Part 1: Joseph Smith In His Own Time

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A
s scholars look back on Joseph Smith two hundred years after
his birth, several historical questions capture their immediate attention. How was Joseph Smith shaped or constrained by his
moment in history? How much was Joseph Smith a product of his
own time? To what extent can he be explained in terms of the prevail-
ing attitudes of his day? Is it more illuminating to think of him as a
critic or as a product of American culture? Should he be seen as an
American prophet or in a larger world setting? In many areas of his-
torical inquiry, America as an analytical category has been replaced
by transnational analyses that situates everything from the Puritans
to abolition in a larger world context; should Joseph Smith be located
in a broader framework than the national? After all is said and done,
what “world” was the world of Joseph Smith?