Luke 17:26 and Matthew 24:37.


*Evening and the Morning Star* 2 (June 1834): 163. Postmillennialism is the belief that Jesus will establish his millennial kingdom gradually and largely through human means. Premillennialism, on the other hand, contends that this will do so suddenly, cataclysmically, and supernaturally. Further, in typical millennial typologies, postmillenialists are characterized as reform-minded optimists who believe that the world must first be Christianized before Jesus can return, whereas the premillenialists maintain that, with the exception of the relatively few believers then extant, the world will abound in sin and apostasy when the Savior comes to cleanse it and introduce his kingdom. An excellent starting point for additional study of Christian millennialism is Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977). Especially good on the relationship between reformism, revivalism, and postmillennialism is Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957).

*Evening and the Morning Star* 2 (May 1834): 153. The "Benevolent Empire" is a collective term for the major interdenominational associations and reform societies that grew out of the revitalization of evangelical Protestantism in the years following the Revolutionary War. These societies reflected the contemporary theological emphasis that sin, both personal and societal, could be totally eradicated, and that it was the obligation of every true Christian to continue to struggle against sin by seeking to convert and reform his brother through acts of benevolence. The story of this phase of American church history is told in detail in Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1960); and Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy. The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

*Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (April 1835): 97.


See the David Brion Davis section in chap. 16 of Bernard Bailyn et al., *The Great Republic*, especially 528-41. Davis is not unaware of the differences, but from my present perspective, the differences are more important than the similarities.


Ibid., 222.


*Times and Seasons* 3 (2 May 1842): 769-71.

Ibid., 771.


*Times and Seasons* 4 (1 April 1843): 152.

Ibid., 153.

*Times and Seasons* 3 (2 May 1842): 771.


*Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (January 1836): 245.

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50 Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate 3 (November 1836): 407.
51 Ibid.
52 Klaus Hansen, “Mormonism and American Culture: Some Tentative Hypotheses,” in F. Mark McKiernan, Alma R. Blair, and Paul M. Edwards, eds., *The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History* (Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado Press, 1973), 11-22. My disagreement with the alienation thesis is not that the Saints did not feel alienated, for in their eyes the gospel always alienated Christ’s disciples from the world, but that some students of Mormonism have misread the meaning of this. The basic difference is that I am arguing for the primacy of ideas, whereas Hansen and others stress an implicit economic determinism. From my vantage point, the Saints’ frequent complaints about the evil in all the world are seen as derivative from a scriptural rather than a social or economic source. For the “dislocated” theory to hold, it would have to be shown that the Saints wanted wealth and power in this world. The whole burden of their writings seems to argue the contrary; theirs was an other than worldly concern. It was the “riches of eternity” they sought for and the right to rule with Christ, not for pelf or posts in Babylon.
54 Bailyn et al., *The Great Republic*, 403.