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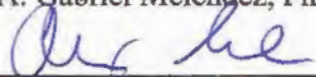
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**IMAGINING THE SAINTS:
REPRESENTATIONS OF MORMONISM
IN AMERICAN CULTURE**

BY

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B. A., English and History, University of Memphis, 1997
M.A., University of Alabama, 2000
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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
American Studies**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May 2011

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DEDICATION

To my family, in the broadest sense of the word

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This dissertation has been many years in the making, and would not have been possible without the assistance of many people.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to address how representations of Mormons in American culture reveal not only key aspects of the history of Mormonism in America but also tell us a great deal about American life and thought since the founding of the religion in 1830 to the present day (2011). Representations are powerful vehicles for creating, shaping, reflecting, and naturalizing society's understanding of religious institutions and revealing cultural concerns and anxieties, and the methodology of this dissertation thus focuses on interdisciplinary analytical critiques of diverse texts to better elucidate the complicated but deeply intertwined history of the Mormon experience in the United States.

I have pursued an interdisciplinary line of inquiry that interrogated how the Latter-day Saints have come to form a communal identity and how non-Mormons have understood and represented Mormons as well as the cultural implications of such representations. The findings of this study indicate that throughout their history, Mormons have often been imagined as an Other by producers of cultural texts in such a way that set them apart. Mormons have also portrayed themselves as a distinct people.

But even more significant is how these diverse imaginings reflect American cultural beliefs and values. Both LDS and non-LDS Americans throughout history have had their own particular anxieties and concerns, and in many cases used Mormonism to address those issues. Cultural representations of Mormonism are important because they are tied into a larger history and a greater narrative about American hopes and dreams, about citizenship and belonging. The ebb and flow of anti-Mormonism and more positive representations says a great deal about the national character and the politics of belonging in a religiously pluralistic nation.

This study untangles the formation of Mormon identity and the story of Mormonism in America by intervening in a dialogue about how the Saints have imagined themselves, and particularly how others have imagined them. The tension seen in pro- and anti-Mormon representations has shaped people's perceptions of the Latter-day Saints and revealed pressing undercurrents in American society. The result of all these Mormon, ex-Mormon, and non-Mormon examples not only gives us an understanding of how Americans imagine Mormons today, but also gives important insights into United States' society and culture for the past 181 years.

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Introduction

Mormonism is multifaceted, diverse, baroque in its effulgence of meanings.

-Richard Lyman Bushman

On the morning of August 10, 1884, a congregation of Latter-day Saints (LDS) gathered in the home of a local convert in rural Middle Tennessee.¹ They were meeting in a home instead of a church because their usual meeting house had been burned down by local vigilantes trying to drive them out of the area. The vigilantes were in line with much of the American populace at the time. They accused the Mormons of teaching and practicing polygamy in Tennessee as well as stealing women from the Southeast to populate their polygamous colonies. Of the charges, the Mormons consistently argued that while they believed in plural marriage, they did not teach or practice it in the South. Two of the elders attending that August church gathering had just completed a tour of the South trying to suppress such rumors. The missionaries had accomplished a great deal in rural areas in particular, and perhaps because of that very success, they were coming under increasing pressure that took the form of everything from verbal intimidation to physical violence.²

Yet Mormons, while certainly not welcoming such external pressure, were hardly strangers to it. From the very founding of the Mormon Church in 1830 by Joseph Smith, Jr., the Latter-day Saints had been under assault of some sort or another. They were called fanatics in New York and driven to Ohio. They lost many of their own number in a financial crisis in Ohio and were driven to Missouri. In Missouri, the governor actually called for their extermination after a series of skirmishes between Mormons and more established Missouri settlers who feared the Mormons' economic and political

cohesiveness. The original settlers also suspected that the Saints would eventually try to end slavery in Missouri, or at the very least bring free blacks into the state. The Latter-day Saints were pushed to Illinois, where they built their own city of Nauvoo, and enjoyed peace for a short while before a mob killed Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum as they sat in a jail in Carthage. Brigham Young rallied the demoralized Saints and began the epic trip west to Utah where the Mormons would build a thriving community against the odds of the harsh terrain. Yet even in a place where the railroad did not reach until 1869, they found little respite. The federal government sent non-Mormons to fill political offices and even marched an army to Utah, concerned about Young's attempts to set up what they saw as a theocracy in the West. Utah had, by 1884, made several unsuccessful attempts at statehood, but a string of legislation attacked the legality of polygamy and the very existence of the Mormon Church and a string of anti-Mormon novels, pamphlets, memoirs, and sermons reflected and urged on that attack. Yet, to the extreme dismay of the anti-Mormons, the Latter-day Saints so thrived that they were able to not only dominate the population of Utah if not the political offices, but they also sent out missionaries into the rest of the United States, and much of the world, to create more converts, and, in the minds of the anti-LDS partisans, to spread polygamy and anti-democratic ideals to a gullible public.³

In short, Mormons were no strangers to opposition on that August 10 day in Tennessee. Just before the church members gathered to worship, in that moment of idle chatter that preceded the service, a group of fifteen masked and armed men burst from the woods and seized the owner of the home. The owner, James Conder, well aware of the threats that had been circulating, called for his son and stepson to get their guns and

defend the Mormon elders, who seemed to be the target of the group. The young men successfully reached their guns, and in the ensuing melee four Mormons lost their lives, the leader of the vigilante group was killed, and one LDS woman was disabled for life.⁴

Newspaper reaction to the Tennessee event was swift, and the majority of stories were sympathetic to the attackers.⁵ None of the other members of the group were ever arrested, and little attempt was made to uncover their identities. The fallout was so great that the Mormons began withdrawing the Southern mission and relocated any LDS Tennessean who was willing to go to the Saints' strongholds in the West. For decades after what came to be known as the "Mormon Massacre," some members of that small community remained on guard for any Mormon missionary activity. The next Mormon baptism in Middle Tennessee would not take place for more than sixty years.⁶

Some one-hundred years after the original event, I stood before the graves of the young men who were killed that day and began the intellectual journey that has led to this dissertation.⁷ Standing there in my hometown, listening to my great-aunt, the county historian, relate the event, and then doing further research myself, I began to wonder why and how the Mormons inspired such ambivalent responses in so many of their fellow citizens. Before their murders, the Mormon elders had successfully converted many locals in the area. Yet another group of men from the same area had been willing to use violence to drive them away. What cultural forces could have led to such an event—an event not unique to Tennessee? A long list of distinguished scholars has provided partial answers to this question. The Mormons engaged in political and economic collectivization that enraged and frightened people, they believed in and practiced polygamy, and they also believed in the extra-Biblical revelation of Joseph Smith that charged all other

denominations were an “abomination”—to non-Mormons, an act of hubris worthy of scorn at the least, and violence at the worst.⁸

Yet this antipathy is hardly relegated to the nineteenth century. I presented a paper on the “Mormon Massacre” at a 2007 academic conference, and after I finished my paper, a hand shot up in the back of the room. A man raised the point that the Tennesseans who killed the Mormons had every right to do so because of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, a mass killing of a non-Mormon wagon train in Utah by Mormons and Paiute Indians. I pointed out that even if one believes Brigham Young ordered the Mountain Meadows Massacre, which has never been substantiated, it occurred in 1857; the event I was discussing happened in 1884. Many of the elders there that day in Tennessee had not even been born when the Mountain Meadows Massacre took place, much less taken part in it. He was not satisfied by my answer, but his obvious disdain for the Mormon faith made me more determined than ever to investigate the question, what was it about Mormonism that people found and often still find so objectionable? And, paradoxically, what was it about their religion that also allowed them to cohere together and proselytize so effectively? How could such a relatively young religion provoke such simultaneous hatred and devotion?

One of the more intriguing answers of why Mormons garner such intense scrutiny was suggested by sociologist Thomas O’Dea. He argued that the Mormon community was quasi-ethnic, and as such, when non-Mormons disagreed with their practices or doctrines, it was easy to label them as the Other and use conventional attack methods against them as a homogenous body.⁹ While there is no doubt great truth in that explanation, it still does not fully account for the continued assault one often sees on

Mormonism in present-day America, as O’Dea’s scholarship is still useful, but dated.¹⁰ On the side of devotion, sociologist Christian Smith’s subcultural identity theory that he applied to Christian evangelicals is also applicable in many ways to the Latter-day Saints. Smith points out that these evangelicals thrive where other denominations decline because they are able to cohere around being a cultural out-group.¹¹ Sociologist and LDS member Armand Mauss makes much the same point when he talks about retrenchment in the Mormon Church as a potent identity marker that allows them to “strategically reverse course from time to time as a means of survival and success.”¹² Yet these potent sociological explanations do not fully consider the impact of diverse cultural media on how Mormons and non-Mormons alike view their faith.

While the Latter-day Saints have been spared violence in recent decades, they still provoke anger and mockery in some quarters. To illustrate the paradox of the equal measures of devotion and scorn they draw, in 2007 a Gallup poll asked Americans about their impressions of Mormonism. The poll showed that Mormonism had a 46% unfavorable rating, and a favorable rating that stood at 42%.¹³ On December 26, 2008, *USA Today* reported on another Gallup poll that asked people who they most admired in the world. The president of the Latter-day Saints, Thomas Monson, came in at number thirteen among men, prompting one reader to write in the story’s blog area:

Mormonism is a fraud. There is little to admire about anyone who would lead a fraud. Check out the story of Mark Hoffman and the Salamander Letters if you want to know about the secretive inner workings the church uses to hide its befouled history and it's [*sic*] lecherous, charlatan of a founder. Joseph Smith wasn't martyred for his beliefs but rather killed by an angry mob for violating others [*sic*] 1st Amendment rights. Read up on the Kinderhook Plates in regards to his own translatory [*sic*] abilities. Even more laughable were his absurd translations of Egyptian papyri.

Relying on a convicted murderer and forger (Hoffman) and a set of plates the LDS Church freely admits are fakes is not seemingly the strongest argument, but many people buy into these theories. Yet Monson still received enough votes to be ranked as the thirteenth most admired man in the world. The posting is remarkably representative of a vast internet community of people who seem to hate Mormonism. For example, in a geocities article, complete with citations to increase authenticity, an author opines that Joseph Smith taught church members to “rob, murder, and plunder,” and includes a link to an ex-Mormon support site.¹⁴ The website lifeafter.org, which ostensibly seeks to lead Mormons to true salvation through conversion to evangelical Protestantism but really just attacks the LDS Church, lists “580 reasons to leave the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” Not surprisingly, polygamy, a doctrine not part of the church for over one hundred years, covers reasons 419-426.¹⁵

The internet does not have sole jurisdiction over anti-Mormonism in the twenty-first century. Films such as *September Dawn* (2007), television shows such as *Cold Case* (2003), novels such as *The Twenty-Seventh Wife* (1961), and memoirs such as *Leaving the Saints* (2005) all represent Mormonism as anywhere from a simply deluded religion to a dangerous cult-like faith. Polygamy is repeatedly thrown into the mix, and shows such as *Big Love* (2006) reinforce that discursive link in the non-Mormon public mind. Where do such works come from? How do non-Mormons come to understand and represent Mormons? These works and others can be traced back in a direct line to anti-Mormon works of the nineteenth century that used many of the same conventions to demonize the church, and of course, make money. Mormons are considered to be so distinctive that they are actually categorized as an ethnic people in the *Harvard Encyclopedia of*

American Ethnic Groups.¹⁶ But how did they become so? This dissertation argues that throughout their history, Mormons have been imagined as the Other by producers of cultural texts in such a way that set them apart. This is significant. But even more significant is how that imagining reflects American cultural belief and values and has the power to shape identity.

This dissertation shows how tensions evident in cultural representations of the Latter-day Saints emerge from a series of imaginings of Mormonism within American culture. Benedict Anderson's model of imagined communities, which he used to explain nationalism, is equally useful in interpreting Mormonism.¹⁷ Moreover, this paradigm can be productively viewed from multiple sides—from the Mormon worldview to the non-Mormon angle of vision to the anti-Mormon perspective. Anderson argues that imagined communities are “imagined” because once growing past a certain population point, most members of the community “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹⁸ For a significant part of their early history, Mormons had no need of imagining their community, because their theological precept of “gathering” brought them all into one place to await the end times. As the years passed, and Utah filled, and missionaries were increasingly successful, the stakes in the great Mormon tent spread across the United States, and then the world. It is usually astounding to outside observers that a religion perceived as ethnically white and one that places the Biblical Garden of Eden in Independence, Missouri, can thrive on a world stage. It is in the very power of imagining a vast community of fellow believers that stretches across space and back into time that allows the church to have nearly as much success in Uruguay as in Utah.

Imagined communities are not simply imagined by those who make up that community, however. Even removed in Utah in the nineteenth century, anti-Mormons imagined a vast theocracy that threatened to reach its tendrils across the country and subvert democracy, morality, and Christianity. Most Americans had never been to Utah, but through novels, memoirs, anti-Mormon tracts, and the popular lectures of Brigham Young's ex-wife Ann Eliza Young, they came to imagine a place of hedonistic debauchery that needed to be redeemed. After the end of polygamy in 1890, Americans had to negotiate a new relationship with the Saints. Eager to join the American mainstream, the Mormons sent out the Mormon Tabernacle Choir as a cultural ambassador and invited people to visit Utah. Gradually, the perception of Mormons began to shift and more positive representations began to emerge from producers of popular culture. As the nation was rocked by a depression and a world war, images of the Saints as hardy pioneers emerged as a way to rally the nation. And in the post-war years, as America became more fragmented, the representations of the Mormons fragmented as well into multiple ideological camps.

Thus, non-Mormon Americans in each period had their own particular anxieties and concerns, and in many cases used the Mormons to address those issues. Analyzing the history of the Saints is by no means an easy task. There were no Gallup opinion polls about the Saints until 1967, and that one was about the desirability of electing a Mormon (George Romney) for president of the United States. But in this dissertation I argue that one fundamental way to understand the complicated relationship between Mormonism and America is by examining and analyzing cultural representations of the Saints. Focusing on representations sheds light on what people were most concerned about at a

given time, and in the process, tells us something about them and their culture. The history of representations of Mormonism in America can be viewed as a kind of palimpsest, where Mormons, ex-Mormons, and non-Mormons all put forth representations into the broader culture, layering one on top of the other, year after year, decade after decade. The result of all these examples not only gives us an understanding of how Americans imagine Mormons today, but also gives important insights into United States' society and culture for the past 181 years. Mormonism has enjoyed such great success that it has attracted both criticism and praise from too many works for one dissertation to survey. But by choosing representative examples that strike a balance between their contemporary cultural impact and the insight they can give to modern analysts, important insights can be gleaned.

Therefore, in this dissertation I argue that representations of Mormonism provide critical insights into both Mormon and American history. In self-representations, Mormons often present a narrative of American exceptionalism and religious identity deeply intertwined with national identity. For example, one LDS sacred text, the Book of Mormon, has Jesus appearing in the New World and Joseph Smith transported much of the Biblical holy lands of the past and the future to the United States thereby recreating America as a locus of sacred Christian mythology. Representations also show us how Mormons and their allies inculcated a narrative of pioneer self-sufficiency that ties in with myths about the essentialist American character.

Yet I maintain that it is not enough to simply analyze apologist representations or those representations that critique Mormonism. Through the analysis of multiple texts, the relationship of Mormonism and American culture can be more fully understood.

While the Mormons arguably nurtured a sense of American exceptionalism, they tied it inextricably with their own religion, causing deep unease and tensions with non-Mormon Americans. The temples where the Saints collapsed space and time to create meaning were off-limits to non-Mormons, and all other religions were categorized as “abominations.” The Saints also engaged in taboo social practices such as plural marriage, and challenged local populations politically and economically with their collectivization practices. Thus, in the non-Mormon representations of the Saints, we can see the ways in which Mormons were imagined, which simultaneously showcases some of American culture’s deepest anxieties. At other times, the Saints have garnered positive representations in mass culture, and these too reveal much about American belief, hopes, and values. All of these representations create a complicated mosaic, but one well worth untangling.

Cultural representations of Mormonism are important because they are tied into a larger history and a greater narrative about American hopes and dreams, about citizenship and belonging. The ebb and flow of anti-Mormonism and more positive representations such as the film *Brigham Young* (1940) or the homage often paid to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir says a great deal about the national character and the politics of belonging in a religiously pluralistic nation. Mormonism itself struggled with issues of inclusiveness and African Americans all the way up to 1978, and the church is still often criticized for its patriarchal outlook and its opposition to gay marriage. Cultural representations are rarely passive—they actively create, shape, and reinforce how we see the world around us. This dissertation gives us a clearer understanding of how the tension between Mormon and non-Mormon representations of the Saints has played out from the

founding of the Saints in 1830 to the present day. In so doing, we can come to better understand how Mormonism fits into the fabric of American culture and how it can be both so successful and so reviled.

In Chapter 1, I examine the period from 1830 to 1844 (from the founding of the church to the death of Joseph Smith) and the impact that early Mormonism in general, and founder Joseph Smith in particular, had on Mormon faith and both Mormon and Jacksonian Era American culture. As the founder of Mormonism, Smith is emblematic of how popular religion is in itself a form of representation that can create meaning and identity. Yet even before Smith's church was officially founded, he had something the others did not: a purported new revelation revealed to him by God; an extrabiblical revelation that, if true, would overthrow nearly two-thousand years of Christian belief and practice. Smith put forth evidence in the Book of Mormon that not only were the various Christian denominations an "abomination" in the eyes of God, but that he had all the answers, not through interpretation or in conversation with the Holy Ghost, but in actual writing on golden plates. Through such powerful cultural representations, meaning can even be created for opponents of a particular religion, and in this chapter I also examine the non-Mormon reaction to the faith during the years when Smith was alive. This mostly negative reaction illustrates the contentious cultural negotiations occurring within Jacksonian America.

Chapter 2 surveys the Latter-day Saint experience in Utah during the second half of the nineteenth century and the non-Mormon reaction to it during the years in which Mormons openly practiced plural marriage, arguing that cultural texts played a pivotal role in how people understood the religion and its people. The Saints hoped that by

relocating to the Intermountain West in the mid-1840s they might find some peace after a stormy decade-and-a-half under Joseph Smith, but the cultural reaction to the doctrine of polygamy (made public in 1852) made that impossible. Authors such as Metta Victoria Fuller and Mark Twain wrote sensational novels and memoirs about Mormonism that castigated the Saints as the Other and turned Utah into an imagined den of vice and corruption. The federal government kept Utah in territorial status from the 1840s through the 1880s to better control Brigham Young and his followers while Young rapidly colonized so that his people would be in position to control Utah. While the Mormons largely prospered, the key identity marker of their theology—plural marriage—withered under repeated cultural critique. Indeed, I make the argument that it was largely cultural representations, mainly in the form of novels and memoirs, that drove the national narrative about Mormonism's place in America and arguably led to legislation that forced the Mormons to abandon polygamy as doctrine in 1890 and thus renegotiate their identity vis-à-vis the rest of the country.

In Chapter 3, I examine the complicated cultural reaction to the Saints' post-1890 reversal on plural marriage. Anti-Mormonism, which was at a fever pitch prior to the cessation of polygamy, did not disappear, but gradually popular representations, including for the first time film, began to showcase the Mormons in a new light. Mormons themselves had to negotiate a new identity that no longer included polygamy. Evangelical Christians tried to keep the flames of anti-Mormonism burning as a means to bolster their own identity and power as well, as the Latter-day Saints were making serious in-roads converting non-Mormon Christians to their brand of Christianity. With a fierce cultural battle raging between Mormons and evangelical Christians throughout the early twentieth

century, popular authors such as Zane Grey created a completely new representation of Mormons—one that arguably eased their way into mass acceptance by the late 1920s.

During the Depression and World War II years, privation became a badge of sorts, and in Chapter 4 I analyze the dramatic shift in LDS representations that occurred in the wake of the novels by Grey and others. The Mormons had long been noted for their ability to take care of their own and survive harsh conditions, but that understanding had almost always been paired with some sort of discussion of Mormon as the Other. Yet representations in the 1930s through the 1950s were overwhelmingly positive. During this time period, the LDS leadership deemphasized the Otherness of Mormons, and that softening of difference combined with a national need to see successful instances of overcoming hardship led Mormonism to in many ways be seen as the embodiment of Americanism, a point often emphasized by newspapers and magazines of the time and represented in novels and film. Brigham Young in particular came to stand as not only an ideal Mormon, but an ideal American in such cultural texts of the time period. Yet this chapter also examines the tensions that began to increase again in the late 1950s as the Mormon Church came under critique for its policy of not allowing black men to hold the priesthood and the Mormons themselves began to reassert their markers of distinctiveness to better maintain a corporate identity.

While in many circles Mormons still embody quintessential patriotic Americans, popular representations in modern America manifest a more complicated view of the religion. In Chapter 5, I examine how in the rapidly changing American post-war culture of the 1960s Mormons largely maintained their conservative cultural values and worldview and once again emphasized their differences to better differentiate themselves

from other Christian denominations. In the process, a space was opened up for critiquing the Saints on issues such as women's rights and gay marriage. The Mormons were no silent partners in this process, however. The church and its members often put forth their own representations of their faith, and this chapter also argues that church members' use of mass media has played an important role in how people have come to understand who Mormons are as well as the issues that matter to them.

All of these chapters underscore a salient point that gets to the crux of how tensions between Mormons and non-Mormons have helped shape Mormon identity and reveal aspects of American character. Mormonism is in many ways a paradoxical religion: it is often characterized as uniquely American yet now has more members overseas than in the United States; it is a religion with a clearly defined hierarchy that prides itself on its democratic belief system; and it is a much-maligned religion that has consistently enjoyed phenomenal success and a high conversion rate. It is important to understand Mormonism for several reasons. First and foremost, the castigation of the Saints in a country that prides itself on religious pluralism exposes fissures within American culture that can help us better understand the culture in which such censure occurred. Mormonism has been variously scorned and embraced throughout its 181 year history, and each step along the path to acceptance illuminates an important facet of American culture, the Mormon Church, or oftentimes, both. How the non-Mormon population has treated the Saints can help illuminate dominant trends in the United States since the 1830s. Conversely, the Mormons have also helped reveal, reflect, and shape American character. Like the Puritans, the values, ethos, and belief systems of Mormons has at several points of entry bled into popular culture and has augmented the national

American character, and Mormonism has also been profoundly shaped by the fact that it was founded in the United States.

This dissertation thus shows that Mormonism is both a product and producer of American culture. This idea is important to understand because it is a significant aspect of how the Saints have emphasized a particular brand of American exceptionalism while at times other cultural producers have scorned or mocked them. The very same ideas that have attracted so many millions over the years have also led to hate and violence against Mormons. Analyzing this paradox leads to a clearer and deeper understanding of the complex dynamic between American religious and cultural history and the ways in which they are often indistinguishable.

This dissertation is also significant to the field of American Studies, where religion has been too often overlooked. The contemporary concerns of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality within American Studies remain extremely important, but one cannot truly comprehend American culture without understanding the country's relationship with religion, and Mormonism has been a vital part of that story from both a religious and cultural studies standpoint. From a broader perspective, religious studies scholar Stephen Prothero argues that religion will be "one of the key identity markers of the twenty-first century."¹⁹ As a key identity marker, it is important to study religion both of the past and the present to better understand how it has shaped and been shaped by American culture, and one potent way to analyze a religious tradition is through its representations in that culture. More specifically, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been analyzed by historians, sociologists, and literary scholars among others. But a truly interdisciplinary overview such as this study has the flexibility to unearth new

material, shed new light on familiar texts, and make connections unavailable to scholarship tied into one particular discipline. And in its comprehensive worldview in which a Mormon way of doing things extends into every aspect of life to the point that Mormonism is often categorized as an ethnicity because of a deeply shared culture, this religious tradition in particular cries out for an interdisciplinary approach.

The methodology of this dissertation thus centers on interdisciplinary analytical critiques of diverse texts that illustrate the ways in which American culture as it relates to Mormon representations is a palimpsest where competing concerns struggle for control over how they will be represented. It is a palimpsest because the representations that attain status in mass culture are never completely erased. They inform future representations and by drawing on the past, the producers of these subsequent texts often create what they purport to describe and make meaning in the present. An interdisciplinary methodology is vital in this analysis as it allows a broad analysis of popular literature, memoir, film, speeches, magazines, newspapers, and television. Representations and counter-representations of the Mormon Church have long been active producers of how people have understood Mormonism and also often serve as reflections of their times.

From a theoretical standpoint, along with Benedict Anderson's model of imagined communities, theories of cultural mythologies are important to my methodology because such theories recognize how the creation of cultural myths through representations have the ability to "transform history into nature," thus effecting a powerful social construction of reality.²⁰ These myths originate in representations that can be examined through a largely semiotic framework, because "[e]very text is a system of signs...which reflect

certain values, beliefs, assumptions, and practices.”²¹ Because every text contains a system of signs, decoding these representations conveys a deeper understanding of both Mormonism and broader American culture.²² The tension inherent in the texts I am considering is also theoretically framed by the binary opposition often found in construction of the Other, where producers of cultural discourse seek to “understand, in some cases control, manipulate, even incorporate, what is a manifestly different...world.”²³ This dissertation fills a crucial gap in the study of religion in America through an examination of representations of Mormonism through an interdisciplinary lens supported by semiotics analysis and undergirded by theories of cultural myths and the creation of the Other.

A representative example of the way that cultural signs are decoded in this dissertation as well as an illustration of how palimpsest creates, alters, and shapes meaning and supports cultural mythologies can clearly be seen in the 1954 *Life* magazine photo shoot of three Mormon towns in Utah. This example not only shows how palimpsest functions in a cultural critique, but it also underscores how representations of Mormonism can powerfully tell us as much about American culture as they do about the Saints themselves. The fact that this analysis centers on *Life* magazine is important as well, as the publication’s mission was to “offer a vision of the world that ultimately attested to the nation’s greatness.”²⁴ By focusing on Mormonism as a component of American life, the religion and its people were in effect legitimized as quintessentially American. Yet a closer analysis reveals contradictions and ambiguities within the article that complicate that notion as the authors make larger points about broader American culture. The *Life* magazine article perfectly captures the methodology and contributions

of this dissertation, in that it shows how Americans have used Mormonism to expound on various cultural tensions and anxieties.

The photo essay was shot by famed photographers Dorothea Lange and Ansel Adams, and Daniel Dixon supplied the text. The Mormon towns covered in the essay supposedly embodied the “whole diversity and depth of Mormon life.”²⁵ The piece was nostalgic in tone, opining that there was “a nobility in the vast horizons and the wind that smelled of juniper and thunderstorms and the soaring rock temples carved by eternity from the same rock that would blunt plows.” The land of Utah was described as “splendid and forbidding,” and as a “place which brought [the Mormons] close to God.”²⁶ The text is, for the most part, fawning, and suggests just how far Mormonism had advanced in the eyes of many Americans. After all, an anti-Mormon magazine crusade was just over forty years in the past. Remarkable change had taken place in less than two generations. Yet the pictures reveal an undercurrent of malaise that indicates broader trends in American and Mormon culture, which further suggests that the two are intricately interrelated. The years from 1930 to the publication of the article had been ones of seismic change for the United States. The nation had endured hardship during the Great Depression and had combated that suffering with social experiments launched by the Roosevelt administration. America had experienced further psychic damage at Pearl Harbor but had rallied, and privation had for a while been integral to American identity as manufacturing ramped up and the war took priority for many resources such as steel and rubber. The atomic age was ushered in with the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the postwar boom, material culture grew to be an ever-more important part of Americans’ lives, and women fought for the right to stay in the workforce. The South was beginning to boil

over with racial tension, and a Cold War was menacing the entire world with the specter of nuclear annihilation. Such change in such a short amount of time was arguably unprecedented, and the anxiety provoked by those changes is reflected in the *Life* magazine article.

The “Three Towns” article thus is nominally an article about Utah Mormonism, but it also gives modern readers an insight into a particular cultural moment in 1950s America. The very first picture of the Lange-Adams piece shows a towering cliff in Zion National Park with a shadow creeping over it, and the subsequent pictures and text suggest that such an ominous photograph was no accident.²⁷ The three towns selected for the piece evoke nostalgia for the past and fear of the future in equal parts. The towns of Toquerville, Gunlock, and St. George, Utah, were real towns with real people and thus ultimately impossible to capture in a few pages of text and a handful of pictures. But their representations serve as a microcosm to the Latter-day Saint experience in twentieth-century America and reveal much about the underlying currents of American life during this time period.

Rustic Toquerville serves as a museum piece in honor of the pioneers who built it while simultaneously as a warning to other pioneer towns that seek to remain too tied to the past. It is celebrated as a place of industry, but it is “a world the rest of the world nearly forgets” as a new age of materialism dawns. Its children have all gone off to larger cities and pursuits, leaving the old residents with nothing but their faith. The pictures portray broken fences, deserted houses, and people with age clearly written into their faces and hands. Dixon marvels, half nostalgically and half in puzzlement that the town has no bank, movie theater, motel, or even that hallmark of a fast-changing country: the

neon sign. A picture of its Main Street, that emblem of “real” America, is tree-lined and empty. One man is pictured next to a painting of his dead ancestor, and thus linked to the irretrievable past of the town, and to the inevitability of its passing. The photographs have an ethereal quality, as if to suggest that this slice of America is as gone as the old West. The town is literally almost dead, with no future generations to continue its legacy. The pioneer era had passed, and it was not going to return.²⁸

Gunlock, Utah, simultaneously represents a seamless hybridization of the past and the present *and* a last gasp of frontier life in a rapidly modernizing America, because the authors make clear that such a golden mean cannot hold—modernity is too powerful. If Toquerville was becoming a ghost town that would simply disappear into the vast West, Gunlock was on the precipice of being swallowed by American modernity, but for the moment doggedly clung to its past. The photographs emphasize a healthy balance of work and play, showing a dirt road lined with frolicking children and a man’s legs foregrounded by a shovel. The text tells readers that the residents of the town built many of the structures there, and unlike Toquerville, these structures remain strong. Life in Gunlock is “pleasant and simple, full of friends and horses and children.” The town is portrayed as American pastoral, with its Main Street an active place of those friends, horses, and children. Yet the author argues that something is about to be lost as the photographers show clouds massing on the horizon, writing, “As the United States swirled over and assimilated the empire of Zion over a half century ago, so now the world outside is reaching toward Gunlock, which in a few years will no longer be what it has always been, an isolated hamlet at the edge of the wilderness.” This sentence is conflicted and brings to mind the tensions that have historically existed between Mormon and non-

Mormon America. Its referencing of an “empire of Zion” brings to mind ostensible anti-American strains within Mormonism, and while the article states that “assimilation” had been achieved, there is still an “outside world” that delineates Mormon from non-Mormon.²⁹

Two photographs of the twenty-one dedicated to Gunlock show cars, and they are quite telling in that they frame an argument for a more synergistic melding of past and present. In the photograph of the horses and children on Main Street, cars can be seen in the distant background, separated from the sun of Main Street by shadow, simultaneously suggesting two ideas. One is that the cars are an encroachment of unwanted change. The other is that when used as a proper tool, cars can complement the traditional life of the town. This is underscored when a car is shown picking up a church member. The car is obscured by bushes—it performed its function of bringing this woman to her community, but it did so unobtrusively. The text laments that it will not stay so. Yet for the moment, the photographs suggest a prelapsarian world that the artists have captured—a nostalgic reminder to the country of what it has lost.³⁰

The photographs of St. George, Utah, show the full effects of modernity, showcasing a future that had somehow become the present, mixing dystopia with guarded acquiescence to the inevitability of change. Route 91 passes through St. George, linking it to Los Angeles, and the town of 4,500 had sprouted twenty-three motels and apparently countless gas stations and cafes. Dixon quotes an anonymous source saying that where once Mormons would not even give a bed to a needy outsider, now they did so gladly, but for profit. Again, the surface admiration of the Saints is undercut by a palpable tension from the past and a present-based capitalist critique. Having lost the distinctiveness that

allowed Mormons to differentiate themselves from the outside world and the outside world to differentiate itself from Mormonism, the lines were beginning to blur beyond recognition.³¹

The pictures of St. George emphasize a world of neon and hustle and bustle that the author is clearly ambivalent about. Cars are showcased over landscape and the people rush by the lens of the camera. Dixon reluctantly writes, “[W]hile they seem to have given up the past for the present and abandoned the plow for the gas pump, their struggle is unchanged. They seek, like their grandfathers, to wrest a living from the desert, and in their way they, too, are pioneers.” Yet the pictures and the accompanying text suggests overall disapproval. Tourists “take over” Main Street. A “worldly” way station stands sentinel on Route 91. The town draws the “restless” and the “weary.” Not a single family is portrayed, in stark juxtaposition to Gunlock. Toquerville and St. George thus bookend the article and complete a feeling of being trapped. Either the youth will abandon a town for greater opportunity, consigning it to death, or they will bring opportunity to the town, changing it so utterly that the previous iteration is basically dead as well.³²

The last word in the article speaks to irrevocable loss and goes to an elderly woman, her face half in light and half in shadows. Her eyes are sunken to the point they can barely be seen, and she wears a simple dress and a strand of pearls. She recalls in a caption how her father was one of the first settlers of Salt Lake City, and she was the child of his third wife—an unapologetic allusion to the plural marriages of the past that truly set the Saints apart. Her gaze is hard and directly at the camera, as if to challenge the Mormons and perhaps the entire country to reclaim that which it was losing. Yet the very magazine that contains the “Three Towns” article underscores the kind of place that

1950s America had become. The piece is bookended by advertisements for coffee makers and underwear. There is an article about the H-bomb. Cold War America had little need for pioneers.

The “Three Towns” article is masterful in its depiction of not only Mormonism, but Americana. The bulk of the pictures are of Gunlock and they showcase a prelapsarian world of family and church-going and horses in Main Street. Toquerville was cut off from any kind of easy highway access and represents a frozen museum piece, and its photographs show people and buildings as equally run-down. St. George was changing almost too quickly to photograph and looked like almost any other American town already. Only Gunlock served as a reminder of the pioneer past. And it was slowly drifting away. Yet the article also suggests the inherent tension that exists in many representations of Mormonism.

The *Life* photo-essay is a prime example of both palimpsest in general and the ways in which producers of popular culture have sought to use Mormonism to discuss larger issues while simultaneously shaping people’s understanding of the religion. Adams and Lange essentially wrote St. George over Toquerville and Gunlock as surely as the future replaces but never completely erases the past. Readers could still see the old images, as readers of a palimpsest can, but the modern St. George was what the authors emphasized as the America of now. The article is framed as a representative examination of three Mormon towns, but it is also historically influenced by over a century of Mormon and non-Mormon relationships and representations.

Indeed, the very first layer of the Mormon palimpsest in America began with Joseph Smith and his burgeoning theology. Ever since then, people have fought for

control over how the church would be perceived. The tension evinced in these struggles has helped shaped the identity of the Saints, and reveals much about American culture at the same time. Mormonism has been at the center of many cultural firestorms, and more than any other homegrown American religion can help illuminate the stresses and strains of American political, social, and leisure culture from the 1830s until today. One important way to understand this dynamic is through an interdisciplinary analysis of cultural representations starting from the very founding of the Mormon Church. Only through the examination of key representations can we truly understand the history of Mormonism in America.

Chapter 1

Foundations, 1830-1844

A depth of thought no human could reach,
 From time to time rolled in sublimest speech,
 From the celestial fountain, though his mind,
 To purify and elevate mankind.
 The rich intelligence by him brought forth,
 Is like the sunbeam spreading o'er the earth.

–Mormon poet Eliza Snow on Joseph Smith, Jr.

The great noise Smith has made, and the influence which he now sways in the world, is a striking illustration of what a man may attain through impudence.

–Reverend William Harris

On October 2, 1831, the *Frederick Town (Ohio) Herald* picked up an article from the *Cincinnati Gazette* that began, “The fact that a set of fanatics calling themselves Mormonites have sprung up and extended themselves in the western part of N[ew] York and the eastern parts of Ohio, is particularly known to our readers. The origin, character and numbers of this sect have not yet been noticed in the Gazette, and it seems proper now to notice them.”¹ This article, and others like it, provides a written clue to how the Mormons were beginning to be perceived in non-Mormon American culture a mere year-and-a-half after their founding. That the Saints were already “known to our readers” is interesting, but the fact that newspapers were beginning to “notice them” is even more significant and indicates that through the mass reach of print media, the imagining of the Saints had truly begun. The article proceeded to describe Joseph Smith as “an ignorant, indolent, careless, shiftless fellow” as well as a “money-digger.”² It was clear from the start that the Mormons would be largely constructed as the Other, and Smith would stand as synecdoche for the entire church.

Joseph Smith, more than any other American religious leader of that time, carried American popular religion to its logical conclusion. He harnessed one of the most powerful forces in nineteenth-century America and used it to build what would become, in Jan Shipps's words, "a new religious tradition."³ As historian Charles Lippy notes, "There is a central zone of religious symbols, values, and beliefs—many of them provided by official, formal religious traditions—as individuals draw on this central zone and subsidiary zones, they erect for themselves worlds of meaning, they create identities for themselves, they engage in the age-old task of religion by finding a way to make sense of their lives."⁴ With Mormonism, Smith took familiar tenets from mainstream Christianity and put a unique spin on them. He was seeking out meaning for himself by responding to God's judgment that all contemporary religions were wrong. But his vision was so compelling that he managed to attract thousands of followers who found aspects of popular religion in Mormonism that differed enough from orthodox Christianity to help them find meaning in their lives. In the societal chaos following the unprecedented democratic upheaval of the American Revolution, many Americans found traditional Christianity as rigid and unsatisfactory as monarchy. As historian Gordon Wood writes, "[P]eople found they could change their religion as surely as their politics," and many turned to Joseph Smith and his nascent religion.⁵

Smith's actions ultimately pointed out the inconsistency in believing in a literal and unchangeable Bible while allowing and even encouraging individual interpretation. He took individual interpretation to an extreme, creating an ongoing revelation, a continued conversation with a God long silent, and to many, that ability to come so close to God was all that they needed to live a life of fulfillment. To many more, Smith's claim

to be the *only* conduit through which God would talk to his people was disturbing enough to be rendered blasphemy, with the consequences that stemmed from Smith's stance eventually labeled as treason.

This chapter argues that such rhetoric and representation, followed by martyrdom, helped to bind the Mormons together more firmly than Smith's representations alone ever could have and in many senses created their communal identity. Indeed, Joseph Smith, Jr., was many things to many people and one can see those representations in the popular culture of his time. People saw him variously as a devoted son, a loving husband, a confounding polygamist, a greedy treasure-seeker, a megalomaniacal office-seeker, a towering military leader, a religious fanatic, and a true prophet. He freely mixed religion, politics, economics, community building, and identity formation. He was a complex and protean religious leader, and he founded his religion in America, dexterously linking a nationalist and religious identity that sought not only to locate sacred space within the borders of the United States, but sacred time as well. Each of these roles set the foundation for how Mormonism would be represented in American culture up until the present moment. And through representation, we can begin to see ways in which the Mormons have often reflected aspects of American culture back onto itself, as well as how the Saints have actually shaped the broader cultural milieu.

This chapter thus examines early representations of Mormonism and how the tensions evinced in Mormon and non-Mormon texts ultimately shaped Latter-day Saint group identity and made it stronger than it might otherwise have been as well as impacted understanding of the Saints by non-Mormons. Joseph Smith famously said "no man knows my history." While he was technically right, that has not stopped people from

trying. His detractors mocked and excoriated his upbringing, his value system, his followers, his book, and his theology. To many of these critics, Smith embodied every great fear of the age: abolition, secret societies, tyranny and empire, hucksterism, and polygamy. The men who despised the Mormon Church and tried to bring it down ultimately accomplished two things, one intended, one not. First, they created an entire paradigm for castigating the Latter-day Saints that has endured to this day. Second, they unintentionally unified the church and made it much stronger than it ever could have been if the Mormons had been left alone. The anti-Mormons essentially used the printed page to construct one multifaceted understanding of Mormonism. In a country that had a strong self-interest in promoting religious freedom, the Mormons became a target of everything from simple mockery to threats of extermination. These attacks reveal the gap between stated and actual values in the United States, and tell us a great deal about American culture in the mid-nineteenth century.

Yet Smith and his followers were not simply defenseless victims. They were able to represent themselves, as well, and did so with gusto, quickly recognizing the power of print and using it to their advantage. With representations coming from both Mormons and non-Mormons, the tension between them illustrates tensions in American society itself. Somewhere in between lies the truth, and only through careful examination of representations can we get closer to that truth. As historian R. Laurence Moore accurately points out, “Once historians recognize that they are trying to unravel not merely what was true [about Mormonism] in some easily defined objective sense, but what people thought was true, or what they wanted others to accept as true, they have to come to grips with the fact that a lot of seemingly contrary things were simultaneously true.”⁶ Thus, it is not

enough to consider Joseph Smith or his culture in isolation from one another; they were intertwined and each reflected and in some ways shaped the other, and by understanding how Smith wove together the sacred and the secular and how both Mormons and non-Mormons reacted to his theology, we gain a clearer insight not only into Mormonism, but also into broader American culture.

Creating Identity: Early Mormonism and the Book of Mormon

In reading the *History of the Church*, written and dictated by Joseph Smith, there is no doubt about who stands at the center of the story. While scholars often make much of the fact that Smith never took credit for his powers of prophecy, his narrative begins with powerful “I” statements that place him firmly in the spotlight. He was writing in 1838, eight years after the formal incorporation of the Mormon Church, and his stated purpose in the *History* was to set the record straight—to disabuse untrue rumors and allegations about himself and his religion. But instead of beginning with the translation of the Book of Mormon or the official 1830 founding of Mormonism, he began with his own birth in Sharon, Vermont, in 1805. In so doing, he set the tone for his followers—and his detractors. Thus, the *History* is more than just history and autobiography; it is a window into American culture and provides evidence about what drove the popularity of Mormonism.

The *History* develops the point that the genesis of Mormon identity can be traced as far back as 1820 when a teenaged Joseph Smith, perplexed by the proliferation of denominations—four within a mile of his house alone—prayed to God to tell him which was the true church. He tells readers of the *History of the Church* that to his surprise he was visited by God and Jesus who told him that not only were all of the churches wrong,

but that they were “an abomination.”⁷ Fifteen-year-old Smith told a few people about his vision, including a Methodist preacher, and he was scorned for his presumption—a harbinger of what was to come in his attempt to overthrow the Protestant Reformation and reintroduce theophany to Christianity. Yet Smith, writing years later, was certain he had been visited by two embodied beings, setting an important theological distinction, leading the encounter to become known within the Mormon Church as the First Vision. The embodied humanity of God and Jesus would have important theological implications for the Latter-day Saints, in that, as Jan Shipps notes, it “is an extremely efficient vehicle for transporting the essence of Mormonism across generations and cultures,” and the description of this vision essentially humanizes God and Jesus and elevates humans as well.⁸

Three-and-a-half years after the initial vision, Smith says that he was visited by an angel named Moroni who told him that there were golden plates buried on a nearby hill that contained a record of the prior inhabitants of the Americas, as well as two translating stones. Similar to the visit by God and Jesus, this encounter humanized angels, and connected with popular culture since Smith maintained that Moroni was a deceased Native American who was descended from the Hebrews—a very popular speculation at the time. Furthermore, the golden plates gave an air of treasure-seeking to early Mormonism, and such pursuits were an accepted pastime in the area. Smith was told by Moroni that he would be allowed to retrieve the plates, but that he was not to show them to anyone else. The heavenly messenger disappeared and reappeared three more times, relaying much the same message with an additional warning for Smith to not seek riches

from the plates. After several false starts, Smith writes that he retrieved the plates in 1827, and began translating them into what would become the Book of Mormon.⁹

From a representational standpoint, the publication of the Book of Mormon was a pivotal event in early Mormonism. The Book of Mormon is proof to Latter-day Saints that Joseph Smith was a true prophet, and to critics, it provided a highly visible target that aided in casting the Mormons as the Other. It has a complex narrative structure and spans centuries of pre-Columbian American history. The book is a history of the first people to come to the Americas—a group of Hebrews escaping the turmoil of the Holy Land. Often referred to as a history of the Indians, the so-called “Golden Bible” was one of the key markers of difference for the Mormons and “satisf[ied] a craving for an American Bible translation.”¹⁰ Throughout the nineteenth century, denominations splintered on minute points of theology, but Joseph Smith gave his nascent religion an entirely new sacred book—no small point in this Age of Enlightenment. Growing up in a culture that mixed the folklore and magic of the past with the scientific principles of the day, people wanted and needed a spiritual connection, as attested to by the Second Great Awakening which swept the region in the early 1800s; but they also desired some kind of evidence.¹¹ As Gordon Wood notes, people of that time still had “lingering superstitions” but they also “had their own small shrewdness and their own literal-minded standards of proof.”¹² They were wary of being taken in, and especially wary of a theology that claimed all denominations were abhorrent to God’s eyes. The Book of Mormon was Joseph Smith’s answer.¹³

When people bought or received the book, they did not have to simply take Joseph Smith at his word, which further underscores the shift to a culture of evidence-based

claims. Eleven other witnesses to the golden plates affixed their statements in the Book of Mormon, giving it further legitimacy in an era where proof was becoming necessary to substantiate assertions. Two sets of witnesses saw two very different incarnations of the plates, adding further legitimacy to Smith's origin story. Three witnesses saw an angel appear before them holding the same plates that Smith had translated from. The angel turned the pages so that they could be clearly seen. Eight other witnesses saw the actual plates without any kind of spiritual revelation—Smith simply took the eight men into the room where the plates were kept and lifted their protective cloth, allowing the men to examine them as they pleased.¹⁴

These two sets of witnesses illustrate just how in tune Smith was with his surrounding culture and gives insight into one way in which the early Mormon Church proliferated. The first set of witnesses, who claimed to have been graced by the presence of an angel—Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris—were to become the highest leaders of the early church. Cowdery already had a vested interest in the church as its scribe, and Harris had made large financial contributions to the new faith. Whitmer had moved his family to Palmyra upon hearing about Mormonism from his friend Cowdery, and had been baptized well before the Book of Mormon was officially published. This visitation imbued them with a great deal of responsibility. They were charged with helping usher in the latter-days and the final revelation—through the angel, their loyalty to Smith was secured, and they quickly had a deep vested interest in propagating Mormonism. The eight witnesses were made up of two families, Whitmer's relatives as well as Smith's, thus beginning a kinship network that would grow Mormonism's early numbers. Critics have complained about the lack of objective

witnesses, leading observers such as Mark Twain to quip, “I could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified.”¹⁵

Yet the decision of Joseph Smith to include spiritual and more tangible witnessing would appeal to a broad range of people. For those who favored spiritual manifestations, the appearance of the angel with the plates gave credence to Smith’s claim that the golden plates had come from heaven and had to be returned there and thus not available for all to see. The Book of Mormon could then stand as proxy for the golden plates and have just as much sway. For more skeptical inquirers, the testimony of the eight showed that even though the plates were no longer available to examine, real living men had seen and touched them and were willing to sign their names attesting to that fact. The Book of Mormon thus did precisely what Mormonism itself would come to do: straddle a line between faith and fact, between folklore and history, all the while speaking to the needs of the credulous and incredulous alike.

The over-arching narrative of the book—a history of the origin of Indians—is in itself not particularly original, but through its very familiarity it gained some of its cultural power. People had been speculating about Native American origin ever since the fifteenth century. Others had even speculated, as the Book of Mormon claims, that the Indians were a lost tribe of Israel, Ethan Smith most notably among them.¹⁶ Thus in one respect, for non-Mormons at least, the Book of Mormon can be read as an entry into popular fiction of the time. What made the book unique is that instead of the standard pattern of the sacred moving into secular literature, the Book of Mormon’s narrative presents itself as a sacred work that contains many elements of the popular culture of the time. Building on the scholarship of F. O. Matthiessen, literary scholar David S. Reynolds

notes of the time period, “The gap between sermons and novels, between religious poetry and secular poetry, between sacred allegory and earthly story—in short, the gap between doctrinal social texts and entertaining imaginative texts—suddenly became far narrower than it had been in Puritan times.”¹⁷ Tapping into the growing popularity of such texts, the Book of Mormon reverses that paradigm and declares itself a sacred text complete with a compelling revisionist history of the Americas, epic wars, and Native American origin stories. Scholar Clyde R. Forsberg, Jr., goes so far as to say that “[t]he Mormon prophet was one of the first writers of a new genre in American literature....”¹⁸ The text develops familiar meta-narratives into an epic history of exotic tribes known as the Nephites and Lamanites. The book also portrays a very Christian pre-Christ civilization, thus extending the promise of America’s Christian origins back thousands of years. According to the Book of Mormon, Jesus appeared in the Americas and gave another version of the Sermon on the Mount, expounded on various points of doctrine, and prophesized the coming of the Book of Mormon.

The theological twist of Jesus’s New World appearance gave the United States a special place in religious history, a theme that Smith would enlarge on throughout his ministry. Thus, in many ways the Book of Mormon is not simply a derivative narrative of Native American origins; it became a new, enlarged addition to the narrative of American exceptionalism. The Indians were actually Israelites. The holy land was in the center of the United States. The Book of Mormon drapes a sacred geography across the landscape and the Native Americans, extending the “City on a Hill” theme thousands of years into the past. America was simultaneously the New and Old World—and the future heavenly kingdom at that.

The Book of Mormon was also unique in that it did not attempt to develop a minute point of doctrine or address one or two theological debates; it answered every major theological controversy of the day. The book did not merely give scholarly opinions or use obscure Biblical passages to make arguments about the likes of infant baptism and the nature of the trinity; it presented clear doctrine and presented it as the word of God. The Book of Mormon was to be the final word in the Christian canon, a creation of the mass printing age that could go to press and end all religious controversy in a single blow. As the *Alexandria Gazette* noted in 1840,

The signal success which every where attends their exertions proves how well [the Mormons'] religious system is adapted to give expression to the various forms of enthusiasm that pervade the religious sentiments of the day. Retaining many truths which are held in common by different denominations of Christians, and covering their creed with imposing forms and lofty pretensions, their system opens a winning asylum for all the disaffected or dissatisfied of other persuasions, and contains much that is congenial to every shade of erratic or radical religious character.¹⁹

The Saints thus harnessed the “enthusiasm” of the Second Great Awakening and the Book of Mormon was a significant part of their success, providing a potent identity marker for a new religion in a religious marketplace where new faiths were proliferating at an astonishing rate.

Consolidating Identity: Joseph Smith as Prophet

Joseph Smith's life as a prophet was central to early Mormon identity. He freely mixed the sacred and the secular, asking God for direction in every detail of the church. As a living prophet, Smith would continue to receive messages from God that would settle any disagreements—religious or otherwise. Smith gradually began to catalogue these orders from God in what would become the Doctrine and Covenants, an ongoing

living text that would complement the frozen words of the Book of Mormon. On relaying messages to his followers, he would thus be relaying the word of God. For instance, when Smith's wife Emma was reluctant to join the church, God instructed her to do so to ease her husband's burden.²⁰ The revelations could be used to frighten followers into line or to encourage them. In a revelation to Oliver Cowdery when he began writing for Smith, God promised Cowdery that if he kept up his diligent work, he would reap a reward.²¹ Much later, near the end of Smith's life, a revelation about plural marriage commanded Emma to accept the doctrine or be "destroyed."²² Smith received monumental commands about points of doctrine, but he also inquired of God on practical matters such as how church members should go about purchasing land.²³ Smith thus wove together sacred and secular until God was a constant and viable presence in every aspect of the lives of the Saints. This belief gave Smith powerful sway over his followers, and his orders took on the aura of sacred commandments, no matter how mundane the subject matter.

Joseph Smith had also taken the revolution of the power of individual interpretation one step further by not providing for any professional clergy in his church. This decision represents the most significant organizational response to the unorganized Second Great Awakening which emphasized personal revelation. Reflecting republican principles of the time, each white man was deemed worthy to preach, and each member of the church was able to receive spiritual gifts. The Mormon Church found a medium between formal and popular religion, attracting members from both ends of the spectrum. From a formal view, Mormonism provided its adherents with a set of beliefs that helped them make sense of the world. Yet, as historian Peter Williams notes, popular religion is an extremely powerful counterbalance to organized religion, and "comes from and

belongs to the people.”²⁴ Mormonism had a ready answer for this consideration in its lay clergy. While church meetings existed within formal church structures, the ability to receive spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues combined with the fact of lay leadership made Mormonism attractive to many converts. As Nathan O. Hatch observes, Smith’s “populist themes resonated powerfully with [his] earliest disciples....”²⁵

Smith also continually took items out of secular culture and elevated them into the sacred realm. For example, a man named Michael H. Chandler came to Kirtland, Ohio, in June 1835 as part of a traveling exhibition of Egyptian mummies and ancient papyri. Smith was intrigued by the scrolls and the church bought the four mummies and the writings. Smith would go on to translate the scrolls into what would become the Book of Abraham, published in 1842. In that scripture, which Smith said was written by biblical patriarch Abraham, the principles of a vast cosmos, a plurality of gods, and the eternal, co-equal-to-God nature of the human soul were revealed. The work was so revolutionary it was not officially canonized within Mormonism until 1880.²⁶ Smith took a piece of popular culture and turned it into a sacred text just as readily as he made the sacred popular.

The temple was another mixture of sacred and secular that Smith brought to his religion during his stay in Kirtland. The Mormons had church buildings, but the center of their spiritual life was the temple. In this sacred space, they would perform ritualistic ceremonies and experience communion with the Holy Ghost. While the Book of Mormon was decidedly Christian, Smith took elements of the Old Testament in his temple buildings that spoke to a mythic dimension that resonated with his followers, and soon construction was under way in both Kirtland and Jackson County, Missouri. Since

Mormonism made a claim to be the return to true Christianity—after thousands of years adrift—it made sense to provide a link back to the days when Jesus walked the Holy Land and the Americas. Consequently, temples, along with the Book of Mormon, became another marker of distinctness that set Mormons apart from rival denominations and gave the nascent religion a sacred past. Smith solidified this connection by bringing back the nomenclature and governing structure of early Christianity by emphasizing apostles in the Quorum of Twelve. He thus connected an embodied sacred geography in the forms of temples to literal successors to Jesus Christ and his followers. Furthermore, from a secular standpoint, since temple rituals were secret, Mormonism took on an air of Masonic-like mystery that appealed to followers and alarmed those hostile to the faith.²⁷

The theology of the gathering was also developed in Kirtland and proved particularly problematic for non-LDS communities, and thus for the Saints, as well. The gathering emphasized that all Mormons should live together in one community to prepare the world for the Second Coming. Non-Mormons often had an issue with this sacred commandment for very secular reasons. They often felt that Mormons would vote however Joseph Smith told them to and patronize only Mormon establishments. Thus in terms of constructing the Other, Smith's theology often contained in its message an oppositional mentality which provided identity to his young religion—and trouble with those outside of it that reflected ideologies of control and power.²⁸

Joseph Smith also recreated the Missouri landscape in Biblical image, providing a religious-themed narrative link to American exceptionalism. Smith had already identified Independence as the location of the Garden of Eden, and Far West, Missouri, another Mormon outpost, as the location where Cain killed Abel. The Indian mounds that dotted

the landscape also sparked revelations for Smith that he linked to the Book of Mormon, providing even more evidence for the veracity of that sacred work. On one memorable occasion, significant enough to be recorded in the *History of the Church*, Smith identified a skeleton by name—an ancient Lamanite who, he said, was killed during one of the last great battles between the Nephites and the Lamanites.²⁹ His words became even more reassuring when placed against the newspaper stories of ancient civilizations in Central America that had been discovered the year before, thus giving further evidence in the minds of many Mormons to the self-evident accuracy of the Book of Mormon.³⁰ On one survey expedition, the Saints camped near a spot Smith had named Tower Hill because he said that a Nephite tower had once stood there. As Smith was about to plot out a new town, he said that the Lord spoke to him and told him to call it Adam-ondi-Ahman as it was the place where Adam dwelt after he was expelled from the Garden of Eden and it would be a future gathering place for the chosen near the end of times.³¹ Narratives such as these reinforced notions of American exceptionalism, but a critical point is that in the eyes of the Saints they were thus not only the truest of Christians, but the truest of Americans as well. Consequently, in extremely difficult times, Smith was able to fill his followers with a multi-layered sense of sacred time and history and a promise that they would be rewarded in the highest level of heaven at the end of times, while also filling his detractors with anger at his elevated rhetoric.

Popular religion in the United States at this time emphasized the primacy of the individual's right to interpretation, mirroring the nationalist narrative of the power and freedom of the individual.³² Mormonism took that idea to new heights by combining communal lay leadership and missionary work with one man receiving clear and detailed

messages directly from God. While in principle anyone in the church could receive revelations, Joseph Smith walked a delicate line that balanced a democratic spirit with a fairly rigid hierarchy. He saw that his followers enjoyed and needed spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues and the power to cast out devils, but he simultaneously realized that if everyone had access to revelation, then anarchy would reign. Thus, he reserved the power of revelator for himself, kept a check on extreme excesses of visionary outbursts, all the while nurturing a general spirit of equality and opportunity in other areas of the church and connecting the United States to ancient sacred space and time. One young Mormon convert quoted his father as saying, “If the Methodists would preach as [the Mormons] do and prove up all their points of doctrine, this is how I would like it.”³³ Through representations such as the Book of Mormon and Smith’s continuing proclamations, many others “liked it,” as well. The church was founded in 1830 with six members. A decade later, the number had grown to 16,865.³⁴

Solidifying Identity: The Importance of Nauvoo

By 1839, the Saints had been pushed out of Ohio and Missouri and were trying to build their kingdom in Nauvoo, Illinois. In Nauvoo, Smith was simultaneously president of the church, mayor of city, and general of the local militia. Throughout his life, he combined many traits, and people have judged him differently depending on their angle of vision. Yet more than anything, Smith had always mixed deep spiritual matters with ordinary life. The pinnacle of these attempts was reached in Nauvoo with four events that help illuminate both Mormon and American culture: the founding of the *Times and Seasons*, a Mormon newspaper; Smith’s candidacy for president; further linked doctrinal and LDS cultural developments; and a eulogy Smith gave at the Saints’ General

Conference in 1844. These four elements reveal a great deal about how Smith imagined not only himself, but also Mormonism, and America as well.

In Nauvoo, the Saints started a monthly paper, *Times and Seasons*, which gives a glimpse into how the Mormons thought of themselves as a people. It should first be noted that they were no strangers to print culture. Recognizing the power of print, the Mormons had formed the monthly *Evening and Morning Star* in Independence, Missouri. Fittingly, in its first issue, it contained both a prophecy and a suggestion about what paper makes for the best writing and printing, another example of how effectively and oftentimes seamlessly the Saints mixed the sacred and the secular.³⁵

The Saints had also published the *Messenger and Advocate* in Kirtland, yet the *Times and Seasons* was arguably more important in solidifying Mormon identity, because although the concept of the gathering was still emphasized, by this point the church had been so successful that Mormons were widely scattered, with a large portion clustered in Illinois. When the Saints were only a few dozen strong, they formed a literal community, but as they grew to the point where most members would never know the majority of other members, there arose a need for an “imagined community” that would bind the Saints together into a cohesive whole. With adherents growing in numbers across North America and Europe every day, Smith and his church needed to create this kind of community among new recruits, as well as old members, to ensure fealty. Thus, the *Times and Seasons* decided to focus almost exclusively on the persecution that the Saints had endured as the best tactic to ensure fidelity to the faith and build a cohesive and binding identity. Their first issue’s prospectus read:

The Subscribers being acquainted with the scattered condition of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and realizing the anxiety which rests in the bosoms of all the Saints who are scattered abroad, to learn of the condition and welfare of the church, have procured a printing press and materials and will publish a monthly Periodical, at this place containing all general information respecting the church; as also, a history of the unparalleled persecution, which we, as a people, received in Missouri by order of the Executive of that State—by which many innocent men and children were most inhumanly murdered—others dragged from the bosom of their families, without any process whatever, by an armed soldiery, and thrust into prison and irons, there remaining for a long time without knowing the reason why they were thus treated—women insulted—houses plundered and burned—and finally, to end the scene of persecution, expell, as exiles, from the State, in the winter season, the whole society; in all, from ten to *twelve thousand souls!* A statement of facts concerning the foregoing transactions, will not be uninteresting to all who wish to see the pure principles of Republicanism preserved unviolated.³⁶

In the next issue of *Times and Seasons*, early Mormonism's greatest early poet, Eliza Snow, gave voice to the discordance of living in a republic that ostensibly ensured religious freedom while suffering religious persecution:

Here, in a land that freemen call their home,
 And at the shadowy close of parting day,
 Far from the influence of papal Rome;
 In slaughter'd heaps, husbands and fathers lay;
 Yes, in a "mild and tolerating age"
 There lay the dead and there the dying ones
 The saint have fall'n beneath the barb'rous rage
 The air reverberating with their groans;
 Of men inspired, by that misjudging hate,
 Night's sable sadness mingling with the sound
 Which ignorance and prejudice create;
 Spread a terrific hideousness around....³⁷

The Saints thus fostered a sense of persecution as a means of solidifying identity, but in Nauvoo they seemed to at last be in a position of strength with control of the courts and a well-armed militia. So, just as Smith had taken up arms when the government would not help him in Missouri, now, when the government would not offer redress for lost property in the evacuation from that state, he set his sight on the presidency in 1844.

If the Book of Mormon sought to answer all great theological questions of the day, Smith's presidency addressed all of the secular issues of the time period. Moreover, in his eyes, the United States was as much in need of a restoration as Christianity. He charged that the once great nation had fallen under the lackluster guidance of Martin Van Buren, and just as Methodists and Baptists had been wrong, so were Whigs and Democrats.³⁸

To effect a correction, Smith's plank urged several points that reflect national concerns of that time from an LDS standpoint. First, he argued that the penal system should be reformed and made into "seminaries of learning" where convicts would work on public projects. He had a particular disdain for imprisonment for debt, having faced money woes for much of his life. He summed up his position on prison reform with the Latin phrase *amor vincit omnia*—love conquers all—a powerful statement on behalf of prisoners nationwide. Smith advocated a centralized national bank to help ease taxes. He wanted to fire two-thirds of Congress and streamline all government. Another central platform was to end court-martials for desertion in the army and navy. He wanted to annex any and all territories that wished to come into the United States. On this issue, his political thoughts lay very much in line with his religious thinking. He declared himself for full religious freedom and even officially guaranteed it in Nauvoo. Smith thought that everyone should want to be part of the United States, but only by their own free will, not through force. He even advocated waiting for the consent of Native American tribes before expanding west. So much of his theology was dependent on free will, it is no surprise that his politics followed in the same direction.³⁹

But the great issue of the day was, of course, slavery, and Smith had a plan for that as well. He wanted to end slavery by 1850—just six years after the election and

fifteen years before it was actually eradicated. He proposed using the money saved in firing much of Congress to pay the “Southern gentlemen” for their financial losses. He flattered the South and never harangued about the evils of slavery; to him, it was self-evident that it should end. It was equally obvious that there should be compensation to those whom emancipation would hurt economically. He treated this plank equally with the others and the same way he had treated the earlier theological disputes—any problem was a problem that needed to be solved, from the trivial to the monumental. While his life was cut short before his candidacy had gotten far, his plank provides a window into his thought process on secular and religious matters, for they were intricately intertwined. His presidential platform was very much along the lines of his usual sacred-secular hybrid: it was this-worldly in that love for prisoners and freedom for slaves would further prepare the world to become God’s Earth, and his guarantee of religious freedom and other freedom-of-choice issues, such as annexation, was born from the opposition the Saints met when they tried to practice their own faith.

The Nauvoo period also shows Smith’s complicated relationship with women, which would define much of the pro- and anti-Mormon rhetoric after his death. He was in many ways a devoted husband and son, and he helped create the Female Relief Society, which gave women a significant sphere within the Mormon world. The formation of the Relief Society was very much in line with the separate male and female spheres of the nineteenth century. The Relief Society was a charitable organization that is still in effect today, an important legacy from the early days of the church. Yet Smith also widened the practice of plural marriage, causing great dissension and deep hurt that extended to his own wife, Emma. While many women of this period, and later in Utah, spoke of the

benefits of plural marriage, such as financial support and increased female prominence in the church due to an emphasis on family, the majority of the nation, as well as many Mormon men and women, were shocked at the idea.⁴⁰ Smith kept the doctrine as secret as he could, but rumors swelled, especially in Nauvoo. Thus, we again see Smith's tendency to mix the worldly with the spiritual, very much in keeping with his emphasis of establishing God's kingdom on Earth. The Relief Society was a this-worldly organization dedicated to relieving suffering—a Christian-motivated charity with very immediate effects. Plural marriage formed a theological doctrine that would affect eternity—once sealed, forever sealed. Both institutions would profoundly affect Mormon women, and the latter would become a way to caricature the Mormon Church—one that lasts until this day, when the doctrine has been disavowed by the church longer than it was in practice.

Joseph Smith also solved the knotty problem that had plagued many Christians for thousands of years: what became of those humans who had lived before the salvation afforded by Jesus Christ? The Catholic Church had determined that those souls reside in limbo—neither in heaven nor in the pits of hell, a principle famously illustrated in Dante's *Inferno*. Apparently, Smith found this explanation unsatisfying, particularly since Mormonism was much newer than orthodox Christianity and thus had an even greater number of unredeemed souls; so, he initiated baptism for the dead. A Saint could stand in for a beloved family member or a famous historical figure and be baptized in their name. That soul would then have the choice whether or not to embrace Mormonism. Thus, just as the Book of Mormon gave the Mormon Church, founded in 1830, an ancient past, baptism for the dead allowed people to reach back into the distant past and connect with their ancestors. It is no accident that today's Mormon Church has one of the best

genealogical archives in the world. Smith had again shown his knack for solving difficult points of theology, as well as keeping doctrinal internal consistency by emphasizing the importance of family and free will.

Smith's adroit theology was fully realized at the 1844 General Conference when he eulogized Mormon elder King Follett. Smith used the eulogy to build upon, and clarify, some of the theology he had developed previously, particularly in the Book of Abraham, as well as to advance some completely new ideas. By the time he was finished, he had completed his project of exalting humans and making God more like them. In the process, he provided a road map for Mormons to follow, and a way to imagine themselves as a distinct people with unique doctrine.

In his eulogy, Smith argued the startling proposition that God's mind is not unknowable and that it is imperative to understand God to fully understand what it means to be human. He meditated on the nature of God, and, connecting with the First Vision, argued that God is like any human—an embodied person with flesh and blood whose only distinction is his immense, almost infinite intelligence. More than that, God was once the intellectual equivalence of a human. God had not been God forever—becoming a god was a process that any believer could follow by acquiring knowledge.⁴¹ It is thus not surprising that the Mormons had always stressed the importance of education. They operated a school for the elders, gave missionary training, and Smith himself took Hebrew classes. Smith saw all life as an evolution—a gradual learning process. He taught that the afterlife should parallel the same process of growth that humans had experienced on Earth.

Smith used the simple metaphor of climbing a ladder to illustrate how God became God—and how humans might follow. In the beginning, God called a council of gods to create the world. Jesus and Satan were present at the meeting. Deconstructing the Bible in German, Latin, Greek, and particularly Hebrew, he argued that the word “create” in the Bible was derived from the Hebrew word *ba'rau*, which actually means “to organize.” Thus, God organized the matter that was already present, and more subversively, souls that would later come into human beings were present at the beginning, as old as God—eternal.⁴² Smith said that matter can neither be created nor destroyed, putting a theological spin on the law of conservation of energy and anticipating Einstein’s theories by more than sixty years. Parents and children would be reunited in mansions in heaven, and Smith himself, who had lost his father, brother, and five children, seemed to take comfort in these thoughts.

He closed the eulogy with words that have been quoted again and again since that day: “No man knows my history...If I had not experienced what I have, I would not have believed myself.”⁴³ He also was keen enough to note what some Mormons, and many non-Mormons, have ignored for years: “I am not so big a fool as many have taken me to be.”⁴⁴ Smith’s unique abilities had been forged in the fiery religious awakenings in early-nineteenth-century New York, but his own image was out of his hands before he had even officially incorporated his church. While his closing remarks are justifiably famous, perhaps the words he spoke earlier in the sermon provide insight as to who he really was and who the world was making him out to be, which would combine into a myth even larger than he could imagine: “I have the truth, and am at defiance of the world to contradict me, if they can.”⁴⁵

Those words underscore the doctrine he preached his entire life: humans have free will and would so have for all time. Mormons continue to believe that Smith had the truth and much of the non-Mormon world continues to try and contradict him to this day, but the success of the Mormon Church in the face of resentment, mockery, and outright animosity, shows that the dichotomy that arose in the 1830s is still alive and well. Indeed, an opponent to differentiate and defend against can serve as a key binding element in the formation of a religious community. Smith's detractors were numerous, and their representations created a different paradigm for understanding Mormonism—one that arguably served the Saints more than it did their critics.

Cementing Identity: The Rhetoric of Persecution

In the fourteen years left of his life after founding his church, the criticisms about Joseph Smith reveal much about the social fabric of American life and values and move through multiple forms of media with multiple tropes, each trope incorporating and elaborating on the one before: a fear of the con man; a hatred of abolitionists and those overly sympathetic to Native Americans; anxiety about tyranny, empire, and murky designs cloaked in the shroud of a secret society; and alarm about polygamous relationships. The tropes are not rigidly separated; they bleed into each other at many points. But that is to be expected in the complicated culture of early Jacksonian America. These fears were influenced by geography, theology, conversion rates, and the prevailing cultural anxieties of the moment, and they are most clearly illuminated in the popular culture of the time, an era when the written word was the dominant form of discourse.

Abner Cole, editor of the *Palmyra Reflector*, a paper in Smith's local town, was the first to show how the power of the press would impact Mormonism throughout

Smith's life and beyond. This early encounter with Cole probably reinforced Smith's understanding of how newspapers could be powerful instruments of conversion, identity-shaping, and criticism. He learned the latter lesson strongly enough to later in life destroy a printing press when the editors questioned his authority—a move that ultimately led to his murder—so it is useful to examine the ways in which various authors used the power of the printed word against a homegrown religion uniquely based on that very same power.

Cole's paper shared a printing press with the publisher of the Book of Mormon, which gave him pre-publication access to the text. Cole managed to acquire advance copies of several chapters of the Book of Mormon. He printed snippets of these chapters, along with some satirical commentary. A threatened lawsuit by Smith ended that venture, but in June 1830, just after the publication of the Book of Mormon, the *Palmyra Reflector* ran a satire titled "The Book of Pukei." The book started with "And it came to pass," used so many times in the Book of Mormon that Mark Twain would later call the phrase Smith's "pet," sarcastically noting that if he had not employed those words, the Book of Mormon would have been a mere pamphlet.⁴⁶ "The Book of Pukei" reflects innuendo and gossip when it comes to Smith's life, but viewed as a window into contemporaneous American culture, it is quite savvy. It tells the story of a magician who was a failed treasure seeker. He convinces the "ignorant" and "slothful" that he is a true prophet of the latter days, and sucks them into his world through trickery and deceit. The culture of folklore and magic was still quite strong in upstate New York at the time, but it was transitioning to a more empirical world view. As such, "magicians" were being called out as frauds in greater numbers, and in Cole's interpretation, it was only natural that some of

these magicians would shift to the realm of religion to try and continue their exploitation.⁴⁷

In 1831, Cole wrote a series of articles for his paper under his pseudonym Obadiah Dogberry that further deepened the anti-Mormon strain growing in New York. The *Reflector* and other local papers had been taking scattered broadsides against “Jo” and his religion over the previous year, but the Dogberry letters consolidated all of the contemporary strings of conjecture into a narrative whole and gave the anti-Mormon movement its initial representational form. These early broadsides clearly show some of the tensions in the United States at that time, led by anxiety about the prevalence and influence of con men.

The articles by Dogberry show a keen fear of being humbugged and looking foolish. After all, Smith was a hometown boy, and his claims of seer stones and golden plates could either be raised up or torn down by the local populace—in other words, they could embrace him as one of their own or turn him into an Other, distancing themselves in the process (while unintentionally solidifying Mormons into an ever-tighter knit community). Due to Mormonism’s conflict with orthodox Christianity and the values of many of the locals outside of Smith’s kinship network, Dogberry went with the majority and began a campaign against Smith. He used the word “impostor” and spoke of “pretended” skills. Repeatedly calling Smith “Joe,” Dogberry claimed that Smith was nothing more than a money-digger trying to swindle locals.⁴⁸ There also seems to be some resentment about the Smith family potentially transgressing class boundaries. As Richard Bushman points out, Smith went from “local fame” to “minor national figure,” a move that did not set well in the small town of Palmyra.⁴⁹

Smith founded Mormonism at the dawn of the Jacksonian Era in the United States, and as scholar Neil Harris notes, for the first time in American history, the common man was taking on greater roles in society. Harris says of this shift, “When credentials, coats of arms, and university degrees no longer guaranteed what passed for truth, it was difficult to know whom and what to believe. . . . Critics charged that the destruction of deference would encourage a generation of tricksters and confidence men. . . .”⁵⁰ Smith is in many ways the embodiment of this fear: an uneducated young farm-boy leading a religious movement that was, in Cole’s and others’ view, taking in converts just like him in vast numbers. Early anti-Mormons were thus concerned with being tricked, and this fear shows how the changing tides of the 1830s exposes the fractures in the social fabric of American culture and how values such as religious pluralism could fall by the wayside as social structures underwent seismic shifts.

In the eyes of many early anti-Mormon authors, Martin Harris became the ultimate example of the conned man and a cautionary tale for all. He was castigated for selling off his farm to pay for the publication of the Book of Mormon. Ironically, he was first lionized as an exemplary citizen *before* converting to Mormonism. The *Wayne Sentinel* heaped praises upon him, calling him “honorable and upright,” “obliging and benevolent,” and a man of “honest industry.” Yet that was before he had met Smith; after that encounter he was cast as a man of great “delusion.”⁵¹ The lesson is clear: it could happen to anyone. Smith, on the other hand, was portrayed as having been ignorant his whole life to better undercut his claims of prophetic leadership. Many of Smith’s followers were described as ignorant as well, but men like Harris stood in for the “enlightened” individuals reading the newspaper. These readers would presumably not

shed many tears over the poor, ignorant, and itinerant, but if an “upright” citizen, such as Martin Harris, could be humbugged, then it was perhaps time to take greater action.

The local papers drummed up such antagonism against Smith that he was arrested on charges of being a disorderly person. The disorderliness was connected to charges of being a money-digger, but he was acquitted. Yet shortly thereafter he was twice more arrested and twice acquitted. This harassment perfectly illustrates the inherent tension between Mormon and non-Mormon representation. Fawn Brodie argues that “despite” his acquittal people resented him more. But really it is *because of* his acquittal that the resentment increased.⁵² He was, in the eyes of the community, a con man who was not being humbled. But more alarmingly, his ministry represented an unparalleled social upheaval in the religious sphere. It was one thing to leave the local Methodist Church and go to the Baptists because of a theological disagreement over infant baptism. Mormonism proposed that every single other religion was an “abomination.” And it was gaining converts, sundering families, and growing ever more unified partially due to the arrests. The acquittals gave implicit approval for Joseph Smith’s life, and his life was now that of a prophet. They also smacked of justice denied, and in the nineteenth century, when legal channels were exhausted, extralegal efforts were often mounted, as would be the case in Missouri. The early converts rallied around their prophet, and as the church expanded and new literal and symbolic family members joined, many would see the persecution as a marker of identity. The more outsiders emphasized the differences of the Latter-day Saints, the more the Mormons felt like a unified community.⁵³ And the more unified the Mormons became, the more concerned cultural elites became.

Ezra Booth and Alexander Campbell were two such cultural elites and ministers by trade, and they took to the pulpit to thunder against Mormonism. Not content with the reach of their own voices, they also turned to newspapers to spread their opinions about the Latter-day Saints. Their involvement with anti-Mormonism underscores the class wariness inherent in anxieties about the success Smith was having with conversions.

Disciples of Christ or Campbellite cleric Alexander Campbell was a national figure who had played a prominent role in the series of religious revivals that had swept the nation in the early 1800s. He published his tellingly-titled “Delusions” in the February 7, 1831, edition of the *Millennial Harbinger*, an explicitly religious paper that Campbell himself had founded. Campbell began with a comprehensive history of religious impostors and gave an even-handed summary of the contents of the Book of Mormon. He apologized to his readers for having to discuss the issue at all, but noted that “several hundred” people had left their respective denominations to join the Mormons, so attention must be paid. He did not mention that many of his own “Campbellites” had left the fold for Joseph Smith. Campbell seemed genuinely befuddled as to why people would give up everything and follow Smith. After the polite introduction, Campbell dropped his civil tone and railed against Smith, calling him “as ignorant and as impudent a knave as ever wrote a book,” “an impious fraud,” and “an ignorant and impudent liar.” Somewhat surprisingly, he gave a much more measured critique of the Book of Mormon on its own grounds of religious history by contradicting several of its points with Biblical history—perhaps to better underscore the superiority of his theological and historical perspective, and thus his greater leadership skills. Campbell’s seventh point about the Book of Mormon is particularly astute, as he noted that it discussed “every error and almost every truth

discussed in New York for the last ten years,” ultimately deciding “all the great controversies” of the day. Contrary to most critics and scholars after him, Campbell believed that the book’s internal inconsistencies pointed to the work being written by an ignorant man, and thus initially gave full credit of authorship to Smith.⁵⁴

Ezra Booth was described as a popular minister who joined Mormonism in Ohio and spent a brief time in Missouri before renouncing the faith and sending a series of letters about the Saints to the *Ohio Star*. He, like Campbell, called Mormonism a delusion, but he had special credibility as one who had fallen under its sway. Booth quickly emphasized that he had not been fooled for long; he had used empirical methods to soon uncover the hoax, a technique that well reflects the concerns of his times. Booth also added a new element that would become a firm tenet of anti-Mormonism: Smith’s purported despotic intentions. Booth worried that since every pronouncement from Smith was a de facto pronouncement from God, and Smith was promoting a gathering in Missouri, that he would soon hold an entire region under his thumb. The letters show a clear cultural pattern being developed as Booth used a version of the word “delusion” no less than eight times in his first letter.

Thus, the delusional theme was still at the forefront at this time, but with successful missionary activity and an emphasis on gathering, the fears of tyranny were also beginning to rise. The theme of delusions and trickery remains central to Booth’s concerns, as well as others, but there is also an undercurrent suggesting that Smith had un-American intentions of tyranny. These claims were given further urgency as Booth noted that the Mormons were literally trying to follow the precepts of the Book of Mormon by converting Native Americans on the western frontier of Missouri. While

converting Indians to Christianity was nothing new, Booth alleged that the Mormons had darker designs of enlisting their aid to eradicate other white settlers, a fear that non-LDS Missourians would seize on.⁵⁵

As Smith set up camp in Kirtland and Missouri, and as the Missourians began to grow increasingly wary of the presence of eastern men in their state, another critic of Mormonism struck a blow against the religion. There were perhaps no greater, determined, or ultimately effective detractors of Mormonism in its early days than Dr. Philastus Hurlbut and his collaborator and publisher Eber D. Howe, two men who put the authorship of the Book of Mormon into question for decades (indeed, for some to this present day), and convinced Alexander Campbell that he was incorrect in acknowledging Smith's authorship. Hurlbut was an early Mormon convert but he was put on trial on June 3, 1833, for "un-Christian conduct with women."⁵⁶ He was summarily dismissed from the church and Smith devoted all of one paragraph to the hearing in his *History of the Church*. However, on June 21 of that same year, Hurlbut made an appeal and confession and was granted membership once again. But on June 23, testimony by two other Mormons alleged that Hurlbut had been insincere in his confession, and Smith cut him off from the church permanently. One gets a strong sense of Smith's distaste for the man because when he wrote about Hurlbut he constantly put "Doctor" in quotation marks, explaining that Hurlbut was no doctor but a seventh son, a station imbued with mystical qualities. Hurlbut disappears for a time from the *History* but is mentioned again in 1834, and this time Smith took him seriously. Smith prayed to God to help him prevail over his "enemy," Dr. Hurlbut—a powerful rejoinder in that Smith, the messenger of God, was calling Hurlbut out by name.⁵⁷

Hurlbut was hired by anti-Mormons to compile evidence against Smith, and after interviewing seventy-two people he turned the material over to Howe who published the findings in an 1834 work called *Mormonism Unveiled* [sic]. The book also included the letters written by ex-Mormon Ezra Booth. The tract has an epic and significant nineteenth-century eighty-word subtitle with a bombshell as its final point: it charged that the Book of Mormon was actually written by author Solomon Spaulding as a romance that was supposed to have been published years earlier. *Mormonism Unveiled* clearly shows how many people were worried about this common young man conning them. Howe characterized the Smith family as “lazy, indolent, ignorant, and superstitious” with a belief in ghosts and witches. Perhaps worst of all, they were “miserably poor.”⁵⁸ Howe can be seen as a successor of sorts to Martin Harris: an upright man whose life had been derailed by Joseph Smith’s con game. His own wife and daughter had been converted by the Mormons, so he turned to the most potent weapon of the nineteenth century: the printed page. Yet Howe was as inconsistent in his descriptions of Smith as his many future detractors would be. In one sentence he explained how Smith could fool so many people through his “inventive and fertile genius,” and in the very next sentence he charged Smith with “extreme ignorance and apparent stupidity.” Howe ultimately concluded that Smith had a “natural genius” that could mesmerize people, thus implicitly providing an explanation for how his wife and daughter were converted.⁵⁹ He went on to excoriate the three witnesses of the golden plates as ignorant and credulous, and he dismissed the other eight witnesses as family members who would, of course, support a lie held in common.

Howe also secured a letter from literary scholar Charles Anthon which further underlines the fear of being hoaxed. Desirous of proof that Smith was translating an actual language, Martin Harris had taken some of the characters from the golden plates to Anthon for verification. Harris said that Anthon authenticated them; Anthon denied it. Anthon wrote about the paper he examined, "I soon came to the conclusion that it was all a trick, perhaps a *hoax*."⁶⁰ The affidavits from Smith's former neighbors underscore this distrust of the Mormon leader. As has been noted by other scholars, these documents are quite suspect as a historical portrait of Smith because they are so deeply marked by bias. They are invaluable, however, in showcasing the anti-Mormon fears of the time that were ultimately a reflection of broader culture's greatest fears, and in showing how people were beginning to imagine Mormonism. The fifty-one statements mostly allege lying, laziness, drunkenness, and money-digging, and are uniform enough to suggest collusion, coaching, the truth, or a matter of interpretation. Yet "truth" in some respects is beside the point—many people believed the affidavits and created a narrative of Smith that still resonates today.

Howe's most significant contribution to anti-Mormon propaganda is the claim that the Book of Mormon was authored by Solomon Spaulding. Howe claimed that Spaulding, a shopkeeper long dead by that point, had written a manuscript with striking parallels to the Book of Mormon. Howe had obtained this information from Spaulding's family, who upon hearing LDS missionaries preach, said that they recognized similarities between the Book of Mormon and Spaulding's never-published book. The theory suggested that Sidney Rigdon somehow obtained a copy of Spaulding's manuscript, gave it to Smith, who plagiarized it into the "Golden Bible." Newspapers ran with the story;

for example, the August 4, 1836, edition of the *Ohio Repository* carried a story titled “History of Mormanism [*sic*].” The piece opened by stating, “It appears that Mormanism owes its origins to an individual named Solomon Spaulding....” The author lambasts the “humbug of Mormanism” and derides Smith as a plagiarist and a money-digger.⁶¹ This claim of Spaulding authorship was favored by conspiracy theories for decades. Although it is now discredited by scholars, the internet is still rife with speculation about Spaulding’s connection to the Book of Mormon.⁶² *Mormonism Unveiled* contains several affidavits from people who affirmed that Spaulding’s manuscript was nearly identical to the Book of Mormon. The problem with these statements was that most of them were relying on memories twenty years or more old, and when Howe actually read the manuscript, he found that the claims of these people did not stand up. Undeterred, he simply posited the existence of a second manuscript, lost to history.⁶³

Before the shocking revelation of polygamous practices, *Mormonism Unveiled* was the chief source for anti-Mormonism, influencing pamphleteers for the rest of Smith’s life and beyond. A representative example is La Roy Sunderland’s 1842 pamphlet, *Mormonism Exposed*. Acknowledging Howe’s work as a valuable source, Sunderland painted Smith and the Mormons as delusional blasphemers in a lexicon almost boilerplate by that point. Sunderland laid out thirty points of objection to the Mormon religion, and his writing shows how the national tenor had moved from Abner Cole’s light mocking to outright hysteria in a little over ten years. Sunderland concluded his piece by harkening back to the theme of delusion, but noting that the delusions were working and thus adding even greater concerns:

The time was when we supposed Mormonism too great an *absurdity* to be received by any person of common sense, who believed the Bible. But we know no system of error was ever broached too monstrous to be believed, by some one....Here you have it as plain as language can make it, that Mormonism *authorizes* and approves the most horrid crimes which it is possible for any one to perpetrate. *Deception, lying, fraud, theft, plunder, arson, treason, and murder*, are among the crimes which have characterized this miserable delusion.⁶⁴

Sunderland's pamphlet oddly enough parallels the Book of Mormon in a way: he took all of the various strands of anti-Mormonism and argued that they were all cause for serious concern, much as Smith had taken on all the religious and political controversies of the day.⁶⁵

Howe's subsequent influence on men like Sunderland is interesting in that it points to another ancillary cause of anti-Mormonism among the elite that spread that particular gospel. As noted, Howe's wife and daughter had joined the faith, much to his dismay; he had also republished Alexander Campbell's "Delusions," and Campbell had lost many of his followers to Smith. Many of Smith's detractors were simply shocked by the popularity of Mormonism. They saw this religion as a religion of the deluded masses, and were determined to destroy it through rhetoric, creating and shaping perceptions of Mormonism, and in some cases, such as in Missouri, joining in the crusade themselves. Yet far from destroying it, their rhetoric continued to bind the Mormon community together. Some members fell away, of course, but they were always replaced by greater numbers.

This swelling of Mormonism's ranks and Smith's choice of Missouri as the promised land would also have important repercussions that highlight a different kind of representation: that of the public manifesto. The troubles in Missouri brought on the era of persecution based on Mormons' supposed support of abolition and their very real

ministry to Native Americans. The public declarations of various committees formed against the Saints in Missouri shows how the complaints against Smith and his church began to shift away from fears of being conned to deeper anxieties about slavery and political dominance. More compellingly, the makeup of the citizen mob committees illustrates how the fears of the Mormons as antislavery united politicians, ministers, generals, and farmers alike. Therefore, just as Mormons united against what they saw as a cultural assault against them by non-Mormons, non-LDS communities also solidified against what they perceived as an imminent Mormon threat to their political, economic, and social way of life.

Indeed, the apex of the fears about Mormons changing the basic character of the Missouri political landscape came with Governor Lilburn Boggs's extermination order of 1838, but its seeds had been well planted at least by July 1833 in the so-called "Manifesto of the Mob" in Jackson County, Missouri. Smith repeatedly refers to a "mob" in his *History of the Church*, yet the word choice is unsound in that it gives the impression of an unorganized group of ruffians. This mob was extremely well-organized and formed strategies for driving the Saints from Missouri or outright killing them, and the manifesto was signed by hundreds of prominent people, including Indian agents, attorneys, judges, business owners, and military men. This manifesto charts the shift in Missouri from following much of the rest of the country's lead in thinking the Mormons delusional to the geographic concern over slavery. The manifesto stated that, "We believed [the Mormons] deluded fanatics...[who] would soon pass away, but in this we were deceived." They charged the Mormons with "tampering with our slaves," "rais[ing] seditions," and "corrupt[ing] our blacks." Citing the importance of protecting their

women and children, the members of the “mob” vowed to drive the Mormons out of Missouri.⁶⁶

The public manifesto and subsequent LDS replies sheds light on an issue that has baffled many throughout the years: why did the Saints receive so much persecution while other equally or greater unfamiliar sects usually did not? The nineteenth century was an age of religious denominational explosion and it also saw the rise of many new sects. Experiments ranged from free love to complete celibacy, and while some of these groups faced various degrees of persecution, no one had an order of extermination printed against them by a state governor. The difference seems to be the successful missionary activity of the Mormons, the emphasis on the gathering, Joseph Smith’s mixing of the sacred and secular, the selection of Missouri as Zion, and the particular cultural moment at which the Saints were founded.

The Mormons arose at the exact moment when they would find a great number of adherents who were facing needs that only that faith could answer such as the potential for lay leadership and a connection to sacred space, and an even greater number of those who would come to hate the new religion due to their preconceived notions of men, their conceptions of morality, and the shifting boundaries of American religious freedom. While the Saints would be persecuted in non-slave areas, such as Illinois and the Utah territory, the ferocious opposition in Missouri accomplished two tasks that would lead to greater persecution: it set a discursive tone that made even sympathetic people suspicious of the Saints once they began to gather in large numbers; and it also created in Mormons an inclination to self-defense that would have disastrous consequences in Illinois.

The Mormons were of course driven out of Missouri, and in Nauvoo, Illinois, they faced some of the strongest charges yet. Drawing on previous anti-LDS works and his own experience in the church, ex-Mormon John C. Bennett published his *History of the Saints* in 1842 and set the tone for much of the literature generated by former Mormons that would come over the ensuing decades. Bennett had been a faithful follower of Smith and a promising leader in the church, so much so that he has been referred to as Joseph Smith's "Judas." But Bennett was excommunicated for carrying on multiple affairs under the guise of sanctioned plural marriage. For his revenge, and echoing Ezra Booth, Bennett charged that he had never believed in any tenet of Mormonism, but that he had been working undercover to expose Joseph Smith's secret plan of empire and tyranny. He compared his act to Napoleon's ruse of proclaiming himself a Muslim, but Bennett notes that, "[H]ow much superior my object was to his! He merely wished to promote the ambitions of his government; I, on the contrary, was endeavoring to save my country from the most dreadful evils—civil war, despotism, and the establishment of a false and persecuting religion."⁶⁷ He proceeds to give a lengthy progression of letters attesting to his character—so lengthy, in fact, that it might give pause to whether he was trustworthy or not. But his character was in a way irrelevant—his archetype and the previous patterns he was following became only more established with his work, and his close association with Smith only gave credence to his story. Bennett quoted liberally from *Mormonism Unveiled*, further reinforcing those claims and adding to them his own scandalous accounts of Smith's "harem" —a discursive link to Mormonism that still haunts the church today.

In the Illinois phase of anti-Mormon sentiment, newspapers again came to the forefront, and Thomas Sharp of the *Warsaw Signal* was one of the most persistent anti-LDS editors. Warsaw had been a major city prior to the arrival of the Mormons and the rise of Nauvoo threatened the city's economic standing. The *Signal* articles show how meteoric Smith's rise had been. The articles attack him almost exclusively. They evince sympathy for ordinary Mormons and offer a truce if they would only leave their prophet's fold. The paper defended Mormon civil liberties against Missouri's attempted extraditions, setting up a climate where they would prove that Smith was violating the very civil liberties the newspaper was espousing. These claims were compounded by the further development of plural marriage. Despite Smith's attempts to keep the practice quiet and confined to the upper echelons of Mormon leadership, the secret soon became quite open in every detail. The *Warsaw Signal* printed a satiric poem that encapsulates many of the complaints against the Saints, and Joseph Smith, in particular, during this time period. One stanza reads:

And 'tis so here, in this sad life –
 Such ills you must endure –
 Some *priest* or *king*,* may claim your wife
 Because that you are poor.
 A REVELATION he may get –
 Refuse it if you dare!
 And you'll be damned perpetually,
 By our good *Lord* the *Mayor*.⁶⁸

The poem ended by making an appeal to those who oppose Smith to maintain their country's rights, liberties, and laws. The poem is filled with esoteric Latter-day Saint terminology, underscoring the fact that Smith was facing serious dissension within his own ranks.

The Warsaw papers kept driving home principles of liberty and law, and eventually they got their message across. Sharp continued to prop up the dissenters as they grew more organized under William Law, calling them the “most intelligent and respectable” citizens of Nauvoo.⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that throughout much of the history of Mormon persecution, the religion itself was cast as “deluded” as Joseph Smith was; yet in the Nauvoo period, the attacks focused mainly on Smith. Editors gave lip service at least to coexisting peacefully with the Mormons. It appears that the newspapers thought Smith *was* Mormonism, and if they could unseat him, the rest would die too.

In 1841, Sharp published a pamphlet by Reverend William Harris called “Mormonism Portrayed” that shows the flavor of Illinois anti-Mormonism and places a heavier emphasis on the secret nature of Mormonism—particularly the organization created to protect Joseph Smith and other Mormons known as the Danites. In recounting the history of the Saints in Missouri, Harris alleged that the Danites had a plan to kill every single non-Mormon in the state, perhaps by poisoning the water supply. Indeed, secrecy became the way to justify violence against the Mormons, replacing Missouri’s abolition concerns. While granting that the Missourians at times went too far, Harris noted that, “[The Mormons] have a capacity for secrecy, which enables them to commit any act of depredation, without fear of detection.”⁷⁰ This capacity for duplicity combined with the natural and understandable occurrence of mobs meant that the Saints would find no peace until they renounced Smith. In convoluted rhetoric, Harris said that he had no use for mobs, yet in this one instance it was justifiable. Shrewdly asking the people of Illinois to stand in the Missourians’ shoes, he told his readers three times in one paragraph that if the Mormons acted precisely as they had done in Missouri, the same

results should take place in Illinois. Harris made the consequential argument that the crimes of the Mormons have no legal redress. Their arrogance, their secrecy, and their cohesiveness were all things that could be seen but no laws were on the books to prevent such perceived transgressions. Harris thus implicitly condoned extralegal violence, a position very much in line with Sharp's and many other prominent citizens in Illinois, particularly in Warsaw. Harris ended with heated rhetoric completely discordant from the rest of the pamphlet, telling his readers that Smith was a modern-day "Mahomet" who would spread his religion by warfare unless checked by extralegal means.⁷¹

The editorials in the *Warsaw Signal* and the Harris pamphlet show how successfully Smith had woven together the sacred and the secular. He had also become a caricature to castigate for political purposes or other designs. Sharp, in particular, played on this dichotomy to argue that Smith was trying to break down the barrier between church and state. He railed equally against Smith as a prophet and as a presidential candidate, which, perhaps, shows he understood Smith better than most. Smith was lampooned and critiqued as mayor and theologian. His doctrine of plural wives was attacked as vigorously as his impact on the Nauvoo courts. Sharp baited Missourians by rhetorically asking what Smith would do to that state if elected to the presidency, and he baited those in Illinois by reminding them of their obligations to their wives and daughters. Yet when the end came, it was a response to a very secular action, and that is where Smith miscalculated. His power as a prophet was at its apex, but in the larger political and cultural world of men, he was vulnerable.

The final phase of anti-Mormon rhetoric during Smith's life began with the one and only edition of the *Nauvoo Expositor*. The *Expositor* was founded by dissenters from

the LDS Church who did not want to leave Mormonism, but who wanted to depose Smith and return the church to its founding precepts. The founders of the *Nauvoo Expositor* thus wanted to continue being Mormons but wanted Smith to step aside in yet another “restoration” of sorts. The explosion of Smith’s theology at Nauvoo did not sit well with these men, particularly his greater emphasis on polygamy for upper-echelon leaders. Moreover, perpetually concerned with extradition to Missouri and near-certain death, Smith had taken on outward appearances of a despot in his control over Nauvoo. He had very real power, and the *Nauvoo Expositor* charged him most of all with using that power to seduce women.

The *Expositor* essays are fascinating in that they take all the various strands of anti-Mormonism and unite them in one single final blow, bookending Abner Cole’s earlier essays but further showing the evolution of the anti-Smith movement in that disaffected Mormons wrote them and in that Smith had aroused so much more ire. The founders of the paper were not so much anti-Mormon as they were anti-Smith. They conflated all the charges against Mormonism over the years into charges against Smith, arguing that if he was deposed then Mormons would exist peacefully and rationally alongside Baptists, Methodists, and other denominations. Point by point they laid out the charges that future generations would emphasize. The authors charged Smith with believing in a plurality of gods, advancing plural marriage, uniting church and state, exercising undue financial control over his followers, forming secret societies, and harboring ambitions of monarchy and empire. They also disingenuously berated Smith for being unchristian towards Missouri, a smart ploy in their attempt to keep Mormonism alive without Smith at its head.⁷²

Ultimately, the *Expositor* showed that Smith, the definitive figure in popular religion of his day, was in conflict with what many of his contemporaries understood about popular religion. The paper charged that individual religious sentiment is fine, but when it came to “religious despotism,” that was no longer protected by the Constitution. In other words, if Smith had merely been an itinerant preacher espousing his peculiar views, there would be no trouble. But as setting himself as a direct and sole conduit to God *and* doing it under the guise of an organized religion, he was duping the innocent and seizing too much power.

The *Expositor* was able to print only one issue before Smith had the press destroyed, but it was enough. Upon hearing of the destruction of the *Expositor*, Thomas Sharp rushed another issue of the *Signal* to print, and he cannily sensed Smith’s error. Calling for “war and extermination” in language reminiscent of Governor Boggs, Sharp hammered home his message of tyranny run amok. The destruction of the press was castigated as “mob violence,” and every charge against Smith was recycled once again, particularly his alleged involvement in an attempt to assassinate Boggs and his purported secret army of men who would perform any murder for him on demand. The anti-Mormons had been waiting for an infringement of some magnitude, and now they had it. Freedom of the press was a sacred virtue when it needed to be, and the citizens of Hancock County resolved to demand that Smith turn himself over to them or “a war of destruction should be waged to the entire destruction, if necessary for our protection, of his adherents.” The committee argued that they had sought proper redress through the ministrations of the law, but having failed at that, they had the right to take up arms—an argument similar to the one Smith made in Missouri. Further arguing that freedom of the

press is a “cardinal privilege,” they called upon surrounding counties, as well as Iowa and Missouri, to help them “exterminate” the leaders of the Saints.⁷³ Their wishes were granted, and on June 27, 1844, two weeks after the resolution was passed, Smith and his brother were gunned down in their cell.

Without a leader, many in the opposition expected the Mormons to dwindle away, but they did not reckon on the effect that persecution had wrought on Mormon identity and community; nor were they aware of the profound organizational skills of Brigham Young. As a writer in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* acknowledged in 1851, “So rapidly has persecution helped on this offspring of ignorance, and tended to give a permanent establishment, a bright future, to a system, not simply of pure invention, but of blasphemous impiety, and folly the most insane.” The author bemoaned Smith’s death because of the binding effect it had on the Mormon community, but it was too late.⁷⁴ Smith and his detractors had wrought a community of believers whose primary identity was being Mormon. Converts longed to be near Smith, but they also hungered for the community and identity afforded to them by the Mormons. One convert recollected upon hearing Mormonism preached for this first time, “How earnestly I wished that I could be where no human ear could hear the sound of my voice that I might shout, ‘Glory to God in the highest, hallelujah to God and the Lamb.’” She stopped herself as she “had never heard a Latter-Day Saint shout, and I had not been very charitable toward the Methodist shouting,” but her enthusiasm was unrelenting and she “constantly longed for the society of the Saints and to hear the Prophet’s voice.”⁷⁵ The society of the Saints, their communion and beliefs, had become interchangeable, or at least a valid substitute, for the leadership of Joseph Smith, a fact the anti-Mormons recognized too late. By the Nauvoo

period, although Smith was indeed the personified synecdoche of the Latter-day Saints to outsiders, to fellow Mormons, he was important and beloved, but ultimately, like any other member, the church could go on without his *embodied* presence.

* * * * *

Joseph Smith's legacy went with the Utah Mormons, despite the fact that much of his family stayed behind.⁷⁶ In death, his stature only grew and legends began to form. In Ogden, Utah, in 1852, convert Ann Eliza Coffin Garner wrote down the story of how in 1843 her father took up arms for Smith, and Smith told him, "Go, and not one hair of your head shall be lost." In the skirmish, a cannonball knocked his hat off, and "the prophecy of the Lord was fulfilled."⁷⁷ Even more tellingly, Zedekiah Knapp Judd's autobiography shows how the memory of Joseph Smith would continue to serve LDS identity. Knapp wrote that after Smith's death there was some confusion about who would lead the church, but in a meeting, Brigham Young began to look and sound exactly like the fallen prophet. Knapp was awed and wrote, "The change of voice and appearance I could not account for only that the mantle of Joseph had fallen on Brigham Young." And that was more than enough to make him follow Young to Utah, along with most of the Latter-day Saints.⁷⁸ Smith's legacy was not in his family, but in his theology and in the way he imagined his religion.

Thus, while some stayed behind to meld into other denominations or form rival factions, the body of Mormons who left Illinois for Utah took with them the identity that they—in particular Smith and his detractors—had created. Smith did not only give them an effective mechanism for the smooth transition of power in a crisis, he gave them, through inventive theology and through cultivating a sense of persecution, their very

identities.⁷⁹ Much has been made—and rightly so—of the characteristics the Mormons formed on the way to Utah, but that sense of distinctiveness was built on a large foundation already supplied by Smith and his enemies. The tensions between Mormon and non-Mormon representations developed a cultural narrative about the Saints that resonated throughout the rest of the nineteenth century as the doctrine of polygamy would thrust the church into the national spotlight once again, with consequences that challenged some of the foundations of American thought and values.

Chapter 2

Scripting the Saints, 1845-1890

The Mormon Church not only offends the moral sense of manhood by sanctioning polygamy, but prevents the administration of justice through ordinary instrumentalities of law.

–James Garfield, Inaugural Address, 1881

It is preached all from the pulpit and written by the pen,
The judges and the lawyers, too, are boasting now and then
That they're going to put the Mormons down in Utah.

–“The Tucker Bill,” Thomas Vaughan

After the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, Jr., it was clear that the Mormons were not going to find a welcome home in the United States if they wanted to continue practicing their religion in the manner Smith taught in Nauvoo. Thus, the main body of the Saints made the long trek west to the Great Salt Lake Valley to set up a government and society beyond the reach of the laws of the United States. Upon the Saints' arrival in what they called Deseret, a Book of Mormon word meaning “honeybee,” the land was owned by Mexico. A few short years later, however, through the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Mormons were once again under the jurisdiction of the United States. The Saints tried for statehood in 1849 in order to gain the privilege of self-government, but they lacked the prerequisite number of inhabitants and their request for territory was too large. There was also a concern in the federal government that they were setting up what some have called a theocracy, a government run by the Mormon elders according to the dictates of their religion instead of the principles of American republicanism. Despite these nascent concerns, Brigham Young served as territorial governor from 1850 through 1857. His tenure ended when he was removed by James Buchanan under suspicion of subverting federal authority. Indeed, Buchanan was so convinced that the Mormons were defying the United States that he sent the army to subdue them. The crisis was averted

without a single battle being fought, but the perception of Mormons as anti-government had grown. It also became clear that the physical isolation of Utah was not going to be enough to let the Mormons finally practice their religion in peace, particularly after the discovery of gold in California made Utah a way-station of sorts between the East and West coasts.¹

This chapter argues that as the Mormons became imaginatively closer to the rest of the United States, anxiety about the Saints began to grow throughout America, and these anxieties can be seen in contemporary representations of the Saints, particularly in novels and memoirs. The cultural concerns revolved around fears of the polluting influence that Mormon practices and beliefs might have on the nation; they also shed light on many important concerns in nineteenth-century American society. In *Purity and Danger* (1966), cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas argues that societies experience fears of pollution when an anomaly threatens culturally mediated norms.² During the nineteenth century, American society experienced such fears with the success of Mormonism in Utah. Accusations of polygamy, white slavery, and blood atonement led to a belief that Mormons would subvert established society, and sporadic anti-Mormon violence and legislation reflected those fears for decades.³ Gustive Larson has written about the “Americanization” of Utah in a political sense, and Leonard J. Arrington has covered the economic aspects of granting Utah statehood. But building on the work of Terryl Givens and Nancy Bentley, this chapter shows how the cultural process was the driving force behind the anti-Mormon crusade, and only when its clear objectives had been met could the Saints achieve full American citizenship.⁴

The doctrine of polygamy was officially announced in 1852, and the cultural reaction against it began in earnest the same year with the publication of the first anti-Mormon novel, *The Mormoness*; it continued unabated throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. Leonard J. Arrington and John Haupt have shown that American novelists of the nineteenth century ultimately produced at least fifty anti-Mormon novels with similar motifs.⁵ Indeed, as Mormon scholar Hugh Nibley wrote in the preface to his 1963 work *Sounding Brass*, “For over a hundred years specialists in Mormon atrocities have done nothing but borrow from each other.”⁶ However, it is this repetition that gives these stories their cultural power in that the novels simultaneously reinforced anti-Mormon beliefs for those who held preexisting prejudices or helped create them for the uninitiated. The form of the novel allowed writers to imaginatively reconstruct Mormonism more freely and expansively than any newspaper story or pamphlet, and memoirs that negatively portrayed LDS life served to increase the verisimilitude of fictional tales. As Douglas notes, “Any given system of classification must give rise to anomalies, and any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions.”⁷ One way that American culture confronted the perceived Mormon threat was through a novelistic paradigm that constructed Mormons as a polluting Other and thus sought to justify anti-Mormon legislation and violence. Legislation and violence eventually ensued, and the cultural products built on top of each other and helped create a tower of anti-LDS sentiment that very nearly led to the destruction of the Mormon Church.

This chapter thus shows that the cultural reaction against Mormonism and polygamy was slow-building, but once it gained full force, it garnered the power to

change the very foundations of the Mormon Church, and therefore the identities of the Mormon people. The representations produced during this time period also clearly illustrate the prevailing anxieties of that time. Producers of popular culture had an established body of work to draw on from the 1830s and 1840s, but they also added important points to the anti-Mormon narrative that deeply resonated within American culture. More significantly, the reaction against polygamy further defined what it meant to be an American citizen with full Constitutional rights: being white and male would no longer fully suffice. Furthermore, the reaction to the Saints of this era illustrates the flexibility of the parameters of white citizenship. Once Utah finally obtained statehood in 1896, a kind of cultural amnesia quickly granted Mormons most privileges of white American citizenship, thus showcasing how easily the line between “citizen” and “alien” could be traversed by whites.

The “Mormon question,” which perplexed the nation for four decades, was actually a much deeper issue than one of religion. It went to the heart of concerns about American identity, citizenship, and empire, presaging events that would come as rising American power began to exert its influence on the rest of the world. For example, in the 1901 Supreme Court case, *Downes v. Bidwell*, Puerto Rico’s sovereignty was at issue.⁸ The United States had acquired the territory from Spain after the Spanish-American War of 1898, and the justices were tasked with determining the island’s legal relationship to the United States. Via infamously tortured rhetoric, they concluded that Puerto Rico “was foreign to the United States in a domestic sense.”⁹ In other words, Puerto Rico was indeed “a territorial dependency” of the United States, but it was too “alien” a place to easily move to full statehood. The so-called *Insular Cases* that followed this landmark

decision determined the fates of several other territories. Scholars rightly note the significance of these cases, citing their importance in shaping American domestic identity, but rarely observe that the thinking that led to Puerto Rico being declared “foreign in a domestic sense” owed much of its logic and structure to the conflict between Mormons and non-Mormons that had spanned the second half of the nineteenth century. Utah was the first territory to be defined as foreign in a domestic sense and thus helped define what it meant to be American in the turbulent second half of the nineteenth century.

Mormon plural marriage received the most attention throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, but Mormon collectivity also irked anti-Mormon spectators. In their perceived lack of individuality and their alien cultural practices, the Mormons failed basic tests concerning the definition of Americanism. In the *Downes* case, Justice Edward Douglas White noted that the reason Congress held sway over territories was because some cultures were too “foreign...to [America’s] habits, traditions, and modes of life” to trust to self-government. He noted that there was some concern that with such “unrestrained possession of power,” Congress might pass “unjust and oppressive legislation in which the natural rights of territories, or their inhabitants, may be engulfed in a centralized despotism.” Any Mormon reader familiar with history probably would have objected to his next statement, that “these fears...find no justification in the action of Congress in the past century.” They would more likely have agreed with the dissenting opinion of Chief Justice Melville Weston Fuller, who wrote, “[T]he contention seems to be that, if an organized and settled province of another sovereignty is acquired by the United States, Congress has the power to keep it, like a disembodied shade, in an

indeterminate state of ambiguous existence for an indefinite period....”¹⁰ The parallels with Utah are striking.

Beginning in 1862, Congress passed increasingly harsh legislation against the Mormon Church, culminating in 1890 with a proposed bill to completely disincorporate the church, seize all of its holdings, and effectively disfranchise all members. Cultural texts ran parallel to these acts of Congress, sometimes reflecting societal discourse, sometimes leading it. These texts were led by the anti-Mormon novels that castigated the doctrines and the people of the church. As scholar Terryl Givens notes, such vitriol was necessary to lay a foundation for action against the Mormon Church. Givens argues that these novels represented a model for the construction of religious heresy, in that only if the Mormons were branded “heretics” could the religiously plural United States act against them.¹¹ The United States was founded on religious tolerance, so Mormons had to be cast as the Other to justify action against their beliefs. Building on the work of Charles A. Cannon, Nancy Bentley has further argued that the anti-Mormon novels of the nineteenth century represent a triumph of sentimental fiction, a genre that helped shape law. Bentley notes that the eventual abandonment of polygamy shows just how powerful sentimental domestic fiction was, and the potent role that the genre played in establishing the nuclear family as the foundation of American republicanism.¹² Other scholars have also noted the significant legal precedents set in direct correlation with the emotional appeals of anti-Mormon novel writers.¹³

Yet it took more than novels to finally eradicate polygamy and ease Utah into the union after five failed attempts. Furthermore, given the true mission of the novels, there was no real need to brand the Mormons as heretics or argue that their “peculiar

institution” of polygamy threatened the American family. Those were just convenient, additional, and admittedly potent justifications for abuse. But authors, politicians, preachers, and newspapers did something far more powerful that helps explain not only why it took Utah so long to become a state, but also shows how Americans used Mormonism as a mirror to define their very identity: they cast the doctrine of Mormons, the bodies of Mormons, and even the geography of Mormons as “foreign” to the ideals, beliefs, and values of the United States.

To anti-Mormons, Utah Mormonism represented a warped view of an America that could be, without vigilance, an eventual replication of the LDS Church. Those sympathetic to the Mormons and those with a more objective viewpoint were often puzzled at the vitriol spewed from the printing presses to the very halls of Congress; after all, Mormons had consistently proven themselves industrious, thrifty, hard-working, and law-abiding in every arena except for polygamy. Their history of persecution made for a sympathetic narrative, and they were steadily transforming the once barren Great Salt Lake into a habitable environment. Reformers further touted Utah as a place without major problems of alcoholism, gambling, or prostitution. Yet to those who dreamed of an American empire, Utah was all too foreign and all too domestic. In other words, like Puerto Rico, the Latter-day Saints and their practices seemed alien to many Americans. But the geographical proximity of Utah and the fact that territories usually moved to statehood made a significant block of anti-Mormons fear for the future of their country. Unlike other peculiar religious bodies, the Mormons would control an entire state and have a strong representative voice in Congress. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 seemed to provide another opportunity for the vision of Americanism put

forth by Utah Mormons to spread across the land. The anti-Mormons saw tyranny in the rule of Brigham Young and the higher-ranking bishops; they saw the unwashed masses of Europe spreading like a plague across the Utah desert; and they combined these fears and loathing with a sexualized branding of Mormonism that made it seem as licentious as the harems of the “Orientals.”

Indeed, just as Edward Said has pointed out how Europeans have defined themselves vis-à-vis Asian culture and society, so too did Americans define themselves against Mormonism.¹⁴ They created a largely imaginary space of alien cultural practices. Arrington and Haupt note, “The non-Mormon fiction writers and their myths were more potent in molding public opinion than were the realities the Mormons continued to reassert,” and more ominously, “the myths were converted into the realities of official policy.”¹⁵ When looking at Utah, one could choose to see white American citizens transforming the landscape and building a just society in an inhospitable climate. If that were the vision of most Americans, Utah would swiftly become a state, the Mormons would control it, and the United States would gain yet another layer of diversity to add to its mosaic. Or, one could see Utah as a den of vice and corruption, an alien land with a sinister priesthood intent on subverting republicanism and not only ruling Utah and its two Senate seats, but also influencing nearby Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, and Arizona. The contest began almost as soon as the Mormons had settled in their new kingdom. Those critical of the Mormons very quickly established something very powerful that the Saints and their allies never could get a handle on: a compelling narrative of what it meant to be American—a narrative many people responded to particularly in the aftermath of the Civil War, when a new national identity was being created. This struggle

between anti-Mormons and the Latter-day Saints and their few allies represented a coda of sorts to that war, with southern senators again defending states' rights, going down to defeat once more, and the power of the federal government growing yet again.

The narrative the anti-Mormons established was so powerful that it can be found across literature, film, and television to this day. To cite a well-known example, in Sherlock Holmes' very first outing in *A Study in Scarlet* (1877), the narrative makes a rare and extended break from England to the American West *sans* Holmes, where “fresh women appeared in the harems of the [Mormon] Elders—women who pined and wept, and bore upon their faces the traces of an unextinguishable horror.”¹⁶ Doyle's book is a significant piece of evidence that suggests that as early as 1887—three years before the official demise of polygamy as doctrine—a British citizen could articulate the narrative that anti-Mormon writers had constructed. This new narrative showed the rest of the world part of what it meant to be an American—an important feat in a world growing accustomed to the new vision of America forged by Abraham Lincoln and the results of the Civil War, and a narrative still widely read today.

In Doyle's novel, it is the Mormons who are portrayed as defying the foundation of religious pluralism on which the Constitution rests. In the narrative, a band of Mormons freshly expelled from Nauvoo come across a man and a young girl dying in the desert. They offer to take the pair with them if they convert; if they do not, they will be left to the mercies of the elements. This faith-based tyranny makes the federal government's future actions a counter-strike for religious pluralism and sacred Constitutional rights, rather than an attack against them. Doyle also seemingly contradicts the anti-Mormon impetus of his book by citing the great trek west as an example of

“Anglo-Saxon tenacity.”¹⁷ But that trope rested on an established narrative as well—one key to the process of Othering the Mormons, and it worked on several layers. It is as if the non-Mormons of the United States had appropriated the traits that they admired about Mormonism, perhaps attributing LDS success to their whiteness, which included established tropes such as a Puritan work ethic, while in discussing less favorable practices the Mormons lost their status as white Americans. The trek showed what they might have been had they not given into “licentiousness” and “barbarism.” The conquering of the land was a familiar theme in American thought and literature, but Mormonism presented a skewed view of that narrative, and often led authors to contradict themselves in the very same sentence.

The persistent contradictions in anti-Mormon literature thus reveal deep tensions in American society. Many Mormons *were* industrious and hard-working, and they were largely white. The taming of Utah was a cultural mirror of sorts that brought to mind the taming of the colonies by the hardy ancestors of many Americans. The very familiarity of that narrative is what made the Mormon issue even more immediate. There was a danger that the Mormons could be mistaken for “true” Americans, and their values and beliefs established across the American West, and perhaps the entire continent. Part of this anxiety was addressed by asserting that one could read the “unextinguishable horror” on the faces of Mormon women. If they were simply white, they were invisible outside of Utah, and thus dangerous. If one could look for clues to see if a person was a Mormon, however, the danger seemed easier to confront. The nation struggled with constructing the Mormons as the Other, and by the time Doyle put pen to parchment, the narrative was locked firmly into place.

Indeed, Doyle's tenacious Anglo-Saxons and newly minted Mormons soon turned tyrannical, and "the victims of persecution...turned persecutors," thus dismissing the sympathetic narrative of the Missouri and Illinois periods.¹⁸ Doyle tells of "secret judges" and a "vague and terrible power" that "cast a cloud over the State of Utah." As the years pass and the pages turn, descriptions of the beauty of Utah give way to mountains that are "black, stern, and menacing," with columns like "ribs of some petrified monster."¹⁹ The harried protagonists escape "wild chaos" and "despotism" to "freedom"—that is, mainstream America. Utah was depicted as foreign as were Mormons. Thus, America was defined over and over again in the nineteenth century by what producers of mass culture deemed its opposite.

Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional examination of the Mormons is one of the better known today, yet he did not invent the Mormon character that was a product of so much literary imagination. Doyle was working from a well-established script that began production in the 1850s—one that was mainly represented in novels, but also found a voice in memoir, legislation, speeches, and sermons among other media. The anti-LDS rhetoric of the 1850s, in turn, drew on the anti-Mormon narratives established through the pulpit, pamphlet, and press of the 1830s and 1840s. The Mormons had lost their leader in 1844, but had been permitted to leave Illinois and trek to Utah to practice their faith in peace. Yet with the discovery of gold in 1848, the outside world began to rush toward Mormon territory once again. Producers of popular culture had seen firsthand that violence and decapitation of the leadership structure would not stop Mormonism. So they took their voice to the people, urging them to petition Congress to destroy the church by fiat; many even urged violence. Each novel and each piece of legislation built on the one

before it, culminating in the 1870s and 1880s with Brigham Young's own ex-wife writing a tell-all exposé, serving as the very synecdoche of all the fictional heroines who had come before. She essentially constructed an Uncle Tom-like figure who roused the sympathies of thousands, while simultaneously serving to make the fictional heroines of the 1880s all the more real. The anti-Mormon American novels of the nineteenth century, as well as the critically important memoirs by Ann Eliza Young and Fanny Stenhouse, cast the Mormon Church, and more importantly, the physical body of each devout Mormon, as an alien and polluting Other that was defiling Utah; if left unchecked, it could defile the nation and threaten the very definition of what it meant to be American.

First Drafts

Prior to the mid-1850s, the script for understanding Mormonism was still not fully in place. The pamphlets of the 1840s had set certain expectations regarding blood atonement, secret rituals, tyrannical leaders, and occasionally allusions to polygamy, but there was not yet a consistent narrative. Indeed, with the Mormons' arduous trip west, there was even some attempt to construct a more favorable narrative out of their plight. In 1851, the pro-Mormon *New York Tribune* mused that "the success of Salt Lake City would seem to prove that the great body of the Mormons are persons of energy and capacity." Acknowledging that the Mormons had "peculiar religious and moral notions," the *Tribune* argued that these "remarkable people" and "patriotic citizens" could still be a commercial and political boon to the rest of the United States. The *Tribune* felt sure that the Mormons were not in any "danger of ever being assailed by hostile or intolerant neighbors."²⁰ That was one year before the official proclamation of polygamy. With this

pronouncement, the anti-Mormon novels began to follow, and the Saints faced hostility that threatened the church's existence.

The Mormoness, published in 1852, was the first anti-Mormon novel, but in many ways, because it was first, and because it was published the very same year as the plural marriage doctrine, it had a much smaller script to draw on than subsequent stories. This work did not even mention polygamy, and its characters were cast as rather sympathetic, if deluded, thus aligning it more with the pamphlets that had preceded it rather than the novels that would follow. In the 1850s, the powerful anti-Mormon narrative, so evident by the 1880s, was not yet fully scripted. Indeed, in the brief fictional tale, "A Mormon Romance," humorist Artemus Ward casts about for a grand summing-up to his tale, but finally gives up, noting that, "[W]riting Mormon romances is confusing to the intellect. You try it and see."²¹

Two early anti-Mormon novels, *Boadicea* (1855), by Alfreda Eva Bell, and *Mormon Wives* (1856), by Metta Victoria Fuller set the framework for much of the rhetoric that followed. In these novels, the Mormons are depicted as polluting Others who foul whomever and whatever they come into contact with and are clear and present dangers to American republicanism. In an era before the railroad linked Utah to the rest of the United States, these novels performed significant cultural labor that began to shape American public opinion about the new Mormon situation out west. In *Boadicea*, the title character lives in Salt Lake City and was raised a Mormon, but the doctrine of polygamy becomes abhorrent to her. She is set to wed a young man named Hubert, and she makes him promise that he will never take another wife. He eventually reneges on that promise, and insult is added to injury when a Mormon elder asks her to become his spiritual wife.

In a display of Western verve, the heroine pulls a pistol while informing the reader that “the Mormon men are the vilest, lowest cowards imaginable” and that they are “dehumanized, effeminate, and lazy.”²² These words are serving cultural labor in that they are adding to, reinforcing, and in some instances creating a script that served to instruct people on what it meant to be an American. As the novel progresses, Hubert’s second wife tries to poison Boadicea, and a mysterious group of elders tries to assassinate her. Hubert sees these atrocities and vows to flee with Boadicea, but the elders strangle him for his apostasy in an act of blood atonement. Before the short novel is finished, Hubert’s second wife has murdered Boadicea’s child and committed suicide, and the vilest elder has burned to death with his child. Bell assures the readers that events such as these are “daily occurrences.”²³ Boadicea escapes to tell her tale and “swell the outcry for the speedy destruction of such a hell of vice as the Mormon colony.”²⁴

The use of the word “colony” has interesting implications for readers, in that a Mormon colony could easily evolve into a Mormon state, and in a place where women and children are murdered “daily,” barbarism and tyranny could reign in counterpoint to civilization and democracy. Taking its cue, in 1856, the new Republican Party platform vowed to stamp out the “twin relics of barbarism,” polygamy and slavery.

Boadicea is significant because it initiated several motifs that would recur throughout the anti-Mormon novels of the nineteenth century. First of all, it is violent, and as Arrington and Haupt wryly note, the subtitle of the book, *Life Scenes in Utah*, could easily have been changed to “Death-Scenes in Utah.”²⁵ No person is safe in the polluting environment of the Mormon colony: heroes perish in great number alongside villains; by implication, no person is safe in America until Mormonism is extinguished.

The doctrine of blood atonement is presented as an unquestioned truth, and readers are advised to steer clear of Utah. The Mormon community is portrayed as depraved and contrasted sharply with the rest of the country. Another trope that Bell initiates is an omniscient narrative voice that is scornful of Mormons and at times moves completely outside of the narrative to more directly critique the faith. At one point, she sermonizes, “The society of the Mormon settlements consists of blacklegs, murderers, forgers, swindlers, gamblers, thieves, and adulterers!”²⁶ She even breaks completely away from the narrative to print the creed of the Mormons, complete with sarcastic italics for the beliefs she deems most ludicrous. If one were to excise this part of the novel and read it by itself, one would think it was part of an anti-Mormon pamphlet rather than a novel. The story clearly shows the ways in which popular culture tropes can become script-like, familiar, and powerful to readers. Using a free indirect style of writing and an omniscient narrator that vocalizes critiques of Mormonism through different characters gives the novel an authoritative and trustworthy voice. Bell writes that Mormonism “must, we hope, sooner or later, destroy itself, like a hideous monster feeding on its own body.”²⁷ This teratology would be seen in almost every other anti-Mormon novel, usually with Mormonism cast as a giant snake threatening to stretch across the nation. Furthermore, by printing the creed of the Saints, Bell seems to aim for the authenticity of one who has the knowledge to take apart the Mormon doctrine. As Edward Said notes about the importance of knowledge in constructing the Other, the information itself can serve as a creating force; thus, it need not be wholly accurate, for knowledge allows domination.²⁸ The claim of authenticity gives novels such as these an authority they would not have otherwise.

Bell also strives for authenticity by mentioning real Mormon leaders. She describes a bust of Joseph Smith “as repellant as it is coarse, cunning and full of passions, sensuality, and every mean and cowardly vice.”²⁹ Just as with Arthur Conan Doyle’s Mormon women and their faces of “unextinguishable horror,” Bell is trying to give the reading public clues on how to spot Mormons. Author J. H. Beadle attempted to do the same thing in his 1870 “exposé,” *Life in Utah*, arguing that phrenological charts showed that the bumps on Joseph Smith’s head revealed that he had a near “perfect” score when it came to tendencies of sexual passion.³⁰ Bell also brought in living Mormons by thinly cloaking their identities. Her character Bernard Yale (read: Brigham Young) is the leader of the colony and is described as having a “harem” that he parades through town. Bell tells readers that it is not uncommon for Mormons to have sisters as wives, and she repeatedly describes Mormon women as plain and repulsive, an odd choice since it is presumably the women her narrative is seeking to set free. Yet the recurrent description of Mormon women as “unattractive” performs significant cultural labor, as well. When discussing “harems” of Asian women, authors of the nineteenth century usually conceded their beauty and focused on the negative aspects of “prostitution.”³¹ However, polygamy could conceivably be viewed as a domestic arrangement more socially acceptable than prostitution, and authors such as Bell wanted to simultaneously discourage polygamy while assuring “true” American men that they were not missing out on anything.

In a bit of tension that further reveals the manifold contradictions in nineteenth-century American society, Bell also states that the women in plural marriage were “white slaves,” and this categorization became an important part of anti-Mormon literature. The slavery motif extended well beyond the women in polygamy to the threat of enslavement

of the entire nation. David Brion Davis argues that when Americans of the Jacksonian era “saw themselves excluded and even barred from witnessing certain proceedings, they imagined a ‘mystic power’ conspiring to enslave them.”³² The secret temple rituals of Mormonism, when paired with a literal accusation of white slavery, served as a strong narrative that threatened the future of the nation. Published one year before the Republican Party railed against polygamy, *Boadicea* was an important cultural tool in vilifying Mormonism.

Metta Victoria Fuller’s *Mormon Wives* picks up in her preface where Bell left off by arguing, “Repulsive as slavery seems to us, we can but deem polygamy a thing more loathsome and poisonous to social and political purity.”³³ While *Boadicea* is a slim ninety-seven pages, Fuller’s book is over three-hundred pages and represents, along with Maria Ward’s *Female Life Among the Mormons* (1855), one of the first fully formed works of what can only be considered the literary genre of the anti-Mormon novel.³⁴ In these novels, a young, innocent, and beautiful girl living on the East coast of the United States or in England is spiritually seduced by Mormon missionaries and treks west after being assured by the fiancé or husband that he will never enter into polygamy. Soon after arriving in Utah, the husband is polluted by the Mormon polygamy doctrine and chooses a plural wife. His original wife enters into a state of brain fever and either recovers to escape; nobly bears her burden in sharp juxtaposition to the Mormon community; or dies. Throughout these novels, an omniscient narrator lectures on the evils of the tyrannical priesthood, blood atonement, polygamy, and/or the perils of white slavery, all the while creating an alien atmosphere out of Utah and the Mormon people themselves,

underscoring the notion that any American can become an unredeemed captive if the Mormon Church is not eradicated.

In Fuller's *Mormon Wives*, the author tells the reader that as horrible as her narrative is, "multiply[] it by tens of thousands" to get a full grasp of the "moral monster [that is] Deseret."³⁵ She underscores this point and increases the authenticity of the novel by including an appendix full of alleged Mormon depravities and subtitles her work, *A Narrative of Facts Stranger than Fiction*. In the narrative, young Margaret Fletcher leaves New England with her husband Richard Wolde after securing his vow that he will never take another wife. However, Wolde breaks his vow to increase his power in the church, and Margaret is so distraught that she eventually dies of heartbreak. The second wife is so moved that she leaves the Mormon colony to try and make up for her sins by warning others about Mormonism.

Despite the popularity of these two novels, as the nation turned to Civil War the anti-Mormon novels largely dissipated. Only four anti-Mormon novels were published in the United States between 1861 and the end of Reconstruction in 1877.³⁶ The lack of cultural texts is reflected in the relative lack of anti-Mormon legislation. The Republican Congress took time to honor their plank by passing an anti-bigamy act in 1862, but with pressing matters of rebellion at hand, the statute was rarely enforced. Abraham Lincoln wanted Utah neutral and quiet, and told a Mormon representative that if Brigham Young "will let me alone I will let him alone."³⁷ After the war, a harsh anti-Mormon bill was proposed in the House in 1870, but in a nation weary of battle, and with southern congressmen newly sworn in, the bill died in committee. The federal government did appoint non-Mormon officials in Utah and hoped that time would deal with the problem

as they turned to Reconstruction.³⁸ Despite the lack of novels, three important memoirs provided a bridge between the novels of the 1850s and those of the post-Reconstruction era, giving further credence to the novels as examples of horrors that not only could potentially happen to real people, but had actually occurred.

Reality Scripts

One of the most significant works published during this period was Mark Twain's 1872 travel narrative *Roughing It*, which chronicled his western sojourn of 1871 to 1872. Twain, who always had a deep understanding of the contradictions and tensions in American culture, tried his hand at wrestling with what he called "the Western peculiar institution" of polygamy.³⁹ Twain's take was largely satirical, of course, but it also contained pointed insight. He called Salt Lake City "the capital of the only absolute monarch in America," contrasting the republicanism of America that had been so hard-won in 1776 and 1865 with the perceived tyranny of Brigham Young. He hit on the voyeuristic qualities of the nation's fascination with polygamy, writing that, "We felt a curiosity to ask every child how many mothers it had, and if it could tell them apart.... We so longed to have a good satisfying look at a Mormon family in all its comprehensive amplexness"; as did many of his readers.⁴⁰ Twain discerned how Utah was foreign in a domestic sense and presaged territorial rule by noting that, "There is a batch of governors, and judges, and other officials here, shipping from Washington, and they maintain the semblance of a republican form of government—but the petrified truth is that Utah is an absolute monarchy and Brigham Young is king!"⁴¹ After making obligatory jokes about Brigham Young not being able to remember his wives or children and mocking the Book of Mormon, Twain cuts to the heart of the narrative war being waged between the

Mormons and anti-Mormons. He notes how little success he had in understanding the complicated issues surrounding the Mormons' place in the nation, writing, "All our 'information' had three sides to it, and so I gave up the idea that I could settle the 'Mormon question' in two days. Still, I have seen newspaper correspondents do it in one."⁴²

The legislators returned to the forefront two years after Twain published his narrative with the passage of the Poland Bill. Congress tried to control the Mormons by taking away control of the courts from the Saints and allowing prosecution to proceed for the accused parties in the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the brutal 1857 slaughter of a Missouri/Arkansas wagon train by a Mormon militia and Paiute Indians.⁴³ The Poland Act greatly increased the potential of the 1862 anti-bigamy act, but it had little to no effect on the doctrine of polygamy, which was what most reformers were concerned about. This ineffectual legislation and the snap judgments on Mormons that Twain referred to were addressed head-on by two women who had actually lived in polygamous marriages. Fannie Stenhouse and Ann Eliza Young wrote back-to-back memoirs, published in 1874 and 1875, that gave credence to the anti-Mormon novels that had come before and lent plausibility to all those that would come after.

As autobiography scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note, "remembering involves a reinterpretation of the past in the present," and is never passive.⁴⁴ Thus, the three significant memoirs that came out in the 1870s can tell us a great deal about how Americans felt about the Mormons at the time—and also how they felt about themselves. Former Latter-day Saint Fanny Stenhouse published her memoir in 1874 after having great success with a smaller work on the same subject. *Tell It All* chronicles Stenhouse's

time in Mormonism from her early conversion in England to her difficult days in the throes of plural marriage in Utah to her escape from the religion and the state. Since Stenhouse's husband had been a prominent leader in the church, her book attracted a great deal of interest.⁴⁵ Stenhouse's work is notable not only for its content but also for the fact that Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the preface, further solidifying the discursive link between polygamy and slavery. Using her strongest rhetorical techniques, Stowe reminded the reading public that

The slave-pens of the South have become a nightmare of the past; the auction blocks and whipping-posts have given place to the church and school-house, and the songs of emancipated millions are heard throughout our land. Shall we then not hope that the hour is come to loose the bonds of a cruel slavery whose chains have cut into the very hearts of thousands of our sisters—a slavery which debases and degrades womanhood, mother, and the family?⁴⁶

It is this type of rhetoric that Nancy Bentley notes “made polygamy imaginable and even punishable as a form of treason.”⁴⁷ Stenhouse was primarily trying to sell books, of course, but when she writes that her work is “a *true* history by a *real* Mormon woman,” she claims the special privilege of the memoir as a “true” account that can supplement the earlier anti-Mormon novels and thus give legislators an even firmer reason to eradicate Mormonism.⁴⁸ Like many other authors, she credits the Saints for their “extraordinary exodus” from Nauvoo, but once the narrative reaches Utah, only the landscape is lovely.⁴⁹

Brigham Young was still alive when Stenhouse's book was published, and she continues the discursive project of de-Americanizing him, and through him, the entire Mormon Church. She writes that while he makes a favorable first impression (echoing Artemus Ward and Mark Twain), he is a “despot” and a “tyrant” who “has meddled with the person, the property, and the lives and the liberty of his dupes; and has at the same

time debased and enslaved their souls.”⁵⁰ Her language is revealing. She calls on the familiar words of property, life, and liberty to echo the ideals Americans value most, and argues that Young stands in opposition to them, and thus America. More subtly, she talks of enslaving the *souls* instead of the *bodies* of others. With the eradication of slavery, anti-Mormon reformers wanted to push hard against polygamy. They thus developed a narrative strategy of arguing that the Mormon brand of “white slavery” was worse than African slavery, because the argument went that the African’s soul was his or her own, while the Mormon was beholden to the church, both body and soul. Stenhouse develops this point later with much more fervor, arguing that the Mormon style of slavery “is infinitely worse and more debasing than the bondage of the Negro, for *they* give soul and mind, as well as body and goods, utterly, absolutely, and for ever, into the iron grasp of the Mormon priesthood.”⁵¹

Despite her critique of previous novels as not sufficiently “true” enough, Stenhouse re-tells the tale of Brigham Young not recognizing his own children that had become an established trope of anti-Mormon fiction. She admits that the story is probably false, but that just underscores how pervasive and even precise the script for the anti-Mormon narrative had become that she bothered to mention it at all.

Another key point one can derive from *Tell It All* is that the reformers had their sights set on more than just polygamy. As many Mormon authors suspected, much of the nation wanted to completely eradicate the Mormon Church and *all* of its tenets. Stenhouse and others thus argued that Mormonism was in opposition to Americanism, no matter what they might do to change. She writes, “If Polygamy were to be relinquished, it would still be found that Mormonism had really very little in common with other sects,

and very much that was completely antagonistic to them.”⁵² Thus, a commitment to religious pluralism need not hinder the Mormon eradication project. Even if polygamy were abolished, Mormons were still not fit to join in the full benefit of constitutional protection.

Legislative action is just what Stenhouse calls for in the wake of the failure of early anti-Mormon legislation. She asks the federal government to “stretch forth its long arm of power for the defence and protection of honest and law-abiding citizens.”⁵³ The “Mormon question” was effectively enlarging the power of the federal government, and most producers of cultural texts backed this enhanced power. Yet while it is true the power of the government was growing, so too was the power of popular culture; indeed, in this particular instance, each needed the other. The cultural labor done by Stenhouse and other anti-Mormon writers should not be underestimated. Stenhouse pushed her vision of Americanism not just within the borders of the United States but around the world. One Mormon on a mission to Australia actually went to a lecture Stenhouse gave to promote her book. He wrote in his diary for days about the flyers around town and how much they bothered him. The newspapers apparently published several favorable reviews about Stenhouse but would not publish a letter he wrote denouncing her. He had to be satisfied with a note in his diary, asking that “the Lord overrule her, and her wicked efforts.”⁵⁴

Probably the biggest impact of the decade, and the one that is still reconstructed today in fictional re-imaginings, was when Ann Eliza Young divorced her husband Brigham, dragged him into court, and later lectured on and wrote a memoir about her experiences.⁵⁵ Unlike Stenhouse, she was born into Mormonism, and as a plural wife of

the “tyrant” of Mormonism, a particularly credible witness. In her memoir, Ann Eliza drills home the theme of slavery, repeatedly calling for “liberation,” and railing against “bondage” and “oppression,” claiming that Mormon slavery fettered body *and* soul. Besides the scandalizing fact that she had been a plural wife of Brigham Young, she represented the voice of someone the nation could easily sympathize with. For example, in a typical passage, she writes, “A gentleman visiting Salt Lake City for the first time once asked me where polygamy hurt the most. [I told him] ‘It hurts all over, body and soul, mind and heart....I can’t tell a spot that it does not hurt.’”⁵⁶ She repeats the familiar claims of the Mountain Meadows Massacre and instances of blood atonement, as well as charging that Brigham Young could not remember the names of all of his wives. She urges continued vigilance, writing that “murders have been fewer of late, for President Young knows that the eye of Uncle Sam is fixed with no small degree of sternness upon the City of the Saints; and more important still, Deseret has not yet been admitted into the Union as a State!”⁵⁷ Her language is interesting in that it calls to mind an all-knowing and all-powerful central government that could control and, if necessary, destroy an entire religion. Ann Eliza acknowledged that Mormon women were homely, but excuses their lack of beauty by telling the reader that “there is nothing in all their lives to glorify or beautify their faces.”⁵⁸ She crystallizes the entire anti-LDS argument neatly, if with bias, and urges other women to clamor for more legislation, claiming that “if your government and its rulers refuse to do...anything to eradicate this foul blot upon national purity and honor, why, they are in so far encouraging its presence, and rendering it daily more difficult of eradication.”⁵⁹

This denunciation and call to action was powerful in that it came from a real woman, not a fictional heroine; a woman who had been involved in polygamy, and a woman not just married to any ordinary elder but to the supreme ruler of the Mormon Church. She uses the recognizable script of pollution to powerful rhetorical effect, calling polygamy a “leprous spot on the body politic” and “a defilement to our fair fame as a nation.”⁶⁰

Ann Eliza became something of a popular culture phenomenon, lecturing across the nation to packed halls to promote her memoir, appearing in the halls of Congress to great acclaim, and she also drew a great deal of attention from other areas of the media. Fanny Stenhouse, writing about Brigham Young’s wives, gleefully noted that he had one less since Ann Eliza “has run away from him and left the poor old gentleman desolate and forlorn.”⁶¹ Newspapers followed every detail of her divorce trial, wondering how the courts could force Brigham Young to pay alimony if, under the laws of the United States, he and Ann Eliza had never been married. Young could also not claim the marriage without risking jail time. A dispatch from Utah opined that “Brigham Young in his answer to the divorce complaint of Ann Eliza, has done more to crush out polygamy than all the Gentile influences in the territory combined.”⁶² Ann Eliza used her fame to project her concerns back into the cultural arena by taking time to underscore the importance of legislation like the Poland Act, urging its enforcement against “social and religious tyranny.”⁶³

Enforcement was a real problem that could be seen and read about not only in newspapers and novels, but also through the speeches of politicians. A year prior to Twain’s visit to Utah, Vice-president Schuyler Colfax of the Grant administration

stopped in Salt Lake City to berate the Mormons for breaking the 1862 anti-bigamy law, underscoring how little it was enforced. Colfax argued that America “is governed by law, and no assumed revelation justifies any one trampling on the law.”⁶⁴ The Mormons tried to assert a counter-narrative, with Elder John Taylor writing a letter to the editor arguing that polygamy “is one of the most vital parts of [Mormonism]; it emanated from God and cannot be legislated away.”⁶⁵ Taylor even attempted to mirror the language of the Republican Party, calling prostitution and infanticide the “twin sisters” of monogamy.⁶⁶ He tried to deftly flip the narrative, arguing that polygamy was actually a moralizing influence, and it was monogamy that created vice. He wrote with fire about the “twin sisters,” charging that

[L]ike the plague they are permeating your whole social system...festering and stewing and rotting...; [they are] a living, breathing, loathsome, festering, damning evil. [The danger posed by monogamy] runs through your very blood, stares out of your eyes and stamps its horrid mark on your features...it runs riot in the land, withering, blighting, corroding and corrupting the life blood of the nation.⁶⁷

Taylor’s rhetoric was skilled. Using the powerful metaphor of the nation as a body, he tried to distract Americans from the issue at hand and turn their gaze inward. Yet his text was just a letter to the editor. It did not have the reach of the novels and memoirs that attacked Mormonism. And in a presaging of the direction the debate would turn, Colfax replied to Taylor, saying with force that, “It is time to understand whether the authority of the nation or the authority of Brigham Young is the supreme power in Utah; whether the laws of the United States or the laws of the Mormon Church have precedence within its limits.”⁶⁸ The two were seen as being in irrepressible conflict, and one had to subdue the other. Claiming that the tenets of Mormonism were a “stain on the national escutcheon,”

Colfax laid down a gauntlet, challenging the Mormons and the nation at large to come to a decisive conclusion about what it meant to be American.⁶⁹

Final Drafts

The Republican Party spent nearly two decades fully eradicating the first relic of barbarism, slavery, and cultural producers largely followed their lead. However, after Reconstruction, the nation again turned to the issue of whether Utah should be admitted into the Union, and what should be done about the other relic, polygamy. For the anti-Mormon novelists of this era, the “Mormon question” constituted nothing less than a boundary crisis. Mormons were despised enough when Utah was a territory, but with the prospect of the Mormon colony becoming a state with voting rights, complete with a link to the East by railroad, the symbolic structure of society was threatened by Mormonism like never before. The cultural response was a storm of anti-LDS novels that castigated everything Mormon as a pollutant not worthy of inclusion in the United States.

The reader of anti-Mormon novels, particularly of this era, often finds direct, overt comparison between Mormonism and the idea of the “Orient.” For example, in Marie Walsh’s 1878 novel *My Queen*, Walsh compares a Mormon harem with one of the “Orient,” albeit with significant contrasting detail. She writes that an “Oriental” harem is beautiful, “its repulsiveness masked ’neath barbaric splendor,” while Brigham Young’s harem has no jewels, perfumes, or sheen, and “[u]gliness banishes beauty.”⁷⁰ That is an extremely important distinction. Earlier novels usually did not draw the explicit connection with “Oriental” harems. By linking the two overtly, readers were plugged into another familiar script of anti-Asian sentiment and all the emotions and reactions tied therein.

Writers of this period also experimented with satire in an attempt to domesticate the Mormons and bring them into line with the rest of the nation by taking the logic of polygamy to absurd extremes, building on the work begun by Artemus Ward and Mark Twain. In the satirical 1879 novel, *The Tragedy of Thompson Dunbar*, the title character and a friend argue over who will marry the entire thirty-two-strong graduating class of a girl's boarding school. The friend eventually marries them (or "it" as they are referred to in the novel), and as their mothers begin showing up he tells the Madame of the boarding school, "My only regret now is that you didn't keep an orphan asylum instead of a boarding school."⁷¹ The narrator wryly surveys this scene and others in Salt Lake City, including descriptions of the "Oriental" sky, and concludes, "It is Orientalism in the extreme Occident."⁷² As Walsh's more serious novel closes, Mormonism is linked to the perceived barbarism of the Far East, and when one character hears a train whistle, he remarks, "Harken to the death knell of Mormonism! Civilization and progress have found us out!"⁷³ Again, these novels define America and Utah as negative images of one another. If the United States represents civilization and progress, then Mormons and their kingdom represent savagery and barbarism. The narrator further warns the reader that "Zion has become Babylon," linking a holy term with an unholy one, and once again defining Mormonism via contrasting ideas.⁷⁴ Walsh also includes a fictionalized (though not labeled as such) account of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, putting one of her characters in harm's way through the evil machinations of Brigham Young. With this "knowledge," readers could spread the anti-Mormon gospel and further the social construction of Mormons as deviant and un-American Others. These "real" scenes are critically important to understanding the legislation and violence that beset Mormons for

the rest of the century. As Edward Said argues, the process of creating the Other is “not [that] of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries.”⁷⁵ The anti-Mormon contingent had such a powerful narrative that they were beginning to create what they purported to describe.

The Supreme Court joined in the action in 1879 and drew a clear boundary over what it did and did not mean to be American in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Mormons had purposely brought a test case to trial, firmly convinced that their beliefs about polygamy would be protected by the First Amendment. However, the Supreme Court thought differently, stating, “Polygamy has always been odious among the northern and western nations of Europe, and, until the establishment of the Mormon Church, was almost exclusively a feature of the life of Asiatic and of African people.”⁷⁶ The novels and legislative/judicial action of this time frame were beginning to mirror one another more precisely, and each new text added another discursive layer to the Othering of the Mormons. The Mormons’ hopes for their understanding of religious freedom were dashed by the *Reynolds* case, yet they still clung to their belief in the face of ever-rising public opinion.

Mormonism and Brigham Young fared equally poorly in *The Fate of Madame La Tour* (1881), *Elder Northfield’s Home* (1882), and *Apples of Sodom* (1883), three novels that increased the anti-Mormon rhetoric to a crescendo and set the stage for the passage and acceptance by the non-Mormon public of extremely harsh legislation. In these three novels, Brigham Young stands as synecdoche for the entire Mormon Church. He is written as boorish, overbearing, lecherous, depraved, and treacherous. He embodies blood

atonement, polygamy, and white slavery in his actions. He is, in short, the embodiment of Mormonism, and a pollutant of the highest order in that everything he touches is ultimately ruined. Brigham Young, while dead by this time, was a real person, and a very famous one at that. It was so much easier to script why one should hate the Mormons using Young than some fictional elder. Moreover, producers of this narrative were trying to counter those who had portrayed Young in a favorable or even an unfavorable, but non-threatening, light. His “harem” had been a major tourist attraction, and when asked by a non-Mormon tourist to Salt Lake City why a group of Australians had come to the city, they replied, “Why to see Brigham Young and the Mormons of course...! We would give more to see him than any man in the world.”⁷⁷ When considered in conjunction with Ann Eliza’s memoir, the anti-Mormon, anti-Brigham Young novelists sought to gain the upper hand in the narrative struggle.

In Cornelia Paddock’s popular book, *The Fate of Madame La Tour*, Brigham Young plays a major role throughout the narrative. The novel opens as a community of Mormons is getting ready to make their great trek west. Young asks Madame La Tour to be his plural wife so that he can obtain her vast fortune, and when she refuses, he proceeds to emotionally torture her by taking away La Tour’s daughter and marrying her off to a series of men, including real-life Mormon leader Heber C. Kimball, who is described as a “wretch” and a “brute.”⁷⁸ Young is described as ignorant and cowardly, complete with a footnote stating that Paddock personally had seen Young in police custody, “pale, trembling, and suffering all the agonies of extreme physical cowardice” — in other words, the exact opposite of traditional American manliness.⁷⁹ As scholar Gail Bederman has noted, the 1880s were the beginning of an era where the American middle

class partially defined their men by the character of “manliness.” Manliness represented the highest in civilization and achievement.⁸⁰ As one anti-Mormon pamphlet stated, “Republicanism develops the manhood of the people; Mormonism crushes that manhood.”⁸¹ And as one Mormon writer recognized, the purpose of anti-Mormon legislation “was to rob Mormons of the manliness of citizenship.”⁸² Anti-Mormon authors seized on this theme and repeatedly constructed Mormon men as effeminate, and thus not worthy of all the benefits of white American citizenship. Paddock also consistently compares the practices of Utah to that of Asia, further linking geography to bodies, practices, and beliefs.

In *The Fate of Madame La Tour*, Brigham Young is constructed as evil. He decides to kidnap La Tour, and when her son finally discerns her whereabouts, he arrives too late, as it is her funeral day. The only record she leaves is a journal detailing the many crimes of Young, including the Mountain Meadows Massacre. When Young dies at the end of the novel, one character speaks for Paddock and by extension the rest of “real” America by saying, “The tyrant is dead. Thank God!”⁸³ But Paddock reminds the reader that the struggle is not yet over—an important coda since Young actually was dead. She warns readers that the ranks of Mormonism swell, and urges statesmen to take action against the various crimes of the Mormons that she so neatly enumerates in three appendices. The Edmunds Act, a severe piece of anti-LDS legislation, was passed the year after Paddock’s book was published. These novels, along with sermons, editorials, and other forms of media, reinforced the anti-Mormon culture of fear for many, and initiated others who had not been exposed to anti-Mormonism, creating and shaping a climate where anti-Mormon legislation and violence met with public approval. After all,

as the *Literary World* said upon the publication of Paddock's novel, "Boulders which crowbars cannot move may be pried out of their beds by the tendril fingers of fiction."⁸⁴

Jennie Switzer's *Elder Northfield's Home* (1882) is tellingly subtitled *Sacrificed on the Mormon Altar: The Story of the Blighting Curse of Polygamy*. Throughout the novel, but especially in her preface, Switzer leaves nothing to subtlety. In her view, Mormons are defiled pollutants who should be put down with violence lest they infect the rest of the country. While Paddock advocates legislative action, Switzer is clearly in favor of open warfare against the Mormons of Utah. In the preface, Switzer repeats the familiar charge that polygamy is worse than slavery, saying that it marks "the pollution of the marriage relation," and rhetorically asks the reader "[w]ere the cries of the slave under the lash more pitiable than...the heart miseries of these women?"⁸⁵ Momentarily forgetting that many slaves were women, she argues, "More helpless are [women in polygamous marriages] than the negro slave, for they are of the weaker sex, and must submit to the power of physical might."⁸⁶ Switzer concludes her preface by urging the government to blot polygamy from the land with the same zealousness used to put down the Confederacy and the Indians.

The narrative that follows is equally harsh and important to consider for the ways in which Switzer constructs the "Gentile" world as America as it should be everywhere, and the Mormon world as the stain upon the continent. The novel opens in England, where young Marion is a recent convert to Mormonism. She is betrothed to Henry Northfield, a Mormon elder who converted her and several others in her village. Marion's unconverted twin sister Elsie is immigrating to New York, and the new Mormons, as well as Elsie, embark on the same ship. On the voyage, Elsie hears about the doctrine of

polygamy for the first time, but Marion and Northfield assure Elsie that he would never take another wife. After a brief sojourn in New York where the twins part, the Mormon party reaches Utah where they meet Brigham Young and hear him give a sermon. Young plays a minor role in this novel compared to Paddock's work, but Switzer does get some critiques in against him. Marion is quite excited when she arrives in Utah and finds that Young will preach a welcome sermon, but she finds him dull and uninspiring. In another by now very familiar scene, a haggard boy walks up to Young, and Young inquires why the "ragamuffin" boy is in his presence. Those standing by awkwardly inform him that the boy is Young's son, reinforcing the view of Young as a depraved man with more children than he can remember. Young also shuts down a school that Marion had opened because, in his view, education leads to apostasy. Thus, the familiar figure of Young serves as a stand-in for Mormonism as a whole. With every denunciation of Young, Switzer denounces Mormonism. As Hugh Nibley puts it, "The real villain of every anti-Mormon book is Mormonism."⁸⁷

The idea of an outside "Gentile" world plays an important role in this novel as in many others. Indeed, as early as *Boadicea*, novelists were constructing "good" Americans who got caught up in Mormonism as being *in* the religion, but not *of* it. As Said argues, the structure of Orientalism is broken down into an "us vs. them" binary, and it is an effective narrative tool to have sympathetic stand-ins for the readers in the perceived nest of vipers.⁸⁸ The years pass swiftly in Switzer's novel, and the family prospers until one day when Young orders Northfield to take another wife and he complies. Marion is crushed and wishes for death. She makes a plan to instruct her daughter, Mayon, to hate Mormonism and one day escape to America. Marion longs for the non-Mormon world

and repeatedly compares it to the depravity of Utah. She takes Mayon to plays depicting American customs and values and teaches her to hate the Mormon way of life, cast as following doctrines of blood atonement and plural marriage as white slavery. This is an important point, because Ann Eliza wrote of the Americanizing effects that “Gentile” plays were having in Utah, and thus art was imitating life for maximum rhetorical impact.

Eventually, Northfield’s second wife dies, but when he announces that he will wed again, Marion suffers a breakdown and spends many months in an insane asylum with “brain fever.” Marion eventually recovers and manages to send Mayon away to her twin sister in New York, and through the literary technique of mirroring, Switzer shows through twin sister Elsie the life Marion might have had if she had only avoided joining the Mormon Church. In dizzying succession, Mayon turns into a reverse missionary of sorts and spreads tales of Mormon atrocity across the East coast, returns to Salt Lake City to visit her family and is shot at by Danites, tries to return east only to be kidnapped and dropped off in an insane asylum, is rescued, gets engaged to a man only to find out he is her long-lost half-brother, converts her passionately Mormon brother back to the “good” side, and marries someone else. Switzer’s didactic message is driven home by a long-suffering plural bride who is on her deathbed. Someone rhetorically asks how her husband could have treated her so poorly. She responds by saying, “It is not the man...who is first to be blamed. It is Mormonism that made him what he is.”⁸⁹

Switzer is clearly stating that Mormonism is a polluting doctrine that could spread across the United States if left unchecked. To many nineteenth-century Americans, Asian bodies were polluting, and cultural text railed against them.⁹⁰ However, the Mormons were not only polluting with their presence, but their doctrine had the power to convert

white men and women and thus weaken America and the white race, and thus just as Mormonism was characterized by these novelists as worse than slavery, so too was the Mormon barbarism worse than that of the Far East—because it was closer. But it was also more invisible inside the mostly white members of the church.

Rosetta Gilchrist's *Apples of Sodom* (1883) repeats many of the recurrent motifs of anti-Mormon novels, although this time Brigham Young forgets one of his wives instead of one of his children, stating, "Your countenance is familiar, but your name escapes me."⁹¹ In this novel, Abbie is the good Mormon wife whose husband, Charlie, promises never to enter plural marriage. When he does take another wife, Abbie dies of heartbreak, desperately clutching her child one final time. As in Switzer's work, Gilchrist defines Mormonism as a pollutant. One of her characters says, "[Mormonism] is an accursed system, and makes *brutes* and *tyrants* of men who, in another community, would be models of true manhood and devoted husbands."⁹² This is an important distinction from many earlier novels where Mormons were *born* brutes and tyrants. These novels point out that dedicated converts can be made brutal, and thus the danger becomes all the more real. Shortly before her death, Abbie's brother Reuben comes to Salt Lake City to try and save her, only to be run out of town by the Danites, or in one character's words, "Brother Brigham's butchers."⁹³ Gilchrist ends the novel by having one of her characters make a soliloquy about the responsibilities of the United States government to end polygamy, arguing that it is better for a baby girl to "die in her innocent babyhood rather than live to share the fate common to Mormon women."⁹⁴

These novels and others helped to foster a cultural climate with great potential for anti-Mormon violence. The rhetoric of pollution is also one of infection, and as the

Mormons began to turn back out to the world and send missionaries to various states, the discursive climate cultivated by anti-LDS popular culture proved quite dangerous. In 1884, in the immediate cultural aftermath of a wave of anti-Mormon novels, four Mormons were murdered in the backwoods of Tennessee simply for trying to convert others to their faith. The non-Mormon locals blamed the violence on a widely distributed newspaper article known as the “Red Hot Address.” The article was distributed throughout the Southeast, and contained a narrative about a Mormon bishop calling for open warfare against the United States. The narrative proved to be false, but could have been ripped from the pages of most any anti-Mormon novel. In the aftermath of the Tennessee violence, as well as violence elsewhere, newspapers furthered the hostile climate with explicit approval for this real-life violence.⁹⁵ In a moment of North-South unity, the *New York Tribune* claimed that the Mormons in Tennessee got what they deserved because they were “insulting the intelligence and morals of the South.”⁹⁶ One Tennessee paper echoed the polluting theme by writing that “Mormonism is a foul blot upon this country, and it will have to be removed some day even if it requires the shedding of blood to do it.”⁹⁷ Another predicted that the “style” of the vigilantes would “be adopted by the United States government after mild methods have failed.”⁹⁸ The anti-Mormon rhetoric fostered within popular culture was now powerful enough to incite violence, and while the government did not turn to martial force as many editorials urged, they did pass increasingly strong legislation that followed the suggestions of the novels that the Mormon Church be dismantled.

The period between 1880 and 1890 saw more anti-Mormon novels published in America than during any other previous ten-year period. Reconstruction had finally

ended, and the pressing matter of Utah statehood was clearly in the anti-Mormon novelists' minds—as well as many Congressional leaders. The idea of allowing Utah into the Union with the doctrine of polygamy still intact was anathema to these men and women. Even the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), the body that had split from the Mormons after Joseph Smith's death and had disavowed polygamy, petitioned Congress to “ask that more effective measures be enacted and carried into effect by the Government of the United States for the suppression of polygamy and its kindred evils in the territories.” They further pointed out that their own church members were “*loyal and devoted* to the Government.”⁹⁹ Different groups were defining themselves as Americans by asserting that they were not Utah Mormons.

The anti-Mormon novels and petitions of the 1880s were reflected in the two major anti-Mormon bills of this period. The Edmunds Act of 1882 disfranchised polygamists, made polygamy a felony and “unlawful cohabitation” a misdemeanor, and gave a commission of non-Mormons the power to deprive citizens of their civil rights without a trial. The Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887 further strengthened the original act, and, among other things, disfranchised the women of Utah, forced wives to testify against their husbands, and introduced a test oath on polygamy to serve on juries or hold public office. The Congressional debates surrounding these pieces of legislation represent the collective thinking of three decades of anti-Mormon rhetoric. Southern senators and Mormons themselves desperately articulated their version of what America should look like, and in their speeches one can see the attempt to shape a narrative that reflected, or refuted, the major texts of popular culture, depending on which side of this issue they fell on.

The anti-Edmunds Bill contingent was not always pro-Mormon per se, but they had an idea of what they wanted the country to represent, and they worried about the powers the federal government was accruing. Seeking to invert the narrative of tyranny, Senator Joseph Brown of Georgia argued against “the enactment or enforcement of unconstitutional, tyrannical, and oppressive legislation for the purpose of crushing the Mormons or any other sect for the gratification of New England or any other section.”¹⁰⁰ He astutely noted that “illegal persecution of any sect always excites sympathy for the persecuted and greatly increases its number.”¹⁰¹ Brown repeated the belief among many Southerners that the Edmunds bill would do little besides make more Mormons. This statement was obviously true and based on the Mormons’ long history of persecution, but this only underscores how serious the contest was to define American identity. The anti-Mormons were willing to risk an increase in Mormonism as long as they could control the powerful tool of identity-based rhetoric.

Representative John Ford House of Tennessee also tried to invert the anti-Mormon narrative, by rhetorically asking, “For what is an American deprived of those rights [taken away by the Edmunds Bill]? He may live in a land of boasted freedom, but thus stripped of the rights and privileges that freemen most value, he is no better than a slave.” Borrowing from the narrative of the Reconstruction period, he said, “Let the carpet-bagger...lift up his head once more and turn his face toward the setting sun. Utah beckons him to a new field of pillage and fresh pastures of pilfering.” He ended on a note that must have resonated with many Southerners, saying, “Mr. Speaker, I would not place a dog under the dominion of a carpet-bagger.”¹⁰² Here again was the role of the federal government being debated. The Edmunds Bill would put even more outsiders in charge of

Utah. The side against the bill argued that this encroachment was against the ideals that America stood for, while the anti-Mormon side argued that only vast federal power could protect the very same American ideals and values they were fighting for.

Senator George Vest of Missouri, a longtime supporter of Mormon rights, tried to shape a middle ground. He argued, “Wrong [the Mormons] may be, but unoffending, industrious people in many respects; and they have made a distinguished success in that most important matter of the comfortable subsistence of the poor people whom they have carried into their once desert country, which they have made by their labor to blossom like a rose.”¹⁰³ He argued that *both* the legislation and polygamy were against core American values, and if Congress but left the Mormons alone, “the principles of our religion and our civilization will find a way to assert their powers over them and withdraw them from the hurtful belief and practices of their strange religion without subverting the cardinal principles of our organic law...”—an argument for a distinct brand of American exceptionalism.¹⁰⁴

The Mormons had a voice during all of the debate as well, and they fervently tried to protect their religious doctrine by defining the playing field using many of the same terms as the anti-Mormons, but from a different angle of vision. In an 1888 debate on Utah statehood before the Senate Committee on Territories, Franklin S. Richards, an LDS lawyer, urged Congress to let in “the courageous men who had determined to make their home in the Great American desert, 1500 miles from civilization and surrounded by hostile savages.”¹⁰⁵ He asserted a capitalist narrative by arguing that Utah as a state would vastly increase the wealth of the United States. He even brought an overwhelmingly ratified state Constitution that banned polygamy and was not amendable

without consent by Congress, leading the Senators who were expanding the power of the federal government to lecture Richards about states' rights. Richards plaintively stated that he and his fellow non-polygamous Mormons, who he said made up almost the entire church, wanted nothing more than "to place Utah in political and social harmony with the nation."¹⁰⁶ His petition was swatted away easily by the entrenched anti-Mormon narrative, with one Senator noting that "we have a right to protect ourselves against that which assails [us], just as we protect ourselves against emigration from China or from countries where the civilization of the people does not harmonize with ours."¹⁰⁷

The senators on the committee also brought in a federal marshal who resembles characters from one of the era's anti-Mormon novels. He is worth quoting at length to show how real life and popular culture so closely mirrored one another. He denounced the "pitiless cruelty" of the Mormon priesthood that created "slavish dupes" who lived in a land "where the highest aims and ambition of American freemen are trodden away..., where the sanctity of home, the purity of woman, and honor of man are disgraced by a system of Asiatic licentiousness, where, instead of the upright and noble impulses of patriots, we find the cringing cowardice of slave and hypocrites...."¹⁰⁸ He defined what an American should look like and gave highest honor to those fighting the Mormons in Utah, arguing that beautiful Utah was cursed with "a cancerous growth,...a festering sore," and to grant Utah statehood before the cancer was cut out would be "an outrage to that noble band of Americans, who in Utah have...maintained the picket line of freedom."¹⁰⁹ Indicating that the Othering of the Mormons was complete, he acknowledged that Utah had a large enough population to justify being a state, but "the

quality of the population forbids such an idea. It would be as reasonable to talk of counting the Indians and Esquimaux of Alaska.”¹¹⁰

Despite setback after setback, the Saints also collected favorable opinions from non-Mormons and published them as pamphlets. The narrative they attempted to form was one of a hardy and industrious people who had no real vices other than the now rarely mentioned polygamy. If polygamy was mentioned, it was asserted that only one to two per cent of Mormons practiced that doctrine. One representative example about Mormon industriousness stated, “The people of the United States are under obligations to the Mormons. They have made Salt Lake Valley, once a desert, a garden.”¹¹¹ Another author reminded people that without the Saints, Utah would still be a barren land: “It is the Mormons that make Salt Lake attractive, their irrigation, patriarchal church government, their sweet cottage homes, and their green fields in the midst of a sandy desert.”¹¹² Reflecting the purity of Mormons in rhyme, the *Buffalo Agitator* called Salt Lake City the place “Where courts, rumshops, brothels are naught/Except where the Gentiles their customs brought.”¹¹³ More astutely, Judge Jeremiah S. Black recognized how public opinion had been manipulated by producers of popular culture, arguing that, “In prosecuting the Mormons, the prosecution have tried their cases beforehand on the streets, in the newspapers, in public meetings, by petitions, and over the telegraph wires.”¹¹⁴ It was a rigged game, he argued, but it was a script with multiple tools of rhetoric, and each tool represented by-now effective reasons for pushing for the eradication of Mormonism.

Indeed, these pamphlets the Mormons produced were readily and overwhelmingly answered by anti-Mormon treatises, such as the *Handbook on Mormonism*. The

Handbook said that community leaders had the obligation to “direct, in the right channel, public opinion in reference to the Mormon question.” Arguing for an “irrepressible conflict between Utah Mormonism and American republicanism,” they urged “American citizens” to petition Congress to pass legislation “disfranchising the polygamists, and transferring the political power now wielded by the Mormon church to a Legislative Committee of law-abiding citizens” to more quickly “Americaniz[e] Utah.”¹¹⁵

One item the *Handbook* got right was the public devotion most Mormon women showed to plural marriage.¹¹⁶ Unlike the sensationalist novels, the Mormon women stood up for their church and its doctrines with firm and decisive rhetoric. At a huge gathering of Mormon women in Salt Lake City, one speaker went back to the theme of American citizenship, saying, “As true and loyal American citizens, we claim the right of protection by that government under which we live, and the free exercise of our religious rights.”¹¹⁷ Recognizing that it is “better to represent ourselves than to be misrepresented,” they urged reformers to seek out “fallen women” in the “Gentile” world, as polygamy “tends to virtue, purity, and holiness.”¹¹⁸ Misrepresentation was a consistent theme throughout the night as speaker after speaker got up to support polygamy and “emphatically declare [their] true sentiments.”¹¹⁹

Yet this too was countered effectively by cultural institutions such as the Women’s National Anti-Polygamy Society, which took credit for “set[ting] the current in motion which has awakened the entire country to a sense of the danger that menaces the Republic by the degradation of women and ruination of the home.” They pledged to “uproot” the “relic of barbarism” from “American soil,” as if a foreign weed had gotten out of hand in a domestic garden.¹²⁰ In short, every narrative that the Mormons put forth

was met by its opposite, and in the tenor of late-nineteenth-century American culture, the anti-Mormons had the stronger narrative, one that prevailed in the battle over what American republicanism would ultimately look like.

One final novel is worth mentioning, as it reflects the ultimate cultural direction the United States took in regard to the “Mormon question.” Alvah Milton Kerr’s *Trean* (1889) was published one year before the Mormons finally abandoned plural marriage as doctrine, and introduces a new twist that empowered American readers. *Trean* is the familiar Mormon daughter, but instead of having a Mormon husband, she meets a “Gentile” American named Paul who helps her take on the Mormon Church in the heart of Utah. In previous novels, readers had been given knowledge with which they could refute Mormonism, but in Paul they get a real call to action. Paul is configured as the manly American exemplar and frequently contrasted with Brigham Young. Again, this serves as an example of the Othering binary put forth by Said. Young is portrayed as a drunken despot, a “well-fed animal” with “fat, white hand[s]” who rides in fine carriages as his people barely scrape by, while Paul is a rugged individualist, has a superb moral compass, and is a decidedly one-woman man.¹²¹ Salt Lake City is painted as a barbaric place where dirty children run around and plural wives strike one another with rocks in fits of jealousy. In an astonishing scene, Young preaches a sermon in the Tabernacle on the wisdom of blood atonement and plural marriage, and Paul stands up to debate with him. This scene bears a strong resemblance to a scene in a novel published the year before, *Father Solon* (1888). In *Father Solon*, the polluting theme is made even more literal when a character calls Mormonism “a sort of scrofulous sore on our social body.”¹²² The title character of this novel travels to Utah to rescue his son from the

Mormons, attends a sermon at the Tabernacle, and unable to contain himself, stands up and denounces the doctrines of Mormonism as “doctrines of men and devils...stamped with evil [and] born of lust and greed.”¹²³

Father Solon just engages a fictional character, but in *Trean*, Paul battles with Brigham Young himself. Instead of simply escaping Mormonism, these American characters were now engaging in rhetorical arguments with the proponents of doctrines of the religion in their own house of worship, representing the minority non-Mormon population in Utah and showing the need for greater legislative action from the “outside” world. Paul accuses Young of growing rich off of the congregation’s labor, and rails against the “unspeakable, terrible advice” on polygamy and blood atonement. He says that Young is nothing but a “monster” inspired by the “ingenuity of hell.”¹²⁴ His speech is cut short by a group of Danites, but Kerr picks up the sermon and continues for several more pages, concluding that the Mormons are little better than uncivilized beasts steeped in “dementia and debauchery” who marry their half-sisters and granddaughters. Kerr walks the reader through the mysteries of the Endowment House, endowment garments, spiritual healing, and the architectural details of Young’s “harem.”¹²⁵ She calls all Mormons “lank-bodied, primitive people” who had been duped by the “deception, knavery, theft, murder, lechery, and shame” of Mormonism.¹²⁶ The “primitive” theme is particularly important in that it showcased American civilization. In the end, Paul and Trean, the two “true” Americans, escape to the “Gentile” world where they “labored long to bring in that dawn which at last is softening the gloom of Mormonism.”¹²⁷ The dawn Kerr refers to is significant, because by 1889, there was at least a sense that the Mormon Church could not long stand under the cultural and political pressures it faced. *Trean*

serves as a master's course on anti-Mormon literary tropes of the nineteenth century, and in 1890, in a profound example of their effectiveness, the dawn the anti-Mormons wanted came with the help of the proposed Cullom-Struble Bill, passage of which would have meant the disfranchisement of all Mormons and the seizure of all church property. That same year, the Supreme Court upheld the legality of the Edmunds-Tucker Act, arguing that "organization of a community for the spread and practice of polygamy is, in a measure, a return to barbarism."¹²⁸ The anti-LDS vision of the role of the federal government and the meaning of American citizenship had won out.

* * * * *

In 1890, Mormon president Wilford Woodruff issued a manifesto that officially ended the doctrine of polygamy, and although anti-Mormonism did not disappear, from 1890 to 1900 there were far fewer anti-Mormon novels published in America than at any time outside of the Civil War era. Mormons were able to keep their doctrine of plural marriage intact during the initial anti-Mormon novels of the 1850s and the memoirs of the 1870s. But the novels and other cultural productions of the 1880s, when paired with harsh legislation, were simply too overwhelming. They could not counter the narrative developed by authors such as William Loring Spencer, whose *Salt Lake Fruit* was particularly popular and went through four printings between 1884 and 1891. In her preface, Spencer urges "Fathers with young daughters [to] clasp tight to your bosom [your girls]...until their hearts cease to beat.... Better thus to end their heart-aches, than consign them to such a fate as may await them if...this frightful anaconda [that is Mormonism] stretches its slimy length across the continent."¹²⁹ It was sentimental to be sure, but it was

coupled with a rhetoric of Americanism, and Spencer instructed her readers to help “Liberty put her heel on the serpent’s head, and crush it.”¹³⁰

The didactic role the anti-Mormon novels and memoirs of the nineteenth century played should not be underestimated. The books were quite popular and even the novels made claims to veracity that increased their sense of urgency. The “truths” put forth by these writers painted the Mormons as monsters. Readers were directly addressed by the narrators and urged to contact their legislators or even take up arms against Mormonism. Although there was no single anti-Mormon novel of the post-Civil War era that epitomizes anti-Mormonism the same way that Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* epitomizes anti-slavery (at least from a modern perspective), the novels in aggregate were ultimately cultural instruments that shaped and refined popular perception of Mormonism. As William Loring Spencer urged her readers, “Exterminate or be exterminated. Forever destroy polygamy, or, like Cleopatra’s asp, it will fasten upon this goddess who smiles down on us, stretching out her arms to homeless exiles, and lo! Liberty, beauteous maid, lies a pale corpse!”¹³¹ The polluting Otherness of Mormonism was constructed as so extreme that to many novelists, and many Americans, nothing less than extermination would suffice.

The loss of plural marriage was a blow to many Mormons, but a number of others were relieved. Their long battle with the federal government was over, and Utah achieved statehood in 1896. But another cultural fight lay ahead. This chapter has shown how anti-Mormon producers of popular culture scripted a powerful narrative about LDS culture and beliefs, and the script on Mormonism laid out in the nineteenth century would not just disappear overnight. The Mormons had to assert their positive “American” qualities

and enlist allies to rescript the narrative in a more favorable direction. While they lost their cherished doctrine of polygamy, they did make a garden of the desert, and in removing themselves from the United States and transforming Utah into a thriving society, the Saints actually helped define what it means to be American.

Chapter 3

Rescripting the Saints, 1890-1929

So far as I have studied Mormon belief, I consider it a most absurd thing, a mixture of superstition and hysteria; but I do not believe it is of itself degrading...or that it is necessary to abuse and malign the Mormon people....

–Summer Gleason

Mormonism has been called “Satan’s masterpiece;” and, with all respect to its sincere adherents, there is no more fitting name.

–Rev. John D. Nutting

The specters that are conjured up from the vasty deep to give warrant to this unseemingly agitation [against Mormons] are but foul creations of diseased animals, phantoms of disordered imaginations.

–B. H. Roberts

In 1890, shortly before Latter-day Saint President Wilford Woodruff issued the manifesto that ended plural marriage as doctrine in the Mormon Church, polygamist Hans Christensen sat in the Utah State Penitentiary, serving time for having more than one wife. He was far from alone. Many other LDS men submitted to prison sentences or went into hiding rather than betray their families and a key identity marker of their religion. Their trials bred even deeper solidarity in the faith, but it had become apparent due to punitive legislation that the Mormons would either have to give up polygamy or be dismantled by the federal government. Christensen kept a detailed record of his time there, and memorialized it in poem as well. One prescient stanza reads,

I look through clouds of trials
 To them, as well as me,
 I fancy in the distance
 A brighter day I see.
 In faith my mind looks forward,
 I see a better time
 I pray for strength sufficient,
 To land us in that clime.¹

Many observers have pointed to September 25, 1890, as “that clime,” the date that Woodruff revealed his manifesto. From that point forward, the LDS Church would cease sanctioning plural marriages where the practice violated local law.² Those still involved in such relationships would be permitted to keep their families intact without fear of excommunication—though they would still ostensibly have U. S. law to deal with. Those living in plural marriages prior to the manifesto were also granted amnesty by President Benjamin Harrison, but were expected to cease “unlawful cohabitation.” Even the official Mormon Church hymnal was affected. Prior to 1890, one hymn served as an argument for plural marriage, blasting the adulterous ways of monogamists, and proclaiming in God’s voice:

Through him who holds the sealing power,
Ye faithful ones who heed
Celestial laws, take many wives,
And rear a righteous seed.
Though fools revile, I’ll honor you,
As Abraham my friend;
You shall be Gods, and shall be blest
With lives that never end.³

After 1890, these verses were stricken. The Mormon Church was ready to join the nation under the terms set forth by the federal government, and they made the cosmetic changes as well as the deep ones. And oftentimes in popular culture, it is the cosmetic ones that matter most.

Yet anti-LDS sentiment was not as easy to dispose of as the lyrics of a hymn and did not disappear overnight. Moreover, the Mormon Church found itself having to negotiate a difficult transition to a new identity without plural marriage as a key distinguishing feature of church doctrine. Historian Kathleen Flake has shown that the

Latter-day Saints were not accepted as viable government stewards by Americans until after the seating of LDS Senator Reed Smoot in 1907.⁴ Smoot faced three years of hearings based on his fitness to serve the U.S. Constitution ahead of his church, but was finally allowed in the Senate. Thus, 1890 was far from the “clime” of Mormon integration, and moreover, that political moment was in part made possible by cultural events, and the full cultural acceptance of Mormons did not happen until after the Smoot hearings. Until the Saints could gain cultural acceptance, they would never be fully included in mainstream American life, which impacted not only their social lives, but also their political and economic lives as well.

This chapter argues that the cultural integration of Mormons took place over several decades and involved a process of “rescription” that can be seen in literature and film from the 1890s to the late 1920s. The dominant narrative about the Saints had been so consistently scripted for so long that it took time to break out of that narrative mold. Scholars Richard W. Santana and Gregory Erickson define rescription as “a kind of popular alchemy that transforms the dross of mass culture into sacred articles of faith for everyday people.”⁵ They are primarily concerned with late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century examples, yet the case of Mormonism shows that the rescription process has occurred much earlier, and with dramatic results that impacted not only an entire religion, but the entirety of American culture. Moreover, Santana and Erickson narrowly define rescription as a religious experience that links to popular religion. But it can be a cultural experience as well and “articles of faith” can extend to views of other religions as surely as one’s own. The Mormons thus went from being a despised people under assault by the federal government itself to enjoying the status of exemplary

Americans in less than four decades—not the near-instantaneous transformation many have seen, but a short amount of time as measured by cultural shifts. The markers of this shift can be seen in the church’s conciliatory overtures to the rest of America through efforts such as outreach concerts by the renowned Mormon Tabernacle Choir, as well as in non-Mormon representations of the Saints’ beliefs and practices in print and in the new medium of film. These representations created a new narrative for a post-polygamous Mormon Church. Cultural acceptance, much like political acceptance, is a process, and the process was not always smooth. The political process involved hearings and testimony and even presidential commentary. The cultural process was much more nuanced and spanned across a wide range of popular culture.

Arguably, the cultural process was the most significant hurdle for the Saints to overcome, because if the Mormons could get other Americans to abandon the nineteenth-century anti-LDS script, then the power of that discursive element would impact the political and economic realms. Mormons would in essence be Americanized, and no one would think twice about a Mormon senator.⁶ Yet the normalization process is complex, and scholars have long puzzled over America’s conflicted and ever-shifting relationship with the Mormons. A cursory glance seems to indicate that the Saints were reviled because of polygamy, but when they dropped their doctrine they soon became referred to by many as “America’s religion.” R. Laurence Moore has argued that post-polygamous Mormons acted exactly the same way they always had—just without polygamy.⁷ How could one doctrine be so odious as to lead to the near destruction of the Mormon Church, and how could such deeply ingrained prejudices disappear so quickly?

What Moore and others fail to fully develop is that how the Mormons acted is only one part of the process. The Mormons also laid claim to a new identity propelled by both ideas and actions based on a new understanding of their faith that did not include temporal polygamy. Yet they were more than just Mormons *sans* polygamy. Something or several things had to replace that huge identity marker for Mormons and non-Mormons alike. The answer to how the Mormons became America's religion is through the impact of popular culture and a rescripting process that brought together not only the Mormons' new presentation of their faith, but also negative evangelical Christian representations and the adapting cultural imagining of the Mormons.

As the post-polygamy era dawned, there were two competing narratives for how the country would view the new brand of Mormonism. One came from the Mormons themselves. Where they had once aggressively emphasized their differences, they now aggressively emphasized their patriotism and normalcy. They promoted the parts of their church they knew were pleasing to outsiders such as the acoustic properties of the Tabernacle and the architectural grandeur of the temple. The other narrative strand came from anti-LDS Christian evangelicals. They were deeply distrustful of the Mormons and professed to not believe the Saints had given up on plural marriage. Producers of these two narratives, both born of a religious impetus, fought their battles not just in halls of worship, but also, even mainly, in popular culture. Denominational Christian and Mormon arguments and counter-arguments found their way into mass culture of print and film, and other producers of mass culture like author Zane Grey took elements of both representations and rescripted the Mormon faith into a new narrative neither the Mormons nor the evangelicals could be completely happy with; one that still thrives

today; a complicated narrative that shifts according to the needs of the time. Through laying claim to a new identity and receiving aid from intentional and unintentional allies, the Mormons became *the* American religion. And it all started with the literal voices of the Mormons themselves.

The New Mormon Narrative

When the Mormons ended plural marriage, they lost an identity marker that performed the impressive cultural labor of simultaneously setting them apart and bounding them together. At the same time, they ended their political cohesiveness and their insular economic practices. In short, they turned their attention to the rest of the nation as non-LDS Americans waited to see what a Mormon Church without polygamy looked like. Familiar with anti-LDS tactics, the Mormons knew that perception was far more important than reality, so they came out of Utah in several ways to reconnect with the rest of the country. One of the first steps in crafting a new narrative for the Saints was taken at the seminal 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, where the Mormon Tabernacle Choir sang for an audience of non-Mormons and began the tenuous journey of rescripting the Saints.

On August 29, 1893, a specially equipped Union Pacific Pullman train pulled out of Salt Lake City and began an important trip eastward. Forty-seven years earlier, the mothers and fathers of the people aboard the train, and in a few cases the people on the train themselves, had made the arduous trek west that had formed so much of early Latter-day Saint identity. The 1893 trip of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir to the World's Fair in many ways mirrored the earlier trek and marked the beginning of a symbolic return to American life for the Mormons. In 1846, they had fled, putting as many miles

between them and the rest of the country as they could. In fleeing, they cemented their bonds through hardship and created a legend to draw on in times of need. In 1893, they determined to reverse that course by traveling by rail across the United States to Chicago to engage in a singing competition at the World's Fair, stopping at key points to display the choir and their abilities. Thus, whereas the first trek west separated the Mormons from the rest of America while serving as a group bonding agent, this journey east served to reconnect them with the rest of the country. This point was not lost on contemporary observers such as the writer at the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* who mused, "It is strange to think that the weary, hunted pilgrims who toiled on foot across the Rockies years ago should now be returning in Pullmans to contest with musical societies of the East for supremacy."⁸ It is no accident that this early form of reintegration took the form of popular culture. After all, the territorial representatives of Utah were no less interested in rehabilitating their reputation to the rest of the country, and they prepared presentations on the abundant natural resources the territory offered—a rather dry presentation not recorded with near the enthusiasm or comprehensiveness of every move the choir made.

The Mormon Tabernacle Choir was formed by Brigham Young and consisted of five hundred non-professional singers, 250 of whom made the trip to Chicago. The church raised money over several months and sent the choir to be their main representative at the World's Fair to compete in the prestigious choral competition on September 9. It is significant that the church decided to send representatives to the Exposition at all, because they were actually denied a table at the Fair's World Parliament of Religions—a massive gathering of religions from across the globe. They were very desirous of being included in that prestigious ensemble, but were rebuffed. The

“Ecclesiastical History of Utah” had to suffice. Compiled by the Utah Board of lady managers to share at the Fair, the booklet presented “various phases of religious work in the territory” alongside Methodists, Baptist, and Catholics among others, thus making a claim on denominational status.⁹ The fact that the Mormons still raised money to send their choir speaks to their desire to rejoin mainstream America—and perhaps to show up the Parliament a little as well. Being denied an opportunity to share their doctrines, they decided to share their voices.

On August 30, the choir gave a warm-up concert in Denver and the subsequent praise gives an indication of one way in which the Saints would rescript their image—through the power of entertainment. The Mormons had never been averse to popular culture. Brigham Young had long emphasized the importance of dancing, theater, and song. As one representative observer who lived among Mormons in Idaho noted in shock, “[T]hese people advocate, instead of opposing, dancing as a social amusement.”¹⁰ And as the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* rightly observed, “No one understood better than Brigham Young the potency and charm of music, and the play, to lighten the burden of cares on the human heart....”¹¹ Music, and popular culture in general, could also bridge cultural gaps. The Mormons of the post-manifesto era would marshal the forces of popular culture and put them to use in showcasing their new identity to the rest of America. In fact, the Saints would rest much of their initial new identity on the voices of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The *Denver Republican* called the singers “the strongest and most talented choir organization between Boston and the Pacific coast,” praising their “attractive power of song.” The conductor, Evan Stephens, provided a face for the choir, and the paper relished his life story as one who had risen from a “shepherd boy on the hills of Utah” to

the musical director of America's foremost choir.¹² The choir was a myth in the making, and each new triumph and performance only added to the myth, further solidifying a discursive link for the Mormons to the rest of the United States.

While the World's Fair garnered far more publicity, perhaps no more important or at least symbolic stop occurred than the August 31 visit to Independence, Missouri, the most sacred ground in early church history. The symbolic import of the event was monumental: the Saints had returned by invitation to the holy place from which they had been violently expelled. The *Kansas City Star* reported the event respectfully, calling Joseph Smith, Jr., the "inspired translator of the Book of Mormon."¹³ One headline attempted humor by proclaiming, "This Time a Friendly Mob," thus shifting the narrative from one of persecution to one of healing and fellowship. The mayor of Independence greeted the Mormons effusively, calling them "American Freemen" and welcoming them as esteemed visitors. The mayor significantly noted that the citizens of Independence were "free from bigotry" and ready to "extend...the right hand of fellowship." He said that he hoped the collective memory they were making would "be ever garnered in each heart," thus implicitly replacing the collective memory of the mob violence fifty-nine years before.¹⁴ The church members there, who had so long been insulated in Utah, reconnected with the hallowed beginnings of their religion by taking away pebbles and other sacred relics from the old temple lot. The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was there as well, and the two groups enjoyed an impromptu concert by the Tabernacle Choir upon the sacred ground. Church President Wilford Woodruff, who had last stood in that spot fifty-nine years before, and who had with one proclamation

ended polygamy and begun a new era of relations between Mormonism and the rest of the world, stood on and watched the choir sing.¹⁵

As the party continued east, the accolades continued to roll in, and perceptions continued to shift. The *St. Louis Globe Dispatch* commented on the unlikelihood of finding so many excellent singers in a city as relatively small as Salt Lake City, and concluded it must be “the purity of the Rocky mountains atmosphere.”¹⁶ Such musings ultimately provided an important base for tourism. Indeed, at least one newspaper even linked the familiar narrative of transforming the barren desert with the choir, calling them “a choral society which is strictly a product of what was fifty years ago a barren desert...”¹⁷ The *Chicago Sunday Tribune* advanced the strongest praise given the recent history of anti-Mormonism. The paper called the singers “Utah’s bravest sons and fairest daughters, the pick and flower of Mormondom, the territory’s sweetest singers.” This recategorization is remarkable given the decades of anti-Mormon literature that had emphasized the weakness of Mormon men and the unattractiveness of Mormon women. The *Tribune* alluded to the history of anti-Mormonism, noting, “An unusual interest is felt by all people in this choral society, even those not musically inclined. This is, in large measure, due to the knowledge that its members are all Mormons and there is a natural and overwhelming curiosity to know what manner of creature a real live flesh and blood Mormon is.” Given the history of non-Mormon descriptions of Mormons, one might expect a litany of abuse to follow. Yet the paper simply stated, “Among these curious ones there will be not a little disappointment when they discover that these musical Mormons are just the same as other people.”¹⁸ This characterization would become a common and important motif. Where earlier works such as *A Study in Scarlet* (1887)

argued that one could tell a Mormon by his or her physical appearance, newer articles and stories emphasized their sameness. The Mormons were slowly being awarded the benefits of whiteness through the same cultural process as the Irish, Italians, and others.¹⁹ As one teacher who lived among the Saints in Idaho for some time without knowing they were Mormons wrote, “I thought they were all down in Utah, and could be distinguished by some peculiar appearance.”²⁰ The Saints were moving into the modern world and challenging common stereotypes and misperceptions—a strategy that would come to pay off as reflected in many works within popular culture.

After the warm-up concerts, the singing competition was held and it represented an important and symbolic proving ground. Would the Saints be judged by the prejudices that surrounded them, or would they stand on their merits? The answer would foreshadow whether the church itself would continue to be solely linked to its polygamous past or allowed to assert its new identity and begin to construct a more nuanced understanding of the religion. The Mormons took second place, and a \$1000 prize. Stephens received a gold medal for his conducting. The *Chicago Record* reported that the singers received “warm and hearty applause” from an audience of eight-thousand people, and the *Inter-Ocean* noted that “music ignores creeds” and called the choir’s performance “delightful and electrifying.”²¹

The choir’s performance was a rousing triumph, but they were not the only ones representing Utah at the Fair. In the Utah building at the World’s Fair on Utah day, several territorial representatives gave speeches to as many as 10,000 listeners. Brigham Young, who had been so maligned as the face of the church, was recast by LDS leader George Q. Cannon as “one of the greatest men...of modern times.”²² And fittingly, in that

historian Frederick Jackson Turner gave a lecture at the Fair arguing that the American frontier was no more, territorial Governor Caleb Walton West, a non-Mormon, emphasized Utah's role in securing that frontier, saying, "[The] pioneers of Utah blazed the way for the westward course of empire.... It was a bloodless conquest, but a conquest, nevertheless...."²³ This speech among others recast Utah into the sacred narrative of the American West, and as surely as Mormons had been calling for the political inclusion of statehood, they were now openly lobbying for cultural inclusion as well.

The trip was a resounding success and a pivotal turning point in Mormon and non-LDS relations. The Utah commissioners in charge of their territory's presentation at the World's Fair compiled a report about the experience, collecting several impressions, including their own. They noted that the people of Utah "are patriotic, frugal in their habits, industrious, contented and happy. They love the Union and the Union's flag, and no matter what may have been said of them in the past, to-day they are marching in harmony with the men and women of this great nation."²⁴ Thus, they acknowledged the past without specifically recalling polygamy and emphasized their essential Americanness even ahead of their vaunted frugality and industry. In a representative example of the comments from non-Mormons, one man admitted that coming into the Fair he had a "strong prejudice against the people of Utah as a whole." His impression after the World's Fair is worth quoting at length, as it serves as a microcosm view of the beginning shift taking place in American culture toward the Mormons: "[A]fter listening to the music of your great Choir I have changed my mind....I can not find it in my heart to mistrust a people possessed of such musical ability, which is certainly the outgrowth of refinement and noble aspiration. I am only one of thousands here to-day whose

sentiments in regard to Utah and her people have changed.”²⁵ Americans’ appreciation for music was starting to change their views on Mormonism. Where for so long producers of popular culture had fostered negative representations of the religion, Mormons were now becoming producers of national popular culture and rescripting the narrative. Indeed, the choir was further aided when praise rolled in from famed composers John Philip Sousa and Patrick Gilmore as well as singers Myron W. Whitney and Emma Thursby.²⁶ The Mormon Tabernacle Choir was becoming part of the popular culture landscape.

Utah entered the Union on January 4, 1896, with many watching to see if the Mormon Church would reinstate polygamy now that they had control over their own state. Amidst the concern of a polygamous revival, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir tacked westward on a tour of California and the Pacific Northwest, acting again as ambassadors for their state and their religion by competing in a very popular *Eisteddfod*, or Welsh singing competitions. The rescription process continued, with the *San Francisco Bulletin* echoing the earlier Eastern papers and noting that, “If there are those who think the Mormons are a lot of wild people from the plains let them come to the Temple and they will soon be undeceived.”²⁷ In a friendly jest, the *San Francisco Call* wrote that “Brigham Young’s tastes seem to have run particularly to big families and big choruses and the monster Tabernacle choir is as great an institution as it was when the Mormon Saint first organized it.”²⁸ It is important to note that the word “Saint” was coming to take the place of the previously preferred “tyrant.” In a more serious vein, the *Denver Evening Session* called the choir “one of the main monuments to Brigham Young,” and praised his “abundance of faith and religion” that made the choir a possibility.²⁹ This underscores

that it was not just Utah representatives who were changing the common narrative about Young, but journalists were beginning to rescript the LDS narrative as well.

With many anti-Mormon commentators trying to impugn the patriotism of the Mormons, the choir emphasized the Mormon Church's love of country through song. They inserted the National Anthem into their program as well as other patriotic hymns, often asking the audience to sing along, thus generating a feeling of "us" as opposed to a binary oppositional stance. Conductor Evan Stephens often turned to the crowd during the patriotic songs, conducting them so that the entire arena became honorary members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, and subtly, of Mormonism itself, greatly lessening the Othering that had taken place for so many decades. The results paid off, with one newspaper calling the singers "fine specimens of womanliness and manliness."³⁰ Another paper noted that many in the audience came out of curiosity to see "something out of the ordinary," but instead they were greeted by "rows of fashionably dressed women endowed with good looks, and lines of stalwart and intellectual looking men, types of sturdy western civilization."³¹ This description counteracts the many previous accounts that portrayed Mormon women as plain and inept dressers and Mormon men as dupes bent on turning back the clock of modern civilization.

The outward-directed missionary work performed by the choir and other public relations efforts of the church led to tourists coming into Salt Lake City to see Mormons on their home ground. Tourism—particularly of the West—was an increasingly popular and available pursuit, and Salt Lake City was consistently described as one of the most-desired sites to see on any travel itinerary to the West.³² One paper called Salt Lake City *the* "tourist Mecca"—perhaps the first time the Saints did not mind being linked to

Islam.³³ Indeed, the flexibility of popular culture can be seen as a negative line of attack that linked Mormonism and Islam persisted as well, particularly with Bruce Kinney's 1912 *Mormonism: The Islam of America*.³⁴ Yet the accolades continued to roll in, not entirely offsetting the negative or prurient representations, but marking a clear difference from the nineteenth century.

The famed Welsh composer Joseph Parry testified after his visit to Salt Lake City that “polygamy is absolutely a thing of the past” and noted with some humor that “they did not attempt to make a Mormon of me.”³⁵ Famed opera singers Ernestine Schumann-Heink and Adelina Patti, used to having audiences rave about them, raved about the Tabernacle, with Schumann-Heink calling its famed organ “one of the greatest pleasures of [my] life.”³⁶ A rabbi who went to a Tabernacle sermon commented on the Mormons there: “They were not the ignorant and credulous peasant type, gathered up from the European slums, that I had been led to expect. The speaking was an appeal to a great host of men and women....”³⁷ Another observer wrote that he crowd-watched at the Mormon Tabernacle, intent on “finding the expression of sadness that is popularly supposed to be the chief characteristic of the female Mormon face..., [but] candor compels me to say that the look of sadness which I sought was never found.” Moreover, in a statement that represented the new and growing opinion of the Mormons, he wrote that he had “never appreciated the beauty of composition and never felt its patriotic influence until this Mormon chorus rose on the air.”³⁸ The “popular suppositions” were slowly giving way to a new popular understanding of Mormonism—one based on an American essentialism that itself had a long established narrative.

The choir was praised across the country and performed key cultural labor in the long road to acceptance, but individual Mormons also made important contributions to creating an American identity and a space for Mormonism in the religious mosaic of the country. One reply to a pamphlet that contained two anti-LDS sermons by a Chattanooga, Tennessee, pastor illustrates how the Mormons were beginning to control their own narrative. The pastor had given two stock sermons that could have been culled from any nineteenth-century pamphlet or novel. The LDS author dismissed the pastor's claims as "the usual charges" and "the old familiar song about polygamy." The author focused on patriotism, reminding the pastor of Mormon military service in the Philippines. He gave an overview of LDS theology and again took time to debunk the Solomon Spaulding as author of the Book of Mormon myth. He also proudly noted that, "We think our singers are of the best," continuing the process of discursively linking the Mormon Tabernacle Choir to an essentialist view of patriotism.³⁹ His arguments show the Othering done by both Mormons and non-Mormons and how that was shifting to a more inclusive view. From the Mormon side, "our service," "our patriotism," "our beliefs," and "our popular culture" was no longer a thing to set them apart—it was to be added to the mythical melting pot as a way to better America as surely as Irish ballads or Italian food. The Mormons were being retroactively written into the story of America in a very new way.

While many Mormons defended their beliefs and argued for greater inclusion, there was perhaps no more powerful—or controversial—advocate than B. H. Roberts.⁴⁰ Acknowledged by historians as one of the towering LDS intellectuals of all time and noted by historian David Bitton as a "Renaissance man," Roberts was a prolific writer and speaker—and also a polygamist. His marriage relations landed him in the Utah

penitentiary and cost him a seat in the House of Representatives. Roberts's experience was in many ways a coda to the anti-Mormonism of the nineteenth century. Millions signed a petition urging the House not to seat him, and indeed, in late 1899, at the close of the nineteenth century, the House complied by a vote of 268 to 50.⁴¹ In his autobiography, a still smarting Roberts castigated the Christian and newspaper opposition which he astutely noted allowed not only attacks on him, but also on his religion and state. While Reed Smoot endured similar affronts in his quest to be seated in the Senate a few years later, Smoot was not a polygamist, and he was ultimately allowed to take his place in Congress. Thus, Roberts provided anti-Mormons with a stage to attack Mormonism. Roberts was an object of popular culture himself—at first, a very negative one. He could have faded into obscurity, but he chose a different route that had important implications for the Mormon Church. Roberts formed an elegant bridge between nineteenth and twentieth-century Mormonism, and spent the rest of his life defending Mormonism against those who would defame it. In the process, he helped shape the new identity of the church.

Roberts is important to consider for several reasons. First, he was an adept crisis manager and a strong orator. This gave him a projection of strength that only added to his intellectualism. Indeed, Roberts was saved from being “just” an intellectual—not always the best thing to be in an era that admired rugged manliness—by the fact he was largely self-taught and spent a few years as a youth in a mining town complete with drinking, gambling, and gun fights. In many ways he calls to mind his contemporary Theodore Roosevelt. For example, as a young man, Roberts was placed in charge of the Mormon Church's Southern mission during a time when vigilante violence was prevalent. Two of

his elders were murdered in Tennessee and the vigilantes made it known that they would kill any Mormon who tried to recover their bodies. Roberts immediately got a wagon and successfully recovered the slain men. From walking across the plains to Utah as a nine-year-old to serving as a chaplain during World War I as a sixty-year-old, Roberts was never afraid of a challenge.⁴² Second, he wrote and edited much of the entire history of the Mormon Church, thus playing a role shaping its narrative. Third, he was not afraid to be vocal if he disagreed with the higher church leadership, giving him an ethos that other Mormon apologists lacked. And finally, he attempted to bring the Mormon Church into the quickly-changing modernity of the Progressive Era by embracing scientific principles and attempting to wed them to LDS theology. The diversity of his pursuits can be clearly seen in the two-volume collection of articles, speeches, and letters, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints*.

He begins the work appropriately enough with a paper he prepared for the Parliament of Religions at the World's Fair in 1893. As noted, the Mormons were not included in the Parliament, and Roberts found that curious in that "Mormonism is the most distinctively American religious movement yet developed in our country."⁴³ In the paper, Roberts gives the familiar narrative of the persecution and exodus of the Saints, a commentary on the Book of Mormon, a refutation of the Solomon Spaulding manuscript theory on the origin of the Book of Mormon, and a lucid overview of LDS theology. In short, Roberts made a case for including Mormonism among the world's religions. However, the Parliament refused to hear the paper unless it was delivered in a small conference room as opposed to the main dais; the Mormons declined. In a telling statement, Roberts places Mormonism squarely in line with other world faiths: "[We] had

asked to speak from the same platform from which the great religious faiths had spoken—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism—... where [our] position and principles could be compared and contrasted with the viewpoint and doctrines of other religions, by the enlightened thought of the age.”⁴⁴ As early as 1893, Roberts was essentially declaring Mormonism a world religion and paving the way for a new identity based outside of Utah. Most scholars point to the early 1900s when the church re-embraced sacred space in the East while simultaneously deemphasizing the principle of the gathering as the point where the Mormons began rejoining America. But Roberts had an earlier vision of Mormonism joining not just America, but the world. As he presciently noted in his paper, “[Mormonism] possesses within itself principles of native strength that will enable it to weather every storm.”⁴⁵

Roberts was a relentless foe against anti-LDS novelists, and published several reviews on different works. His reviews were often rejected by Eastern papers and had to appear in pro-LDS papers in Utah, though at least one appeared in the *New York Times Saturday Review*. For example, Roberts picked apart the popular novelist Harry Leon Wilson’s *The Lions of the Lord* (1905), a fictional retelling of early Mormon history—one that did not portray the Saints in a favorable light.⁴⁶ Roberts compared the novel point by point to an anti-Mormon speech given in 1850, asserting that Wilson had employed “the methods of yellow-backed, ten-cent novelists of a quarter century ago.”⁴⁷ He vigorously defended the church against Wilson’s claims that the Mormons were responsible for the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Furthermore, in an example of the church’s new confidence, Roberts granted that “I am not so blind in my admiration of the Mormon people, or so bigoted in my devotion to the Mormon faith as to think that there

are no individuals in that Church chargeable with fanaticism, folly, intemperate speech and wickedness.”⁴⁸ Here Roberts is incorporating a theme that was developing in non-Mormon popular culture. The Mormon Church was beginning to be cast as a positive body that like any group had corrupt individuals within it. More surprisingly, Roberts also noted that “even Mormon leaders have given utterance to ideas that are indefensible.”⁴⁹ This statement underscores for the reading public that there was no evil hierarchy waiting to swoop down and excommunicate—much less kill—Roberts for speaking his mind as an individual who happened to be Mormon. He was defending Mormonism to be sure, but he was also making a complicated case for not only Mormonism as a whole, but also for the positive and negative aspects of its individual parts—in other words, a realistic portrait that was neither the grossly distorted view of anti-Mormons nor the uncritical viewpoint of many Mormons.

Roberts’s defense of Mormonism was eclectic and spans thousands of pages. From refuting Senator Thomas Kearns’s 1905 anti-LDS speech on polygamy to defending fine points of Mormon theology, Roberts helped shape Mormon identity and present it to the world. His *Defense* began with calling for a place for Mormons among the Parliament of Religions in 1893. It ends in 1908 with a Fourth of July speech that places Mormonism at the heart of America. Roberts gave a speech that day in Spanish Fork, Utah, arguing that the Constitution of the United States was divinely inspired. He never mentions Mormonism, and by not doing so, he generalized his religion to that of America’s religion. It was his God that inspired the nation and the founders of the nation, he subtly argues. He adroitly linked a religion created fifty-four years after the founding of the United States to those mythical beginnings.

Roberts's career concluded with two massive capstones. He compiled a six-volume primary-source history of the early period of the church complete with critical notes and essays that is still in print today. And he also published a *Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, a 3,459 page work that brought Mormonism up to the contemporary moment. His angle of vision was certainly that of a Mormon leader, but his views were nuanced and overall balanced. He even tried to bring the church firmly into modernity by weaving science with Mormon theology in a separate piece, arguing that humans existed before Adam for millions of years, paving the way for an evolutionary old-Earth argument. Unfortunately, his theological interpretation clashed with church president Joseph F. Smith's view of a young Earth, and Roberts's work on that subject was not published until much later. Even so, he was an outspoken advocate of a particular brand of Mormonism grounded in history and passionate in theological elucidation. Joseph F. Smith was the national face of Mormonism, but Roberts was its more personal face, accepting debate invitations, speaking at Protestant churches, and questioning points of doctrine he found troublesome, particularly in the Book of Mormon. He gave other Mormons permission to question tenets of the faith to build a better, stronger, more modern church. Questioning the leadership remained a risky endeavor for those who wished to rise high within the church, but Roberts showed to fellow Mormons and the rest of America that independence of mind was not automatically at odds with being a Mormon. He made Mormonism relevant to modern life in the United States and at the same time connected it firmly with its origins.

The contributions of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the great Mormon apologists are vast, but perhaps no greater link back into America was achieved than the

rededication of LDS sacred space, most notably in Vermont and New York. The year 1905 marked the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Joseph Smith. The Saints were often charged with worshipping Smith, and there was the prickly issue of his involvement with polygamy, but church leaders decided to raise a monument to him in Sharon, Vermont, his birthplace. Many newspapers howled at this development when the monument was finally dedicated in 1909. The *New York Times* wrote that “Smith was an enemy of this country, and a moral reprobate. The monument to his memory is an insult to the intelligence of the people in its neighborhood....”⁵⁰ In a particularly harsh piece, *Harper’s Weekly* opined that “The only thing to [Joseph Smith’s] credit is that he was lynched. That bred some sympathy for him, and so it is a pity that it happened. But Jo Smith was an enemy of civilization and of the United States.”⁵¹

Despite these denunciations, many papers were sympathetic to the Saints, underscoring the multifaceted representations taking place. For example, the *Washington Post* ran a long story about the monument, citing it as a good way to draw tourists and a fitting way to honor Smith. They gave a detailed history of Smith’s life—including the First Vision—and after describing the trek to Utah, wryly concluded, “From that point their history needs no comment.”⁵² Indeed, by linking the monument to sacred tourism, the Mormons gained the implicit approval of the locals. The *Boston Daily Globe* reluctantly reported that “Vermonters...regard Mormonism as a species of deep-sea octopus, with ever-reaching tentacles seeking whom it may devour, but the residents...rather welcome the idea for the monetary revenue to be derived.”⁵³ The Mormons would always be linked to Utah, but their identity was no longer confined. The monument was an obelisk, and symbolically represented a stake within America, paving

the way for Mormonism to become first America's religion, and then a religion of the world.

Not surprisingly, Mormons also advanced their own narrative through the popular medium of literature. Nephi Anderson wrote an important novel in 1898 that was quite successful and is still in print today, *Added Upon*. Anderson was a Mormon, and he integrated Mormon theology into his novel. The work is a lucid commentary on the Mormon belief that humans exist together in pre-life and post-life conditions. Anderson symbolically completed cultural labor as well by attempting to exorcise the ghosts of anti-LDS novels of the past. The middle of the book initially follows the plot of so many of those narratives. A young man—in this case, from Norway—becomes enchanted with the Mormons. His family berates him, asking why he would “associate with a people known everywhere as the scum of the Earth.”⁵⁴ He loses his friends and his fiancé, but he is unwavering in his faith. Anderson's plot recasts America as a revamped “City on a Hill,” a spiritual revisualizing of the Puritan exodus wherein the young Mormon flees verbal persecution in Europe for religious freedom in America (and perhaps in some ways symbolically the Mormons' flight from Illinois to Utah). For the protagonist Henrik, “America had a new meaning for him now. Before, it had been simply a new wonderland, with untold possibilities in a material way; but added to this there was now the fact that in America the Latter-day Zion was to be built....”⁵⁵ When Henrik makes his way to America, he expects his extended family living there to scorn him for his beliefs just as his immediate family did. But they simply say, “That's all right, we live in a free country, you know, where one's religion isn't called into question.”⁵⁶ Anderson was positing a new America where that statement was true even for Mormons. Anderson closed the

novel with a poem, which, since Utah had obtained statehood just two years prior to the publication of *Added Upon*, could well symbolically represent the Mormons' new situation:

Upon this globe, God's children glorified
 Are no more strangers, wand'ring to and fro
 As weary pilgrims; now they have received
 Possessions everlasting on Earth—
 A portion of the glorified domain
 On which to build and multiply and spread—
 A part of Earth to call always their own.⁵⁷

Anderson's popular novel, along with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, B. H. Roberts, and countless other Mormons who inserted their voice into mass culture, staked a claim on America for the Saints.

The Mormons were on a firm track to becoming, in the eyes of their fellow citizens, Americans and denominational Christians. Yet rescription is not always a unidirectional force. The anti-Mormon rhetoric did not simply disappear overnight. Forces rallied against Mormonism, arguing that its members were simply "playing possum" and waiting for the fervor to die down before resuming polygamous marriages. Furthermore, those who had been in plural relationships before the end of the doctrine in 1890 continued to maintain those relationships, including many men in prominent roles within the church. While one Mormon Tabernacle Choir member argued that his church was "distinctively American," it would take decades before a consensus emerged and the rescription was completed.⁵⁸

In the meantime, the multidimensional representations of Mormonism continued to show the hopes and fears of America, but of a new America facing a new century and a new way of life. Moreover, there was another dominant force vying for the LDS narrative

during this time period: anti-Mormon evangelical Christians. The Christian rhetoric served as an important flashpoint in religious identity for many evangelicals who were searching for oppositional others. The Mormons made an argument for inclusion in mainstream America, thus defining it in the process. Yet while Mormons were becoming more vocal about taking their place in American life, just as anti-LDS rhetoric helped shape Mormon identity and create unity, the success of Mormonism helped shape early twentieth-century Christian identity and created a rallying point for those who would deny Mormons a place in Christianity.

“The Rising Tide of Mormonism” and Christian Religious Identity

No other group resisted incorporating Mormons into the fabric of American cultural life more than certain branches of evangelical Christianity. As the nineteenth century closed and the twentieth began, they continued to define themselves against Mormons and many made the argument that plural marriage was still an active part of the LDS Church. Reform was an important part of the Progressive Era, and to these evangelicals, polygamy still merited their attention as surely as alcohol. However, their rhetoric contained new elements that performed cultural labor beyond pure reform. Their anti-Mormonism shows an important transition from Christian denominations abhorring polygamy in the far away territory of Utah to fearing Mormonism as a powerful rival that was spreading its influence beyond Utah and siphoning away their members. The “Mormon question” had given anti-Mormon Christians a great deal of identity, and it had also garnered them political influence. They tried to hold onto that power by castigating the Mormons and calling for a constitutional amendment banning polygamy. As one contemporary observer put it, “If polygamy were permitted to die a natural death the

Evangelical Churches would lose their last foothold against the rising tide of Mormonism. It is not polygamy that disturbs them, but envy and jealousy.”⁵⁹

Even within Christian evangelism there was an inconsistency to the narrative which blunted its impact against the unified Mormon narrative—a reversal of what had happened in the nineteenth century. A fundamental disagreement erupted in the broader Christian community about how to deal with the Mormons. The various responses reveal a great deal about American religion at that time period. It was quite elastic in many ways and able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. In other ways, American religion was tied to the past in such a manner that threatened to leave it behind mainstream America. One faction tried to continue casting Mormonism as a dangerous Other, while another welcomed the church into the American family of denominations. The fact that the latter position ultimately won out had much to do with the cultural rhetoric surrounding this “new” brand of Mormonism.

For example, one non-LDS supporter wrote that, “The younger generation of Mormons are ashamed of a good portion of the past history of their church and protest against being judged by it. They are as true to their families and have as little desire to practise polygamy as any class of young people in the United States.”⁶⁰ Another non-Mormon supporter argued in a more positive vein that “we [should not] condemn the Mormons and Mormonism of today for what their enemies said of them thirty fifty or sixty years ago.” He also pointed out the LDS service in the Spanish-American war, and complimented the Saints on their conquering of Utah, an achievement, in his eyes, that reflected upon the “entire white race.”⁶¹ Another astute non-Mormon Christian wrote that “The point I want to insist most strongly on is that we must be on our guard lest we yield

to the temptation actually to regret that the Mormons are improving—to be almost sorry that we have lost our old thunder because we can no longer honestly repeat the stories of the sensationalists....” In a point addressing why young Mormons were not vocally condemning polygamy, he simply and rightly noted that “they would be condemning their mothers and fathers.”⁶² Thoughtful congregations often asked Mormon representatives to speak at their churches. One such pastor wrote, “Mormons have been relatively more successful than any other denomination in the past decade and are increasing daily, both here and abroad. All the information we now have about the Mormons, comes from their opponents.”⁶³ His church invited B. H. Roberts to give an overview of Mormons that would span four meetings wherein rival clergymen could also give their views. Only Roberts showed.⁶⁴

Thus, Mormons cultivated important allies within the non-LDS Christian community, but they had powerful enemies as well. The anti-Mormon retort was focused mainly on the political situation in the nation, pointing to the fact that B. H. Roberts, a polygamist, had been elected by the people of Utah to serve them in Congress, *ipso facto* they were traitors to the nation. Reed Smoot was elected to the Senate and endured three years of hearings that included placing LDS president Joseph F. Smith before Congress. Roberts was denied his seat because of his familial situation; Smoot was found to be not a mindless servant of the Saints and kept his, but this did not pacify the evangelicals. Nothing could or would placate them, as they were struggling to maintain their own religious identity in a rapidly changing world of uncertainty.

Those who had made their name by combating Mormonism continued to try and capitalize on their reputation to advance their political career, and the evangelical reform

movement latched onto their platform. Senator Shelby Cullom wrote a 1905 magazine piece on “The Menace of Mormonism” fully fifteen years after ostensibly achieving victory over the Mormons and polygamy. Reminding readers that he had the “honor” of crafting the first “anti-Mormon bill,” he called for a constitutional amendment prohibiting polygamy. He argued that while polygamy was no longer the danger it once was, the practice still continued in secret within the Mormon temples. He offered no proof of this accusation, but relived his glory days of crushing out widespread plural marriage, bragging about the judge he sent out like an avatar to the wild West to tame it with the forces of civilization. He also tried his hand at rescription by arguing that the Mormons’ industry and frugality was not to their credit, but to the credit of “the character of the dominance which has curbed and incited [them]”; in other words, Cullom himself.⁶⁵ His narrative was once powerful but now seemed familiar and had little bearing on the modern Mormon Church.

One popular tactic the evangelicals used built on the 1870s memoirs of Fanny Stenhouse and Ann Eliza Young by getting former Mormons to tell their stories—a practice that continues today. The 1908 collection of *The Letters of an Apostate Mormon to his Son* is representative. The father set up a long thesis arguing why the history of Mormon persecution should no longer be considered as a mitigating factor for the Saints. He cited the “revolting indecencies” of the Mormons, their murdering of “hundreds” of people in Utah, and the fact that everywhere the Mormons moved the “Gentile” community was “forced to band themselves together for the protection from the assaults of Mormons” —an attempted rescription of history. He argued that Mormons knew that cries of persecution would no longer garner sympathy, but he also recognized that the tide

was still turning in favor of the Mormons due to the impact of popular culture. He noted that in his estimation the Saints had moved from using persecution to advance their cause to using tourism, writing, “It is safe to state that the annual visiting tourists [to Salt Lake City] do more to spread a favorable view of the Mormon propaganda than the combined efforts of the 2,200 Mormon elders on the mission field to-day.”⁶⁶ This work was attempting to do more than entertain or educate a son; the author was attempting to perform cultural labor. After all, the back of the book noted that ten cents in stamps would get the reader a series of anti-Mormon pamphlets. Yet the author had no countervailing narrative of equal power to the one that was being developed by Mormons and their allies. He simply fell back on the decades-old anti-Mormon rhetoric, reminding readers of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, a horrific event to be sure, but one now fifty years in the past that showed little evidence of a concentrated Mormon plot. Indeed, the towering historian Hubert Howe Bancroft had weighed in as early as 1889 that “this horrible crime, so often and so persistently charged upon the Mormon church and its leaders, was the crime of an individual..., one who was a member of the Mormon church, but of whose intentions the church knew nothing, and whose actions the members of the church, high and low, regard with as much abhorrence as any out of the church.”⁶⁷ While Bancroft and others defended the Mormons, the Mountain Meadows Massacre retained a powerful hold on the anti-LDS imagination—one that still exists to this day.

The most unified and sustained attack from Christian evangelicals came from the National Reform Association. They instigated a coordinated campaign against Mormonism and put forth their views in conferences, pamphlets, and the *Christian Statesman*, the official organ of the organization. The *Statesman* recognized that among

certain non-LDS religious leaders there was a call for a spirit of tolerance. They argued that while tolerance is a “fine American quality,” it should not give way to “an indolent acceptance of evil.”⁶⁸ Just as the “apostate” letter writer, they recognized the growing power of tourism, noting that “Salt Lake is without any question the most important tourist city in the land, and all because of this unwarranted publicity that has been given it from the romance attached to its peculiar faith and social system.”⁶⁹ The National Reform Association called for a constitutional amendment to end polygamy, a ban on LDS materials through the U.S. postal system, and a ban on any Mormon serving in Congress. They, unlike their forbears who granted that the Mormons were remarkably industrious, initially gave no quarter, arguing that anyone could have tamed the Salt Lake valley with irrigation. They charged that Mormons were not patriotic but took an oath of treason against the U.S., and gleefully reported the news that Mormon endowment garments were conflicting with Navy regulations on proper underclothing. They meticulously watched over the Mormon Church, charting everything from their converts in Japan to their sugar factories to the birth of their children.

The *Statesman* called on the nostalgia of the nation by reminding them that Lincoln (or at least his party) had called slavery and polygamy the “twin relics of barbarism.”⁷⁰ The Constitution had taken care of slavery; now it was time for that same Constitution to eradicate polygamy. Yet seeing the cultural reaction to Mormonism growing more favorable, they fine-tuned their argument, showing at least some adaptability. In a notable passage given their previous attacks on Mormonism, they wrote, “[We] are not attacking or even denying the heroism and fortitude of the Mormon settlement of Utah.”⁷¹ They shifted their attack squarely on the Mormon leadership. With

positive representations of Mormons showing up across literature and film, one *Statesman* writer noted, “There is a difference between the man and the organization to which he belongs....I must be understood as dealing with a system. I throw no stones at the rank and file.”⁷² This strategy served two purposes: first, it acknowledged the shifting perception of many Americans about the Mormons in an attempt to reach a more mainstream audience. Second, it allowed for “ordinary” Mormons to come back into the rank and file of “real” Christianity.

Yet the *Statesman* made relatively little headway. They bitterly complained that their meetings often “receive[] but indifferent notice from the press of the city.”⁷³ Their problem was that they were living in a time of compromise and flexibility but they were in the end largely inflexible. The nation was looking forward to the new century ahead and the *Statesman* remained mired in the past. But the complaints and charges of the *Statesman* do reveal a great deal about American life at the time. The editors worried that Utah’s best crop was “babies,” in that the birth rate of Mormons would never lead to “race suicide,” a great fear among many whites of that era, and a discursive attempt to portray Mormons as non-white. There was also a grim pride evinced at the astonishing industrial explosion of the United States. As one writer noted, “France makes fashions, Germany makes dye-stuffs, Ireland makes linens; but America makes everything—pins and automobiles, tooth-picks and aeroplanes, slums and religions.”⁷⁴ The *Statesman* shows a deep tension between the great freedoms America offered that spurred innovation and the fact that that very freedom led to undesirable results as well.

The evangelical narrative still carried weight, but it was clearly just a shadow of the rhetoric of the nineteenth century. In one review of a 1907 Mormon address by Joseph

F. Smith, the anti-LDS Ministerial Association of Salt Lake City tried to raise all of the old arguments. However, they ruefully note, “We are not unmindful of the fact that we shall be charged with persecution and misrepresentation in issuing this review.”⁷⁵

Characteristically, B. H. Roberts shredded their review, using caricature in a way they were familiar with using against the Mormons and linking it to manliness, saying, “I say that Joseph F. Smith’s position needs only to be stated to the world, and the manhood of America will applaud his attitude, long-haired ministerial associations and short-haired women’s organizations to the contrary notwithstanding.”⁷⁶ As for the Ministerial Association’s fear of being called persecutors, Roberts devastatingly replies, “[Y]our power is no longer equal to your malice, and so we do not believe you will ever be able to persecute us again.”⁷⁷ Nostalgia for the past is often a powerful tool, but the Mormons, through their own rhetoric and that of their allies, seemed like just another denomination. To the *Statesman*, though, “There is no compromise.”⁷⁸ Backtracking subtly yet again to its original position against all Mormons while keeping overt pressure on the church leadership, they bemoaned the sweeping impact popular culture was having on the image of the Mormons:

We know of Mormon industry and thrift. They are not in dispute. Other people than Mormons possess these qualities. But the Mormon church is the only institution in the country which is allowed to plead virtues as a license for sins. The Mormon church alone is permitted to offer the thrift of its people as a cover for the greed of its priests; the devotion of its members, as a shield for the disloyalty of its creed; the beauty of its temple or the music of its organ, as a defense or a denial of the polygamy practiced by its prophet and king.⁷⁹

Clearly, even the *Statesman* recognized that the narrative was shifting towards a more positive representation of Mormonism, one that could also be seen in the new popular culture innovation of the time: film.

Visual Rescription: Mormons on Film

The anti-LDS evangelical Christians had recognized the power of popular culture polemics, and they transferred the spirit of anti-Mormon novels to the new medium of film. The leaders of the National Reform Association financed and promoted the 1917 silent film *A Mormon Maid*—a visual rehash of the old plots and themes that nevertheless unintentionally presents several sides of Mormonism. As scholar Richard Alan Nelson rightly points out, the film represents a “carryover of moralistic Victorian literature to the nascent cinema.”⁸⁰ While this is undoubtedly true, the film actually represents a great deal more. It owes much to the anti-Mormon novels of the previous century, but by transferring their plotline to a visual medium the film also offers several points of departure. As for the similarities, the familiar young woman is nearly forced into a plural marriage against her will, as is her father.⁸¹ In a new twist, the Avenging Angels, or Danites, are shown in hoods and robes that the film claims influenced the Ku Klux Klan. In typical violent fashion, the father’s first wife shoots herself in the head in a rather shocking scene of on-screen violence, and the heroes kill off the evil Mormons and escape.⁸²

There is little doubt that most people of the time viewed the film as anti-Mormon, but again, by transferring book motifs to the screen, there were several unintended consequences. The anti-LDS novels usually cast Utah as a beautiful but foreign and alien place of barbarism. *A Mormon Maid* puts the Saints firmly in the narrative of the mythic West. The visuals carry powerful signs that the Mormons were hardy pioneers who could even drive off Indians. While the film calls polygamy the “ugly of early Mormonism,” it also shows “The Lion of the Lord,” a character representing Brigham Young, as living it

as a spiritual obligation, not a licentious one.⁸³ The villain of the film, Mormon apostle Darius Burr, is using the principle of plural marriage to further his own prurient ambitions. Burr represents those faux Mormons such as John C. Bennett who practiced polygamy for sexual gratification, whereas the Young character, while portrayed as wrong in his beliefs, is sincere. The film also fell into what was becoming the prevailing narrative of the time: old Mormons were “bad” or at least wrong; new Mormons were “good” Americans. The hero of the film is actually a young Mormon who does not believe in plural marriage.⁸⁴ The film contains a great deal of anti-Mormon propaganda as well, but it is interesting to note that at least some news outlets came to the defense of the Saints. Other outlets such as the *Trenton Evening Times* called the film “an accurate and truthful narrative of Mormonism of early Utah.”⁸⁵ More neutral outlets drew a line between Mormonism of “that day” and by extension the Mormons of the present time. Yet there was also another line drawn between anti- and pro-Mormon Christians. The *Syracuse Herald* reported that once local clergymen found out that the Anti-Mormon League had a stake in the film, they denounced the organization.⁸⁶

It was becoming clear that film was going to play an important role in determining precisely what the past, the present, and even the future looked like. Mormons themselves recognized the power of the new medium and produced and released several films that are now lost. While there were also several anti-Mormon films released during the early twentieth century, within a few films one sees a narrative shift from the stock characters of nineteenth-century literature and a surprisingly nuanced and accepting view of the Mormons that refutes the script that films such as *A Mormon Maid* tried to advance. One of the earliest films was Thomas Edison’s 1905 nickelodeon short, *A Trip to Salt Lake*

City. Recalling the more gentle jabs at Mormonism such as those proffered by Mark Twain, this film satirized the now-defunct doctrine of polygamy. In the short, a train porter escorts women and children to their berths, and it becomes clear as a man comes in that he has six wives and nine children. The filmmaker plays the situations for laughs as the harried father tries to placate his extended family. Ultimately, the man brings in a milk jug with nine straws and gains some peace and quiet. While the church leadership probably was not happy that the film brought back the specter of polygamy, it was still a quantum leap from the anti-Mormon novels of a few decades previous—and even some representations of that day.

Many representations of the early twentieth century, in a carryover from the previous century, focused on the Otherness of Mormons by arguing that the offspring of polygamy were something other than white due not only to the licentiousness of Mormon men who would marry anyone, but also to the moral decay embodied in polygamy that would eventually be seen in LDS offspring. Thus, the cover of the songbook for the popular song “The Mormon Coon” showed a black Mormon man with six wives of varying races. Other cartoons showed Mormon men with children of various races. The belief was so prevalent it prompted one author who had visited Salt Lake City to write, somewhat puzzled, that “I am unable to discover wherein the children in Utah appear to be materially different than those in other parts of our country....”⁸⁷ *A Trip to Salt Lake City* showed no such miscegenation fears as all its protagonists were white. One interesting point is that the film never actually mentions the family’s religion. The discursive link between polygamy, Salt Lake City, and the Mormons, was already so strong that there is little doubt the film was about an LDS family.

Another film that deals with Mormonism in a similar vein is the 1926 Raymond Griffith classic *Hands Up!* In the film, Griffith plays a Confederate spy trying to infiltrate and destroy a gold mine in Nevada that is paying for Union supplies. Much as in *A Trip to Salt Lake City*, *Hands Up!* plays polygamy for laughs instead of as a dire threat to the nation. Griffith's character, Jack, woos the two daughters of the mine's owner, and to get out of a scrape, proposes to them both. He is nearly hanged for his offense, but he escapes, and at the end of the film, he stands with his arm around both daughters, wondering what to do. A carriage pulls up, and out steps a bearded man. He introduces his three wives as they step out of the carriage one by one. Jack asks if they are really all his wives, and he tells Jack that he has nineteen wives in total. As he walks away, the sisters tell Jack that the man is Brigham Young. Jack gives a knowing smile and hops in the carriage with both women. The final shot is of the back of the carriage, adorned with a sign that says "To Salt Lake City." Not only is polygamy shown in a humorous light with no commentary about its effect on national morals, but the star of the film engages in what will ostensibly become a plural marriage.⁸⁸ Thus, while Christian groups were declaiming polygamy as a persistent and immediate threat, many producers of popular culture were portraying it as a practice of the past, and moreover, a non-threatening one.

Despite the release of several films dealing with Mormonism and Mormonism's place in America, literature remained the dominant medium for discussing the Saints. From magazines to novels, producers of mass culture articulated and debated the place of the Mormons in early twentieth-century America. The tension in these narratives, particularly in the work of Zane Grey, would bring to fruition a true rescription of the Saints.

Zane Grey's American Mormon West

The struggle to articulate a new Mormon narrative spanned both books and magazines. Those writers who chose to take the anti-Mormon tack often stuck with the narrative of the nineteenth century, or as B. H. Roberts labeled it, “old warfare in [a] new phase.”⁸⁹ An anti-Mormon magazine crusade kicked off in 1911 with articles appearing in various periodicals, including *McClure's*, *Pearson's*, and *Cosmopolitan*. The authors charged, among other things, that polygamy was still being practiced in Utah and solemnized in the temples. They also gave highly distorted views on Mormon theology. Recognizing the power of popular culture to work against them as surely as anti-LDS Christians did, the Mormons noted that every charge the magazines were making had been clearly and openly refuted during the Smoot hearings, but “several large volumes have to be waded through to obtain that definite information, while the mingled nonsense and venom poured forth from month to month is in present view and in popular form.”⁹⁰ Indeed, the church blamed one single cartoon for causing all the problems—a *Cosmopolitan* drawing that showed a dark creature stationed in Salt Lake City and stretching out its tentacles across other Western states.⁹¹ The articles that accompanied the cartoon created a powerful link that spurred much of the subsequent anti-LDS magazine rhetoric.

Yet rarely noted is that the Mormons finally had a national stage—or at least their allies did. Theodore Roosevelt himself published an open letter in *Collier's* in 1911 refuting the anti-LDS magazine accusations. He thundered, “There is a peculiar infamy in this species of slander, and the men engaged in it do not stand one whit above any men who have really taken part in the practices which they affect to denounce.”⁹² Roosevelt's

argument thus places the accusatory parties below actual polygamists—an unheard of position for an ex-president. Linking the Mormons to the propagation of the white race, he flipped the concerns of the *Christian Statesman* and noted that

[Mormon] young men were less apt than their neighbors to indulge in that course of vicious sexual dissipation so degrading to manhood and so brutal in the degradation it inflicted on women; and they were free from that vice, more destructive to civilization than any other can possibly be, the artificial restriction of families, the practice of sterile marriage; and which ultimately means destruction of the nation.⁹³

Roosevelt's emphasis on the importance that Mormons place on family can still be seen in popular culture to this day.

The tension between pro- and anti-Mormon representations can be found in novels, as well, particularly those about the American West. Authors struggled over how the Mormons of the old West would be portrayed, and thus how they would be thought of in the contemporary moment. Jack London's *The Star Rover* (1915) is about a prisoner who is able to reach a state of transcendence and revisit past lives. One such past life was of Jesse Fancher, an Arkansan crossing Utah with a wagon train. London, following in the footsteps of Harry Leon Wilson, tells a fictionalized version of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, complete with the real-life character "John Lee," which adds verisimilitude to the tale. The Mormons are given no redeeming qualities. As the travelers make their way across the plains, desperate for food, they are denied at each settlement; at one point they are even turned away after asking for milk for a baby. The Mormons massacre the party, including the narrator. London gets in many shots at the Mormons through Fancher's voice, including the commentary, "They ain't white. They're Mormons."⁹⁴

Some contemporary allies tried to build on Bancroft's assertion of Mormon innocence in the matter, as Julius C. Birge did in his 1912 memoir. He met a man in Salt Lake City who claimed that the Danites were real, but Birge noted that the man "was said to be a professional gambler and a *habitué* of Trowbridge's saloon." Birge's friend went further, saying, "I believe them men who are doing most of the talking are a heap worse than any Mormons I have seen."⁹⁵ Yet the negative accounts never ceased, particularly after John D. Lee, who was executed for being responsible for the Massacre, published with the help of notorious Mormon-hater Alfred Henry Lewis, the provocatively titled *The Mormon Menace, Being the Confession of John Doyle Lee, Danite, An Official Assassin of the Mormon Church Under the Late Brigham Young* (1905). The net result was that while contemporary Mormons increasingly gained acceptance, the Mormons of the nineteenth century were often castigated.

Artists of this time period who engaged with Mormonism rarely discussed modern-day Mormons—there was no agreed-upon script in the same way there was for nineteenth-century Mormonism. Rather, they used the past to illuminate the present. They talked about Mormons of the polygamous era in a deeper manner than ever before to better understand what was happening in present-day Mormonism. The caricatures of old could no longer hold as the Mormons and Utah became more and more part of America. The aforementioned examples are important, but perhaps no greater shift in the ways in which producers of popular culture portrayed Mormonism took place than when Zane Grey set out to write about the Saints. Three of his novels expertly wove together and in a sense helped create the new cultural understanding of early twentieth-century Mormonism by revisiting the old West. As scholar William R. Handley argues, "Grey's

fiction not only ‘steals back’ the white identity Mormons already had but much of their religious and cultural identity as well.”⁹⁶ Grey was in effect creating what he was ostensibly describing. In *The Heritage of the Desert* (1910), *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912), and its sequel, *The Rainbow Trail* (1915), Grey took almost every existing strand of LDS myths, truths, lies, and contemporary feelings, and brought Mormonism into twentieth-century popular culture.

The Heritage of the Desert reads like a test-run of the two more powerful novels to follow. It symbolically takes America’s relationship with the Saints and compresses it to the relationship between a “Gentile,” Jack Hare, and a Mormon, August Naab. The proof of Mormon patriotism and the Saints’ legendary industry and faith is represented in a simple declaration that encapsulates the transition from anti-Mormonism to a more accepted faith, as the narrator says of the Hare’s feelings for Naab, “In forty-eight hours he had learned to hate the Mormons unutterably; here, in the presence of this austere man, he felt that hatred wrenched from his heart.”⁹⁷ The main villain of the novel, an unscrupulous rancher, is a non-Mormon. Homosocial relationships between tough men constitute a recurrent and powerful strand of narratives about the West, and Grey granted that storyline to Mormon and “Gentile” relations.⁹⁸ Hare and Naab are the emotional center of the novel and Hare declares his love for the Mormon on at least three occasions. Furthermore, Grey rescripted the Mormons into the mythical narrative of the West by making the gun-toting Naab the fastest draw in the region. Naab’s pull is described as “quicker than the eye,” but he also disdains violence because of his faith. He is a character with depth, and tells Hare, “[I]t doesn’t follow because I’m a Christian that I don’t know how to handle a gun.”⁹⁹

Naab's identity is inextricably tied into his Mormon faith, but he is also more than a Mormon. He, like other great characters of Western literature, is a rancher, a father, a friend, a leader, and almost as an aside, a polygamist. As Hare notes just once near the end of the novel, "I feel differently from Mormons about...women. If it wasn't for that!"¹⁰⁰ The "if it wasn't for that" is key, because at the time of the novel's release, that impediment had been removed, and Grey was creating a space for Mormons not only in the present, but also in the past. Hare would have actually joined the church if not for "that," but even with plural marriage, he found the Mormons worthy of friendship. Grey is reminding his readers that in an era when the frontier had closed, there were actual men who had lived its ethos, and among those men were Mormons. Naab was a "desert man...stripped of all the false fears of civilization"—and a Mormon.¹⁰¹ In most prior works of popular culture, Mormons were unrepentant villains with no redeeming qualities. Grey presented a more complex view of the Saints, a rescripted view that acknowledged their good qualities alongside their less than desirable ones, yet emphasized their strong traits to counter the decades of anti-Mormon literature. As Grey says through Hare, "They said I fell among thieves. I've fallen among saints as well."¹⁰²

Riders of the Purple Sage is by far the most enduring and famous of the trio of novels, and it is also the most conflicted.¹⁰³ While many observers have uncritically viewed it as another anti-Mormon novel, it has layers of complexity that defy easy categorization. The anti-Mormon sentiment is clearly part of the novel; Grey's editors at Harper's initially refused to publish it because of what they deemed its intolerant spirit—an interesting point about Mormon and non-Mormon relations in itself.¹⁰⁴ Grey himself noted that anti-Mormonism would pay better based on the country's sentiment fostered by

the anti-LDS magazine campaign.¹⁰⁵ Yet despite the author's intention and his editors' reaction to the book, it still stands far apart from anti-Mormon novels of the nineteenth century and rescripts the Saints in several important ways.

The novel deals with two parallel stories: in one, Jane Withersteen, a Mormon and owner of a large ranch, falls for a rugged "Gentile" cowboy and Mormon killer named Lassiter. In the other story, Jane's non-LDS ranch hand Venters is forced to hide in the canyons of Utah to escape an evil Mormon elder, and in these canyons he, in a case of mistaken identity, shoots a young girl named Bess, nurses her back to health, and falls in love with her. Conventional anti-Mormonism is represented in the character of the local Mormon bishop, but aside from him, the portrayals are dense and multi-faceted. The fact that the novel is set in 1871 is particularly germane, as evinced in an exchange between Jane and Lassiter. Jane says, "Lassiter, the men of my creed are unnaturally cruel. To my everlasting sorrow I confess it. They have been driven, hated, scourged till their hearts have hardened. But we women hope and pray for the time when our men will soften." Lassiter rejoins, "Beggin your pardon ma'am—that time will never come." But Jane, the moral center of the novel exclaims, "Oh, it will!"¹⁰⁶ In a few brief sentences Grey has historicized and contextualized why Mormons of the past seemed cruel at times, and forecast a future, which was his and his readers' present, in which they would be more fully integrated into the broader culture. In other words, Grey literally rewrites history with his knowledge of the present, and in the process creates a space for Mormonism in the American story.

The novel also inverts the familiar script of the "Gentile" riding in from the East to save the day. Lassiter actually rides in from the West, reflecting a Mormonism less

remote, and this fast-drawing gun-slinger never draws his weapons until the end of the novel, all at Jane's behest to not kill her fellow Mormons. In fact, the close-to-caricature Lassiter even acknowledges, "I've known many good Mormons."¹⁰⁷ It is true that in the next breath he says that some are also "blacker than hell," but the fact that there are *many* "good" Mormons and *some* "bad" ones in such a popular novel is an important turning point in popular non-LDS literature that reflected and built upon the growing sentiment that some men would use Mormonism for their own ends and that should not reflect upon the religion as a whole. One of the "bad" Mormons, Jerry Card, is still portrayed as the finest rider in the West. The chief villain, Elder Tull, is a fiercely competent and rugged character. Some of the other "bad" Mormons are depicted as brave and manly—as one character notes about some men who ran away from a gunfight, "It was plain they wasn't Mormons." The men who stayed to fight were up against Lassiter, the most famed Mormon killer in the West, but they "didn't weaken nor lose their nerve."¹⁰⁸ Mormons in past literature were often portrayed as weak and unmanly. These Mormons, while pitted against the heroes of the novel, were bold and fearless gunslingers in their own right. And not all of the Mormons betrayed Jane. The bishop was trying to force her into marriage to gain control of her vast holdings, but two of Jane's ranch hands defied the commands of their leader who told them to abandon Jane, and they ultimately sacrificed their lives for her.

At the end of the novel, Jane and Lassiter flee the Mormons who are bent on destroying them and seal off a canyon, thus blocking their pursuers and trapping themselves, by pushing a large rock into the pass. The rock, as has been noted, symbolically crushes out a particular brand of Mormonism. But by sealing Jane and

Lassiter into the canyon, Grey also acknowledges that the process is not immediate. As Venters says, “some day the border’ll be better, cleaner.”¹⁰⁹ Until then, Jane and Lassiter will wait in their canyon. The meaning is layered, but as one character says to Jane, “I don’t know much about religion as religion, but your God and my God are the same.”¹¹⁰ The wait would be over in the sequel to *Riders*, and Lassiter and Jane come out from their canyon into a new world of Mormon-non-Mormon relations crafted in part by producers of popular culture such as Grey.

Grey’s *The Rainbow Trail* served as a sequel to *Riders* and introduced a completely new story line as well. A former preacher named Shefford is the hero of the novel, and he ventures into the wildlands of Southern Utah to find himself and along the way he discovers a village of Mormon women who are presumably secret plural wives. There are unfriendly Mormons in this tale, but they are unfriendly due to “persecut[ion] by the government.”¹¹¹ Reflecting the newspaper stories about the Mormon Tabernacle Choir that were at the time of the publication of the novel over twenty years old, Shefford meets a Mormon, “the first man of that creed he had ever met, and he could scarcely hide his eagerness.” Shefford only knew about a “long-past generation of Mormons, fanatical, ruthless, and unchangeable.”¹¹² In a passage that completely bookends early anti-Mormon literature with the new script, Shefford asks a trader his stance on Mormons. The trader replies that he is neither for nor against them. He says, “I get along with them. I know them. I believe they are a misunderstood people.” Shefford replies, “That’s for them.” The trader says, “No. I’m only fair-minded.”¹¹³ The idea that the only fair and neutral conclusion one could draw about Mormons was that they were misunderstood and

capable of fellowship was virtually unprecedented in popular literature written by non-Mormons.

The characters also represent a new understanding of Mormonism. The cowboy Joe Lake is described as “a Mormon of the younger generation,” completely trustworthy, and graceful on a horse and with a gun.¹¹⁴ Grey posited an age-based hierarchy of Mormonism, one that was headed inevitably towards openness. The men of Lake’s generation were “stalwart [and] clean-cut,” whereas their fathers were “stern, quiet, [and] somber.” Most out of place in the modern world were the “strange, aloof, serene...gray-bearded old patriarchs.”¹¹⁵ Each generation had become more Americanized and less of an Other.

In a passage that reads like it came from pro-LDS literature of the polygamy era and also goes to the heart of representation and misrepresentation, the narrator notes of Shefford,

His judgment of Mormons had been established by what he had heard and read, rather than what he knew. He wanted now to have an open mind....One wife for one man—that was the law. Mormons broke it openly. Gentiles broke it secretly. Mormons acknowledged all their wives and protected their children; Gentiles acknowledged one wife only. Unquestionably the Mormons were wrong, but were not the Gentiles still more wrong?¹¹⁶

Grey was putting forth a new way of not only understanding Mormons of the present, but also of the past, completely offsetting not only the cultural labor being performed by anti-LDS Christians in the present, but also an entire body of anti-Mormon literature. Grey continually develops the theme of a younger generation of Mormons, bemoaning the fact that nothing “would ever change these old Mormons but death,” but triumphant that a new style of Mormonism was indeed replacing them.¹¹⁷

Grey exulted in the homosocial relationships to be found in the West, transferring the excitement of a potential polygamous relationship to that of a monogamous relationship with a woman and the ability to make a true friend of the famously industrious Mormons: “Shefford had a passionate gratefulness toward [Lake]. That stultifying and blinding prejudice which had always seemed to remove a Mormon outside the pale of certain virtue suffered final eclipse, and Joe Lake stood out a man, strange and crude, but with a heart and a soul.”¹¹⁸ In the climactic moments of the novel, Lake and a young Mormon woman named Ruth help Shefford and his true love escape from the polygamous camp, and in so doing, “Shefford read the death-blow to the old Mormon polygamous creed...in the joy at this revelation [that] Ruth and Joe Lake belonged to a younger generation of Mormons.” Grey spoke of a “different force” in those younger Latter-day Saints, and “saw the old order changing.”¹¹⁹

In finally rejoining the plot of *Riders of the Purple Sage*, Shefford rescues Lassiter and Jane from their canyon prison at long last. He is aided by Joe Lake, and in a deeply symbolic moment, “the big, strong hand of the young Mormon went out to meet the old gunman’s.”¹²⁰ As noted, in *Riders*, Lassiter had described some of the Mormons he had met as “blacker than hell.”¹²¹ But Joe was described as “white clean through”—effectively bookending the series and history itself.¹²² Just as the old polygamous ways were changing into a dedication to monogamy, so were the old anti-Mormon prejudices giving way to a more positive take on the religion. Lassiter, a stand-in for all who hated polygamous Mormonism, was able to put out his hand instead of his gun when faced with the new Mormonism. Just as the cowboy put down his gun, it was now time for the

polemicists to put down their pens. Grey even seems to serve as a stand-in for Shefford as the novel draws to a close, opining,

As Ruth and Joe had arisen to this height, so perhaps would other young Mormons have arisen....Shefford felt as if he were marching with the whole younger generation of Mormons, as if he somehow had been a humble instrument in the working out of their destiny, in the awakening that was to eliminate from their religion the only thing which kept it from being as good for man, and perhaps as true, as any other religion.¹²³

Perhaps Grey saw himself as that humble instrument for the present. In five years, Grey had charted the course of anti-Mormonism to a more nuanced view based on the hybridization of the Mormons' views of themselves mixed with the narrower more negative view of evangelical Christianity and filtered through a rescripting of the sacred narrative of the old West. Mormons were now a part of that landscape; thus, they became a largely accepted part of the contemporary moment in America.

* * * * *

This chapter has shown that the time span from 1890 to the late 1920s evinces a narrative and counter-narrative being asserted by producers of popular culture. In one narrative, the Mormons are industrious, frugal, chaste, patriotic citizens who are completely ready to join in the culture of the United States. In another, the Mormons are evil, traitorous, licentious heretics. It would take popular culture to find the middle ground—a fact not always appreciated at the time. In 1907, Joseph F. Smith gave an address he sent to the world. In it, he advocated for Mormonism's right to not only peacefully join the world's family of religions, but also to be allowed to represent themselves:

We refuse to be bound by the interpretations which others place upon our beliefs; or by what they allege must be the practical consequences of our doctrines. Men

have no right to impute to us what they think may be the logical deduction from our beliefs, but which we ourselves do not accept. We are to be judged by our own interpretations, and by our actions, not by the logic of others....¹²⁴

Yet B. H. Roberts, in his reasoned arguments, seemed to realize what Smith did not, or would not always concede: the Mormons could not refuse to be bound by the interpretations of others. If they wanted to be part of American culture, they had to acknowledge and respond to the fact that they were inside the fluid process of creating cultural narratives. They could attempt to dominate the narrative, but they could not stop it. As Roberts said, “What can ‘Mormons’ do in the presence of [anti-Mormon reviews]? I can tell you what one ‘Mormon’ will do. He will teach these reviewing gentlemen that the reviews will not be all on one side. That he himself will turn reviewer....

‘Mormonism’ here can hold its own.”¹²⁵ It would take action and reaction to integrate into American culture. For example, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir’s tours were a great success and a tangible marker not only of Mormon identity but of American identity, and set the prelude for America’s new relationship with a Mormon Church that no longer counted polygamy among its doctrines. Indeed, this era of Mormon and non-Mormon relations is bookended by the tour of the choir in 1893 and their popular premier on a national weekly radio show beginning in 1929.¹²⁶

The Mormons’ concerted effort along with their enemies and their allies meant that imprisoned polygamist Hans Christensen was at least partially right when he wrote, “While thus my mind is rambling/And looking at the past/A voice is softly whispering/‘All will be well at last.’” Producers of popular culture had greatly impacted the ways in which non-Mormons thought about the LDS Church, paving the way for greater LDS inclusion in American cultural life. But in the process, they wove several

strands of the evangelical argument into their narrative to form a complicated mosaic that would have repercussions for decades to come.

The next chapter examines how as the Mormons prepared to celebrate their centennial, much of the rest of the nation looked on not with wariness, but with admiration. And as Americans hunkered down against the devastating repercussions of the Great Depression, the Mormons turned to their famous industry and frugality and provided a model for charity and perseverance. It had taken one-hundred years, but the Mormons were finally accepted. As they become more American, they lost some of their distinctive identity. But at least at first, that was a small price to pay after all of the trials they had endured. They solidified their place as part of American culture, and a once-conflicted popular culture landscape began to look more like an area where Mormonism would thrive.

Chapter 4

(Re)Presenting the Saints, 1930-1960s

These people of whom I write are my people and I love them, but I believe that what they did becomes even greater when we face the fact that they were human beings by birth and only saints by adoption

–Maurine Whipple

The 1930s through 1950s was an auspicious time for the Mormon Church in America. Newspapers and magazines made much of the apparent assimilation of the Saints. They cited great Mormons engaged in American civic, business, and public life, such as Secretary of Agriculture under Dwight Eisenhower, Ezra Taft Benson; president of American Motors George Romney; and middleweight boxing star and future champion Gene Fullmer.¹ During the 1943 LDS General Conference, it was noted that between 75,000 and 89,000 Mormon men were serving in the armed forces, and twenty-five LDS army chaplains took their place alongside other denominations.² The Mormon Tabernacle Choir continued their beloved radio performances and tours, including an appearance at the 1934 Chicago World's Fair that brought to mind their 1893 triumph there. They even managed to score a pop hit with their rendition of "Battle Hymn of the Republic."³ But as the Depression of the 1930s weighed on the American psyche and a strong emphasis on conservation persisted throughout World War II, no Mormon history was more venerated than the nineteenth-century pioneers. In an era where "[p]opular culture in various forms...reverberated with the rhetoric of democracy, the importance of the little folk, and the greatness of the American way of life," representations of Mormonism became overwhelmingly positive.⁴ In this chapter, I examine how popular culture of this period, particularly literature, reflected not only an acceptance of the Mormons, but also held them up as a paragon for how to live an exemplary life. Authors and filmmakers who had

once used Mormon characters as either stock villains or as secondary aides to non-Mormon characters helped canonize the pioneers by raising them to the level of national myth. Tensions during this time period were muted, but arose once more in the cultural fragmentation of the late 1950s.

The Mormon Church thus thrived during the mid-twentieth century, but was ushered into modernity as surely as the rest of the country, losing some of its connection to the pioneer past. Yet the past is always available to comment on and bring the present into sharp relief. From the 1930s through the 1950s, the pioneer past of the Mormons represented a usable past—one that could illustrate how to survive hard times. Reflecting the anxieties of the Great Depression and the hopes of the Roosevelt administration's New Deal programs, popular culture of the time emphasized "unity, loyalty, and teamwork."⁵ Representations of Mormons thus continued their shift to a more positive outlook as the country called on their usable past to shore up the hopes of the nation, while at the same time showcasing their fears. Those who chose to represent Mormons turned to the pioneer times in ways that illustrate their anxieties about everything from women's rights to surviving hardship. The novels in particular of this time period stand in stark contrast to the sensational novels of the nineteenth century. After one hundred years, the Mormons were finally accepted into the American family of religious denominations, and a new generation of artists explored the rich LDS past, and in so doing, give us insight into their present.

It is interesting to note just how Americanized contemporary Mormons had become by the mid-twentieth-century in that novelists rarely turned to them for contemporary subject matter. They had simply become too like other Americans to be

consistent fodder for fiction. While most novelists wrote about the Mormon past, Sinclair Lewis did take the next logical step of writing about contemporary Mormons, thus beginning to create a vocabulary about them. The fact that his mentions of Mormonism are as random as other authors' mentions of various religious denominations illustrates just how much the Latter-day Saint Church had become part of everyday American life.⁶ In 1929's *Dodsworth* and 1933's *Ann Vickers*, Lewis mentions the prevalence and geniality of Mormon missionaries as an aside.⁷ In *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), the Book of Mormon is on a shelf alongside the Bible, the Koran, the complete works of Thomas Jefferson, and poetry.⁸ One character in *Cass Timberlane* (1945) says, "I'm going upstairs to read the Book of Mormon. Isn't it curious now that I've never read the Book of Mormon?"⁹

While Lewis was the most prominent author referencing contemporary Mormons, newspaper and magazine features were more frequent and in-depth in their praise. A representative example is an article the *Los Angeles Times* ran in 1947 called "What It's Like to be a Mormon." The article lauds the Mormons as exemplary citizens who effectively blend a capitalist impulse with both individual and community pursuits. They are cited for giving so many of their sons to the war effort, and in a statement underscoring one of the concerns of that period, the author writes, "Mormons seem less gloomy than most about the atom bomb."¹⁰ The article informs the reader that only three percent of Saints ever practiced polygamy (a questionable statistic), even making light of contemporary fundamentalist polygamy in Short Creek, Arizona, by quoting former governor George W. P. Hunt as saying, "If I had to live in [Short Creek], I'd want more than one wife myself."¹¹ But while the *Times* article's main focus was on contemporary

Mormons, it still makes explicit just how valuable the Mormon past was as a usable artifact, noting that, “Today nearly a million Mormons still live for all the world as if 1947 demanded the same brand of industry and co-operation their great-grandfathers found necessary for survival in 1847.”¹² Even while celebrating the present, the writer of the article cannot help bringing in the past. After one hundred years, Mormons had finally joined mainstream America. As a sense of “crisis and personal isolation” during the initial years of the Depression “gave way to a dream of community [and] a vision of interdependence,” the LDS past became usable not just for Mormons, but for the rest of the country as well.¹³

Mythologizing the Pioneers

In 1930, in the midst of a depression, the Mormon Church turned one-hundred years old, launching a golden age for the church in terms of its relationship with the country of its birth. One representative local newspaper journalist took the opportunity to wax philosophical, writing, “If [the great] migration is an epic, no less a one is the story of the colonization of the intermountain region by these people in a wilderness....”¹⁴ The church had grown from six members in 1830 to 700,000 by the centennial. Pioneers were being celebrated in newspapers, novels, magazines, and songs. The accolades continued for years and reached another crescendo in 1947 when Utah celebrated its centennial by lionizing the pioneers in diverse media including the musical *Promised Valley*. Those pioneers still alive entered extreme old age, and people clamored to hear their stories. They gave lectures to LDS organizations like the Daughters of the Pioneers, cementing their mythic status. Evan Stephens, former conductor of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, told an audience how he walked across the plains in 1866, and felt sorry for those who

now miss “the great joy and great experience of crossing that glorious and wild country.” Stephens evoked a nostalgia for the pioneers that was present across popular culture, and he told his listeners that “you cannot do a more honorable thing than cherish [the pioneers’] memory and express your appreciation in work.”¹⁵ It was no accident that Stephens and the newspapers emphasized work.

In 1936, the LDS leadership started a Church Welfare Plan that became a model for dealing with the hardships of the Great Depression and eventually all general privation. The leaders of the church were dismayed by the fact that many members had found it necessary to resort to public and private relief, thus experiencing, in their estimation, “a resultant loss to their morale and self-respect.”¹⁶ Church President J. Reuben Clark did not mince words, telling all Mormons, “Let us avoid debt as we would a plague” and encouraging the Saints to store a year’s worth of supplies.¹⁷ In speeches about dealing with the Depression, church leaders turned to the memory of their ancestors, arguing that work was the cure to all hardship, extolling the “pioneer members of the Church [who] built thriving settlements on the shores of Great Salt Lake, and made the deserts blossom as the rose.”¹⁸ Clark and other leaders sought to raise work to the level of literally gospel truth. The message was noticed far beyond the confines of Temple Square as in literature and film about Mormons another layer was added to the palimpsest and the Saints emerged in popular culture as pioneer heroes.

The Literature of the Pioneers

The first major Depression-era novel to deal with the Latter-day Saints was Vardis Fisher’s epic 1939 historical novel, *Children of God*.¹⁹ Fisher’s work traced in great detail the founding of the church to the end of polygamy. The novel received significant

acclaim and was cited for its historical accuracy and detailed research. It represents a profound shift from those novels such as Zane Grey's that featured fictionalized Latter-day Saint characters. Fisher marked a return to the novels of the nineteenth century where Joseph Smith and Brigham Young were often characters. But, in a pivotal shift, the leaders of the Saints are portrayed in a generally positive light, especially Brigham Young. And this time, in the largest change of all, almost *every* character is Mormon. *Children of God* serves as a textbook of early Mormon history—one that has important biases, but that also celebrates the Mormon story, in the words of the novel's subtitle, as an American epic.

Significantly, Fisher elevates the more pioneer-like Brigham Young over Joseph Smith. The novel opens with Smith's "First Vision." Fisher portrays Smith as a charismatic and ambitious young man who sincerely believes in his calling. The author makes two hedges, however: first, Smith lies about actually seeing the golden plates when he only saw them in a vision. Second, Smith is portrayed as extremely libidinous, setting up the polygamy revelation. Fisher's portrayal of Smith is interesting in that it is generally respectful and takes Smith at his word, but consistently characterizes him as "soft" and "a dreamer." Smith is portrayed as abhorring violence and stays the hand of his violence-inclined friend and bodyguard Porter Rockwell in several instances. Smith is also contrasted with Brigham Young and found wanting as a leader. When Young makes his appearance in the novel, Fisher writes, "Joseph was afraid of him. Joseph was a philosopher with the soul of a monk."²⁰ Brigham Young muses that while Smith is a great prophet, "he was no man to take a ragged and embittered people and build them into a kingdom."²¹ The implication is clear and borne out in novel after novel of this era: in

times of hardship, the world needs men of action over men of thought. Brigham Young proved to be the emblematic model of what a Depression-era man should be.

Fisher presents a version of Mormon history that helps bring Mormonism more into the mainstream, thus re-presenting the Saints to the public and beginning to if not erase, at least complicate, the many anti-LDS novels that had come before. For instance, Fisher exonerates Smith for the Danites, but as the Nauvoo period begins he is portrayed as a lustful and out-of-control prophet—a portrait that anticipated Fawn Brodie’s 1945 historical biography of Smith, *No Man Knows My History*. Fisher tempers the assessment that Smith is simply sex-crazed, and certainly more than prior authors, by penning an exchange between John C. Bennett, who is using the revelation for pure seduction, and Smith, who was genuinely furious when Bennett suggested he had the same impure motives. Thus, while Smith is indeed portrayed as lustful, his desires are in a way fortunate given God’s new revelation. Emma Smith comes off particularly bad even though she had cause to be angry. Fisher portrays her without any sympathetic qualities, which casts Smith in a somewhat more positive “boys will be boys” light. Yet the narrative always comes back around to Smith’s inferiority to Young. At one point, Smith is considering his feelings for Young. Fisher writes, “He envied the man...his shrewd appraisal of human beings, his statesmanship, his hard commonsense...Brigham had been a Moses to a fleeing people.....Yes, Joseph envied and admired the man but he had always been a little afraid of him.”²² This characterization was a paradigm for 1930s masculinity—a precursor to the Tom Joads of the literary world in temperament, and a model for the John Wayne-character types of film in manly competence.

In *Children of God*, when Smith is assassinated, he dies quietly and bravely, but he is soon forgotten as Young takes on the mantle of leadership. Indeed, one of the most remarkable aspects of Fisher's time period is how firmly Brigham Young takes center stage of the Mormon, and in many ways American, story. A quote from Mormon historian Leonard J. Arrington that is featured prominently on Brigham Young's web page at lds.org gives insight into this fascination:

Brigham Young was a kingdom builder with dreams as grandiose as Sam Houston or John C. Fremont. [But] unlike them, he was successful. Brigham Young was the supreme American paradox...the business genius of a Rockefeller with the spiritual sensitivities of an Emerson...He was not merely an entrepreneur with a shared vision of America as the Promised Land; he was a prophet....²³

Producers of popular culture had exhausted the ways in which to mock him for polygamy, and with plural marriage now well in the past they faced new crises that Young's life could actually provide a model for. They turned to the historical figure of Young and found much to admire, especially given the context of the times, and much to include in the over-arching narrative of the bygone West.

Fisher portrays Young as a resourceful dynamo, and the author quickly deals with polygamy by essentially excusing Young and blaming Smith. Young "did not have Joseph's sensuous delight in fair women. Polygamy for him was not now and was never to be a matter of carnal hunger: it was a commandment from God...."²⁴ Young has the Saints working from sunup to sundown and then singing and dancing throughout the night. His sense of frontier justice is acknowledged but, again, excused, much in the same way authors celebrated at-times extralegal figures like John Henry "Doc" Holliday. Young tells Bill Hickman to feel free to kill horse thieves and counterfeiters, but "[i]f you should kill a righteous man, you will burn in hell forever."²⁵ Fisher clears Young of any

wrongdoing in the Mountain Meadows Massacre, having Young sincerely declare the murders “the most horrible thing I ever heard of.”²⁶ While Young does cover up the affair, it is portrayed as a reasonable decision given the army about to invade and the frailty of the southern Utah settlements where the massacre occurred.

At the same time as Fisher is exonerating Young for violence against innocent travelers, he is praising him for extralegal frontier violence against criminals. Young is presented as a frontier man who understands justice. When asked by a judge about the Danites, Young replies, “All pioneer communities...have vigilantes when necessary to preserve law and order.”²⁷ Yet he holds his own people to the same standards. Young rails against “stupid fanatics among his own people [who] behaved like the brutal hoodlums which easterners believed all Mormons to be.”²⁸ When some Saints are physically attacked, Young orders them not to respond with violence. Thus, Young the historical figure is present in the novel, but he rises to a kind of synecdoche not only for the Saints, but also for the entire country as a representation of American exceptionalism. Fisher portrays Brigham Young as everything he had never been in the annals of fiction, and participates in raising him up as one of the great men of American history. Fisher makes this link explicit, writing, “[The great trek] was a pilgrimage toward freedom, toward a fuller and richer destiny for the *entire* human race. In all its suffering and patience and courage, it was a mighty symbol of the struggle for perfection and peace that had been the heritage of humanity for centuries”²⁹ [emphasis added]. Fisher thus ties the struggle of the Mormons to the struggles of the American people, a message that would have resonated with Americans as surely as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), a novel that won the Pulitzer Prize the year after Fisher’s novel was published.³⁰ Fisher further linked

the memories of the past to the struggles of the present by having Young opine that one day Salt Lake City would be visited by millions who “would marvel at the industry and genius” of the Mormon people.³¹ Salt Lake City was a material reminder of the pioneer past, and as such, it stood as a monument to overcoming adversity.

Writing in the 1930s, it is significant that Fisher spends a great deal of time on the economic success of Utah under Brigham Young. Young is presented as a financial savior of his people as he uses church funds for work projects, sometimes completely unnecessary ones, to keep parishioners off of the dole, reminiscent of some of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s initiatives, and mirroring the action taking place in the contemporary LDS Church with the formation of the Church Welfare Plan. Young creates a society with “[n]o idleness, no poverty, no greedy struggle for privilege and wealth,” a message that likely would have resonated with contemporary readers.³² In a sentiment that could have come from the Roosevelt administration or the Mormon leadership, Fisher wrote that Young believed “[a]bove all, every person should have the right to work and to find work to do.”³³ Fisher’s Young represents the very paradox of America itself; he was “[a]n individual himself [who] believed in personal initiative and competitive practice; but he also believed in collective and community enterprises.”³⁴ As such, he made provisions for the old and the sick, anticipating the social security reforms of the 1960s. Young is portrayed as both a frontier man and an executive of unparalleled skill, and Fisher builds him up in a near apotheosis.

The last section of the book deals with what Fisher sees as the disintegration of the Mormon Church, and can be read as a cautionary note to any society, but particularly to the realities of the period in which he was writing. Fisher blasts the leaders of the

church for compromising their principles on plural marriage in what he deems a hypocritical business move. He agonizes that “[p]erhaps only a persecuted and desperate people could rise to the nobility of self-sacrifice to achieve great things. If that were true, what would unite this and the next and the next generations in an invulnerable clan?”³⁵ Fisher suggests that a commitment to core principles centered on a usable past is the answer. He writes of the material memory embedded in the Kirtland temple and the Joseph Smith birthplace. Only by remembering where America came from can the country get to where it wants to be, Fisher suggests. While LDS Church president Heber J. Grant found the book “as mean as the devil,” it was an important step in changing the ways Americans viewed the Mormons.³⁶ In *Children of God*, Fisher does his part to solidify in the national consciousness a particular way of seeing the Saints.

Brigham Young’s leadership was built up by Fisher and others to the point where Young became to be seen as an example of a great *American* leader. In 1950, a statue of Young was placed in the Statuary Hall in Washington, D. C., and where once Vice-President Schulyer Colfax had railed against Young, Vice-President Alben W. Barkley presided over the dedication of the statue. Senator Elbert D. Thomas of Utah argued that the pioneer period had “left its mark on its people and in the development of American culture and traditions.”³⁷ In a move that underscored just how important it was to link the present to a usable past, Young’s grandson was the designer of the statue, and his last living daughter was at its dedication. Fisher and other authors played a large role in bringing that tradition in the form of a usable past to a wide American audience. Fisher portrayed Young fighting for a society that would be “charitable and righteous and free”—a veritable retelling of the best sides of the founders of the country.³⁸ As for the power

of cultural labor, it should be noted that the proposal for placing Brigham Young in the national Statuary was first raised in 1897.³⁹

Perhaps no other book of the time better showcases American fears, values, and hopes than Maurine Whipple's 1941 novel, *The Giant Joshua*, a fictional case study of a real nineteenth-century pioneer Utah settlement known as the Dixie mission. Her novel followed on the heels of *Children of God*, but stands apart as a more focused examination of a single community. While Whipple, like Fisher, used Brigham Young as a character, he was mainly in the background as common people took center stage and tried to conquer the wilderness. Whipple acknowledged that it was only natural to "deify" the pioneers not only because of what they had accomplished, but in an important point, also because their way of life had ended. But, she argued, their spirit lived on, and contained useful lessons for the present.⁴⁰

The narrative of *The Giant Joshua* centers around a young woman named Clory who becomes a third wife to a much-older church elder. We see the pioneer era through her eyes, and significantly, she is of the second generation of pioneers. The great trek complete and in the past, this second generation is duty-bound to not let that sacrifice go to waste—as presumably those in the 1940s should carry on as well. While the novel is focused on the Salt Lake Basin period, Whipple still briefly recounts the entire early history of Mormonism through her characters, and they take that past and put it to action against their own hardships. Clory's settlement battles drought, flooding, disease, Indians, anti-polygamy deputies, and in some cases, each other. As Whipple writes, "No one colonizes without a heartbreak."⁴¹ It is how these Saints deal with heartbreak that serves as lessons to her readers.

While extolling hard work, the novel also attempts to reshape church history to offset the anti-Mormon novels of the past. Whipple acknowledges the Mountain Meadows Massacre, but similar to Fisher, she writes that Brigham Young “would have given his life to prevent that butchery.” Young says, “That dreadful business will be a blot on Deseret forever. That was the only wagon train ever molested in this Territory, and yet history books will emphasize it so that the world will ignore the countless other times we’ve given freely of our substance.”⁴² Brigham Young agonizes over the crime, thus adding another layer of cultural labor to that already performed by Fisher. Whipple also explores polygamy and finds much to critique, but as a contemporary *New York Times* review noted, she “shows one why—and how earnestly—men believed in the doctrine.”⁴³ Whipple deals with polygamy head-on, calling it “a prison with bars stronger than iron.” Yet she also writes with sincerity that “Nobody has *all* the things he wants in life.”⁴⁴ The early Mormon Church put women through a difficult period, Whipple seems to argue, but in this “unique land calling forth unique ways of living,” plural marriage was a hardship in the same way flood or drought was.⁴⁵ It was adversity from God to be conquered by community, and unlike flood or drought, there were some side benefits such as a lack of destitute widows, no prostitution, and the children that resulted from those marriages. Gone are the sensationalistic accounts of “harems,” and in their place the reader finds honest and hard-working men and women trying to practice their religion as best they can. Whipple emphasizes points like, “If the gentiles think polygamy is any fun, I’d like to see one of their women try it!”⁴⁶ By portraying her characters neither as degenerate sinners or perfect saints, Whipple places them somewhere in the middle as

ordinary humans who as a community rose to extraordinary heights, thus making them all the more relatable.

The title of the novel contains a rather subtle message to the American public. Joshua trees are usually quite small and gnarled, but in the desert they reach great heights. The theme of the novel is that hardship breeds greatness, and the titular trees become a symbol of promise much the same way a rainbow is used in the story of Noah. Whipple writes, “[T]here are always Joshua trees, if poor stumbling humans will but lift up their eyes.”⁴⁷ In a passage that clearly seeks to mirror the narrative of American exceptionalism, Whipple writes of the Dixie mission, “Here was the land, untouched, primeval—surely the world had never seen anything like it before, human atoms from every country...deliberately going forth into the wilderness ‘to keep it fast and bring forth good fruit.’”⁴⁸ Nothing mattered more than the “Good of the Whole” and conquering the land that was “so old it was new and virgin.”⁴⁹ When asked to sum up Mormonism in one word, a character says “neighborliness.” The character continues, “Our country was founded on that ideal, and we had it until we began to split apart into vested interests.” To answer particularly American fears about loss of individuality, it is pointed out that “some people think the Group means chains, whereas it’s the only way of insuring liberty,” in that pure individuality is anarchy. As one “Gentile” says after hearing the soliloquy on Mormon togetherness, “You’ve got a peculiarly American religion, growing out of a peculiarly American need.... [I]f you people are ever let alone long enough to work out your destiny, who knows that you might not do it?”⁵⁰

With the Mormons of the 1940s well into their successful Welfare Program, the character’s statements take on the veneer of prophecy. Setting the narrative in the past

gives it power, because that past had already been overcome. As one contemporary reviewer noted, “Watching [the Mormons] struggle against the elements, improvising homes and food and a whole social system, one is compelled not only to respect but to marvel at them.”⁵¹ When Whipple writes about “the fear that human strength never would conquer those hills [of Utah] that stretched wave upon wave” the reader knows that in fact those hills had been conquered, and so might the ones of the contemporary period.⁵²

The Giant Joshua clearly resonated with the public, landing on the ten best year-to-date fiction books list.⁵³ Whipple used the story of the Mormons to put forth an optimistic theme: “A spirit that is light, free, volatile, no sooner is it crushed in one place than it springs forth with renewed shouts in another.”⁵⁴ Though times might be hard, Whipple’s characters admonish her readers to, “Remember *this is still America*. She may make mistakes...but *she’s still America*.”⁵⁵ Whipple’s message was resonant, and she was explicitly reaching out to members of her own generation. In an elegant flash-forward of seventy years to the contemporary moment, a descendent of Clory touches some of her material goods that have been passed down over the years. The narrator speaks for the dead to the living: “We hand it across the years....Your heritage. What have you made of it? Where is the brave new world?”⁵⁶ The American public was becoming reeducated about the Mormons, and authors like Whipple underscored that “[e]ach generation [has] its desert to cross,” but together they can overcome anything. Clory helped “plan and build a world,” and when she thought about all the hardships including plural marriage, she would not have changed anything.⁵⁷ Whipple thus elevates resilience and makes it safe and even vital to link the present with the past—a past that did include plural marriage.

Wrestling with the Past: The Problem of Polygamy

With a statue of Young in the capitol, the broader culture had to come to some sort of understanding of what motivated the Saints' polygamous past, and novelists such as Vardis Fisher and Maurine Whipple openly engaged with that topic. The results change the impressions of polygamy created by nineteenth-century novelists, and even becomes a part, albeit a troubled one, of the pioneer heritage. One of the novels that explored plural marriage as a way to better understand human nature was 1949's *The Peaceable Kingdom* by Ardyth Kennelly. Kennelly's novel centers on Linnea, a second wife in a plural marriage. Linnea is portrayed as resourceful, industrious, and indefatigable. But she could also be a woman of 1949, one taking on a greater role in society and moving beyond the confines of patriarchy while never being able to completely escape it. In a comparison that turns decades of linking polygamy with carnality on its head, Linnea conflates plural marriage with Catholic nunnery, in that both require women to sacrifice earthly pleasure. The same applies to the men—they are in it because they have a religious duty to fulfill. Yet plural marriage is still critiqued. In dismissing the sexual aspects, Kennelly is able to explore the more human consequences of polygamy. Difficulties abound in Linnea's marriage, and at times she rails against the institution of plural marriage. At one point she gets so angry at her husband, Olaf, for not coming to see her for fear of being arrested, that she leaves him. Similarly to Whipple's narrative, polygamy is presented as just another difficulty of life, and as such, continues breaking new narrative ground. As Linnea says to one character complaining about polygamy, "Ain't there nothing *serious* wrong with you?"⁵⁸

One of the most remarkable things about Kennelly's book is the way that she explores women's fears about leaving their husbands, thus universalizing an aspect of plural marriage and connecting it to concerns that sometimes face monogamous unions. Linnea has five children but is a second wife. She lives in constant fear of being left alone, yet eventually transcends that fear by confronting the most powerful male in her world—the president of the LDS Church, Wilford Woodruff. After learning that a neighbor first wife would only give permission for the potential second wife to marry if she gave up her firstborn daughter to the childless first wife—and now the second wife has given birth to a girl, Linnea begs them to reconsider the deal. The first wife refuses, so Linnea marches into President Woodruff's office and demands that he intervene. Kennelly writes, "Even her worst enemy would have to admit it. To go right up to the President's office single-handed and get the President to do exactly what she wanted—that was something to blow about, crow about, and tell and tell over again till the story was as old as the hills."⁵⁹ Kennelly creates a space for female empowerment and the normalization of a plural wife while still glorifying the LDS pioneer past and its notions of community.⁶⁰

Helen Hinckley's *The Mountains Are Mine* (1946) stands as an interesting juxtaposition to works such as *The Giant Joshua*. The pioneers continued to be lauded but polygamy was given a slightly different emphasis by Hinckley. As a critic for the *New York Times* who called Hinckley's book the best novel about Mormons to date wrote at the time, "It is difficult to regard the Mormons with restraint. Few have written sympathetically of them without becoming mawkishly sentimental. Fewer still have been able, even in fiction, to refrain from judgment."⁶¹ Hinckley, in this critic's eyes, was an

exception. The first run of the book contained an advertisement for Vardis Fisher on the back cover, and while Hinckley does not surpass him in scope, she does manage, through simplicity, to tell a story with resonance while avoiding, as the reviewer notes, “lurid historical props” such as the Mountain Meadows Massacre. By avoiding such narrative devices, she strives for objectivity. Thus Hinckley disposes of most anti-Mormon plot tropes while being very hard on plural marriage—an interesting take from a Mormon woman of the 1940s.

Hinckley states in her acknowledgments that her purpose is to celebrate “the gallantry that sometime attends poverty, the life situations in which it is plain that help can come only from within ourselves and from God.”⁶² The plot centers on a young girl named Milly and her family as they make the arduous trek west from Nauvoo. They suffer a great deal, adding another fictive memory of a real event to the public domain. While “[n]early every one...had...bowed over the grave of a parent, a mate, [or] a child,” they still sang, danced, and prayed faithfully all along the way.⁶³ On arriving in Salt Lake City, Milly is put to work for a family far from her own, and her mother soon enters into a plural marriage. Hinckley continues the theme of plural marriage as a commandment rather than an excuse for sexual license by having her characters say things such as, “It takes strong men and women to...live in plural marriage.”⁶⁴ Milly’s mother is constantly instructing her, and by proxy, the audience, on issues within Mormon theology. She tells Milly, “[P]lural marriage is the word of God....I bear you my testimony that it is a law given in righteousness.”⁶⁵ Hinckley covers the charitable philosophy of the Saints, and negates the charge that Mormons were mere dupes by turning those charges into a joke: “Us Mormons make [blind obedience] more agreeable by calling [it] ‘following

counsel.”⁶⁶ While Hinckley gives on balance a dismal overview of plural marriage, it is not one filled with sexual license, and underscores some of the ambivalence the country was feeling as it admired Mormon history while still remaining wary about representing polygamy.

Milly’s family does have some trials living in a plural marriage, but they remain happy as a unit. Milly soon receives a proposal of marriage but decides she wants to attend school in Salt Lake City first. Once there, she falls under the spell of the charming Captain Hyrum Lucas and enters into plural marriage herself as his second wife. Lucas turns out to be a destitute liar. He does manage to strike it rich but his earnings are questionably obtained and he is in constant danger of excommunication. Milly endures a great deal before finally leaving him. Interestingly, a very-well depicted Brigham Young grants the divorce—a testament to how great his stature had grown, that in a novel with a generally unfavorable view of polygamy, he is still represented as a great man with no commentary on his own domestic situation. Hinckley clearly approves of the divorce, writing, “The courageous tiny sprouts [in Milly’s garden] had but to lift their heads above the soil and they grew amazingly.”⁶⁷ The message was quite progressive for the 1940s—a time when divorce was still relatively rare. Hinckley’s message centers on equitable marital unhappiness as early on in the narrative she sets polygamy as difficult for both men and women. They were willing to suffer for their faith, but there was a point of neglect and unworthiness in the eyes of the church that would make divorce not only justifiable, but the preferred path. The novel ends with a strong implication that faith will always overcome hardship: “In the furnace God has proved thee/Hence to bring thee forth more bright/But shall never cease to love thee.”⁶⁸ In other words, while times might be

hard, God has not abandoned the country, and people will be stronger in the end through their trials.

The Next Generation: Mormon-Themed Juvenile Literature

Not all Mormon-themed novels dealt with polygamy, and in these books directed at young people, all negative stigma of the Mormon Church is eradicated. The pioneer theme was a natural fit for juvenile books, and Marian McIntyre McDonough is a representative example of the educable possibilities of the genre and an interesting counterpart to Vardis Fisher. McDonough's *Sun in the West* was published in 1937 during difficult economic times. The tale was a tribute to the "children pioneers" and written in the hopes of bringing Utah's "unique history in our western life" to young people.⁶⁹ Fifteen-year-old Diantha Halsey is the center of the novel. Her family is picked to help colonize fictional Las Animas, Nevada. They endure weeks of difficult travel, stampeding cattle, and an Indian abduction along the way. Wherever she goes, Diantha carries her dead mother's rosebushes and always successfully "makes the desert blossom as the rose," a symbol for the resilience of the Mormons and of the general human spirit. Interestingly, and perhaps unavoidably for a juvenile novel, as mentioned above there is no polygamy in *Sun in the West*. In fact, one older male character who in other novels would be the predator character is a sweet man who befriends Diantha for altruistic reasons alone. Brigham Young is depicted as a kind man and an excellent leader who is gentle with young people. The Mountain Meadows Massacre is acknowledged, but in the book the leaders knew nothing of it and their complicity in the cover-up is dismissed with the admonition that "if it gets around it'll be one more thing for which to hate us Mormons and blame us all for what some blackguards have done."⁷⁰ The theme of the

novel revolves around resilience in the face of privation, but there are also several overtures, as one character says, of the fact that “we’re all the same underneath no matter what we believe....”⁷¹ A family of “Gentiles” plays a central role in the novel and befriends Diantha, creating a space for historical reconciliation. As Mormonism was becoming more and more incorporated into the American family of denominations, such statements gave weight to the claim that Mormons were Christians just like any others, and the omission of polygamy creates a very fictionalized but real-to-the-reader past in which polygamy never was. The novel is a piece of Mormon apologia for juveniles of the time, both Mormon and non-Mormon, and it is an effective tool of historical re-presentation.

Another book aimed at juveniles was published in 1940 with the express aim of educating “American children...about the history of America—about those brave pioneers who built up our country and passed on their loyal, independent, spirit.”⁷² Rhoda Nelson’s *This is Freedom* was aimed at boys and stands in counterpart to McDonough’s girl-centered novel. In Nelson’s book, a young non-Mormon orphan named Thad joins the LDS exodus from Nauvoo as a means of obtaining passage west. Along the way he steals some food and a horse, has an adventure with Indians, and ultimately learns selfless Mormon values when the LDS victim of Thad’s horse theft actually offers him a horse and tells him, “If I had no other horse but this one I am giving you, I’d rather walk every mile between here and the Big Basin, than have you [steal].”⁷³ Through Thad, Nelson instructs juveniles about “the mob element whose ignorant minds were inflamed with hatred” and other lessons from Mormon history.⁷⁴ The reader learns about the Mormon battalion and the gulls and the crickets. Thad is a character in the mold of Tom Sawyer,

complete with a treasure map. The trek is not all fun and games, and Nelson continues the narrative trope of glorifying hardship, writing, “[T]he morning hymns of the emigrants had rung out with no less assurance, when hunger, sickness and death had crouched over the campfires, waiting.”⁷⁵ Thad is so inspired by the Saints, he finds that family and hard work is “real freedom.”⁷⁶ As in McDonough’s novel, there is no acknowledgment of plural marriage. The message is that responsibility and hard work are the real values a young man should have, and a life of faith can contain as much adventure as a life of treasure hunting. The fact that Nelson emphasizes that the book is American history and not just Mormon history is significant, as well.

The juvenile novels of this time period performed important didactic work and stand as a complement to the other Mormon-themed historical novels being concurrently published. The novels were advertised in the *New York Times*, for example, as representing the “famed, adventurous trek of the Mormons to Salt Lake Valley.”⁷⁷ Quotes such as this underscore two important points: these novels were being treated as *history*, and furthermore many of them were not just a phenomenon of Utah. They had a continental reach, and the fact that they were almost *all* historically-themed had significant implications for how people thought about the Mormons.

Literature as History

The authors of this time period were literally rewriting a history that had often been portrayed by non-Mormons as a decadent and violent era. Together, they covered the entire expanse of early Mormonism—that period that had been so castigated—and presented a new representation to the country. While most authors dealt with the Utah period, Virginia Sorenson’s *A Little Lower than the Angels* (1942) exclusively examines

the Nauvoo period and in the process educates the public about a different era in Mormon history than most authors were focused on. She covers the anti-LDS harassment and how it impacted ordinary people. Sorenson confronts the legacy of plural marriage by tracing it from its very beginnings and makes it clear that she too, and by extension other Mormons, is dismayed with the history of polygamy. One character thinks after hearing the revelation,

It was impossible, incredible, it couldn't be true. If you went to China or Turkey or Persia, there were exotic silken women and strange eyes and curious prattle and utterly new ways to go along with it. But here—the good steady farmers digging the ground in the good solid American manner, with their plain talk and their sober clothes and their stolid faith. It didn't come easy here; it jolted you and socked you and turned you inside out with a kind of loathing.⁷⁸

Joseph Smith is depicted as a powerful man with strong urges, and through his relationship with Eliza Snow, the background for polygamy is more clearly revealed than in those novels dealing exclusively with Utah. Smith explains to Snow that he had loved her since before they were born, and that he would love her as his wife, along with others, in the heaven that comes next—a subtle point of LDS theology still in effect. Sorenson presents polygamy as almost unbearably difficult but coming from a point of religious conviction, and of course, in 1941, it was over fifty years in the past.

Sorenson also narrates how the Mormons esteemed work in Nauvoo, creating another discursive link to the contemporary culture that elevated hard work. In that city, they were “all part of something bigger,” and as one character says, “workin’ with wood for the Church is as Godlike as workin’ with souls.”⁷⁹ Showing how cooperative work efforts keep everyone employed, Smith says, “I want to make another society, because a religion that won't take care of the people in this world isn't very likely to take care of

them in the next.”⁸⁰ Sorenson recreates Nauvoo as a historical identity marker for living Mormons, and reminds non-Mormons why it was important in the past and still had relevant lessons for contemporary times. As Sorenson once said, “Legends that remain are almost as important as historical documents.”⁸¹ Arguably, they are even more powerful for shaping a culture’s understanding of the past.

Authors also explored aspects of Mormonism other than the great trek west though they still kept the narrative firmly anchored to the past. Paul Bailey helped popularize the 1846 voyage of the *Brooklyn* that took Saints in the East to Salt Lake City via ship around Cape Horn. Samuel Brannan is *The Gay Saint* (1944) in this novel, and he becomes an ocean-borne Brigham Young for the exodus by ship. Bailey’s fascination with Brannan is evident, as he had written a biography of him in 1943. Like in other LDS-themed novels, Bailey’s characters emphasize “unity of hearts, and a willing constancy of hands.”⁸² These Saints weather difficult storms and several deaths as well as births, and they sing the whole way through. In one scene that must have deeply resonated with an America that had seen an attack on Pearl Harbor take place less than three years earlier, Brannan and company disembark at Hawaii, where he speaks of love for country and says, “Destiny whispers that the very soil we stand on eventually must be [America’s]. That no nation nor set of nations shall wrest it from her! Already queen of the Atlantic, we yet shall know her as sovereign of the Pacific. This great blue ocean is America’s sea, and in pristine glory she shall rule it forever!”⁸³ Brannan was talking about the war with Mexico, but with World War II raging as he wrote, Bailey reflected some of the contemporary concerns he and other Americans were experiencing.⁸⁴

Bailey, like several of his fellow authors of the time period, develops a theme that cautions against materialism. Brannan clashes with Brigham Young over where Zion should be located. Brannan pushes for California, but Young settles on Utah. As Brigham Young tells him, “We want peace—not luxury!”⁸⁵ Bailey writes of the Salt Lake settlement, “There could be no denial it was an audacious, heroic upheaval of the changeless face of nature. But to Samuel, it seemed so pointless, so absurd.”⁸⁶ But of course, it wasn’t. Young’s vision of hard work proved successful. Brannan stubbornly persisted in living in California and gained and lost a fortune, ultimately dying in poverty, and when compared with Young, forgotten by popular history. Bailey’s fascination with the man underscores the flexibility of the Latter-day Saint story: authors emphasized different aspects of Mormon history to develop larger American themes. Brigham Young was all about success through hard work, whereas the life of Samuel Brannan helps illuminate the classic American theme of the rise and fall of a great man.

Bailey was a popular LDS writer whose texts were sometimes used in Mormon Sunday School, and his 1940 work, *For this My Glory*, is a powerful look at the history of Mormonism in America. Through the character of David Warren, Bailey symbolically traced the country’s hatred of the religion, to its uneasy truce, to its full acceptance. Warren started out as a Missouri settler who wanted to drive the Mormons out of his state for their views on slavery and their collectivity. He further believed that Mormons had killed his father, a fire-and-brimstone style Protestant minister. Bailey walks through all the old tropes, such as Warren thinking Joseph Smith had a “satanic brain, dark with infamy.”⁸⁷ Yet when Warren sees his friends beating Mormon men and raping women, and when he further realizes an acquaintance had killed his father, he turns away from the

violence. His hatred dies hard, however, and he still wants to see Joseph Smith taken down for his arrogance, so he agrees to go to Nauvoo and try to kidnap him and return him to Missouri. The plan is quickly foiled and Warren is shot. A family who he had helped drive out of Missouri agrees to care for him. The experience humbles him and when he meets Joseph Smith, he is surprised to find that he admires the man. On reflection, he learns a lesson directed at anti-Mormons: “[I]f I hate Mormons now, it’s a habit of youth.”⁸⁸ After some time in Nauvoo, he muses that, “Queer as Mormons were, [I] now wished them no harm.”⁸⁹

Warren decides to stay in Nauvoo and grows so enamored by the religion and a local girl that he decides to join the church. An elder agrees to baptize him if he learns the tenets of the faith, and Warren agrees. In a highly symbolic moment of forgiveness, “David Warren, Missourian, would-be kidnapper of Joseph Smith, joined the church of the Mormons.”⁹⁰ Once inside the religion, all of the stereotypes melt away and “David happily discovered Mormons were by no means the sad-eyed, strait-laced fanatics of popular belief. They loved dancing, socials, and indulged merrily and often.”⁹¹ In a conversation with a Missourian, Warren addresses anti-Mormon points one by one. Of plural marriage, he says, “Mormon polygamy is not based on carnal lust.” The Danites were real but the church leaders knew nothing of them and as soon as they found out the organizer was excommunicated. While Warren does not convince his friend, the scene carries a powerful point. The friend says, “I’ve studied your Mormonism too—but not from the same books you seem to have read.”⁹² Bailey thus makes the point that history is relative and malleable. Through Warren the audience is moved from disdain of the

Mormons through ignorance to a more accepting feeling toward them, as Warren carries the truth and the audience sees it through his eyes.

Once the anti-Mormon talking points were addressed, Warren joins the exodus from Nauvoo and then the epic march of the Mormon Battalion. He and his fellow soldiers endure starvation, lack of water, and lack of supplies. Much as Maurine Whipple, Bailey brings the lesson overtly to the present, as Warren wonders “if some time in the dim, distant future, a generation unborn might yet acknowledge and perhaps even revere this strange army of sacrifice.”⁹³ Warren and the other soldiers are portrayed as heroes, and as examples to try and live up to. In another blow against the anti-Mormon narrative, the Missouri soldiers in the army are portrayed as a drunken mess, whereas the Mormons are so resilient and clean-living that a grateful General Alexander William Doniphan orders a 100-gun salute for the weary Mormon Battalion as they march into Santa Fe, New Mexico, which represents an actual historical event.

When the Battalion reaches California, Warren is mustered out and marries but soon falls to the temptation of gold, another warning against materialism that complements Bailey’s book on Brannan. He loses nearly everything, but his wife and his religion ultimately save him and he heads east to Utah, away from temptation. After walking and riding a total of 4000 miles since leaving Nauvoo, Warren arrives in Salt Lake City to find “one of the most beautiful spots on earth” where his people were undertaking “the most brazen, breath-taking social experiment ever conceived by man or God.”⁹⁴ Brigham Young sends Warren to colonize a settlement, and Bailey crystallizes the mythology of the Mormon movement by writing, “[H]ere in this jouncing wagon were living symbols of the three major movements of a mighty symphony of faith—the pioneer

trek west, the cruise of the *Brooklyn* around the Horn, and the march of the Mormon Battalion.” And of course, the explicit message that the pioneering does not necessarily ever end, but the past can pave the way for the future: “Behind [Warren], swaying in its papoose-case, breathed the symbolic hopes of the future.”⁹⁵ Warren and his family went on to build up Cumorah—a name with resonant meaning for the Mormons that gave them a transcontinental connection to the hill Cumorah in New York where Joseph Smith said that he found his gold plates.

Bailey also played a part in reasserting control over Mormon history. Warren decides to enter into plural marriage and Bailey presents it rather matter-of-factly, writing, “In eyes of a hostile world, it was another polygamous Mormon union. To David, thinking in terms of millenniums, it was quite another matter.... He sensed no shame in the thing he had done.”⁹⁶ The Mountain Meadows Massacre was characterized as orchestrated by “a few misguided zealots [who] had brought reproach upon all Saints.”⁹⁷ The repetitious representations of Mormon history performed cultural labor that did not completely eradicate the anti-Mormon leanings toward these events, but provided a very visible counter-argument to those equally repetitive claims.

Bailey argues something had been lost since the era of the pioneers, thus challenging Americans to try and regain that elusive essentialist character. As years go by within the novel, he writes with evident nostalgia, “And suddenly the Mormon empire lost its isolation. The railway...wrote finis to the era David Warren had known—the era of isolation, of covered wagons, of pack-horses and hand-carts.” And since it is gone, it is gone forever, and Bailey reminds readers that “never, throughout these years, did the Mormon cause find sympathetic response in America’s heart.”⁹⁸ Bailey drives this point

home with a pathos-laden ending that finds Warren hiding from deputies in an old cabin that gets trapped in an avalanche. As the air is running out, Warren frantically writes his last words to future generations, and particularly Bailey's generation, at that time watching as the world devolved into another catastrophic war:

I see cynicism...hate...greed enthroned. I see man enslaved...a perishing world drenched in blood! I see my children's children...they flower in beauty, and they stink in battle death! I see the woe...the horror upon horror. I shudder. I cringe. And yet, I know it cannot be the end.....oh, precious ones, despair not...for out of the flames and the blood now rises the new earth...hate and bitterness are no more!"⁹⁹

Bailey suggests that the American people had once been cruel to the Mormons. But in the contemporary moment where war and adversity threatened them, they could correct that lapse by honoring the past and using its lessons in the present, as well as acknowledging the Mormon contribution to the American experience, and more firmly weaving LDS values and ethos into the imagined national character.

Novelists of this time period were thus re-presenting the Mormon people as emblematic of what it means to be American. The discursive power of these novels is strong, but so was the influence of popular historians on the imagining of the Saints. Popular historian of the West and novelist Wallace Stegner was one of the strongest non-Mormon champions of the time. Indeed, Stegner thought the Mormon story was much better suited to history than novels, because "Mormon institutions and Mormon society are so peculiar that they call for constant explanation."¹⁰⁰ Along with historian Bernard DeVoto, Stegner helped explain and popularize Mormons to the country.

In 1942's *Mormon Country*, Stegner presented an overview of some of the defining characteristics of the Mormons as he saw them. While he presented an even-

handed account of the early Saints as engaging in “benevolent despotism,” his enthusiasm for what they achieved through group effort is a major point throughout his work.¹⁰¹ He refers to Brigham Young as “a colonizer without equal in the history of America,” and notes that while Mormons “have been called many...hard things, they have never been called bad settlers.”¹⁰² Weaving between the past and the present, Stegner ultimately concludes, “There is no absolute generalization possible. Mormons are people like other people. They do not have horns. They do not usually, nowadays, wear beards.”¹⁰³ His work is a powerful representation and carries discursive weight in that as history it is ostensibly “true.”

Novelists and historians were presenting a new paradigm for understanding Mormonism, and the fact that most of the novelists’ works were historical in nature only solidifies that link. But there was one popular culture medium that was beginning to have a wider reach than print culture: film. In a swipe against the changing times, Wallace Stegner argued that one “can’t *participate* in movies or the radio, and it is this participation, shrewdly calculated and carefully nurtured, that maintains the group spirit and the Mormon belief in the small towns of Zion long after one would have expected the American system to dilute and destroy it.”¹⁰⁴ Yet it was film that was, for a national audience, naturalizing the Saints as a mythic part of the American West as well as representatives of quintessential American traits.

Visual (Re)Presentations

In 1940, Brigham Young was placed in the film pantheon of great American leaders when Twentieth Century Fox turned the Harper-Prize-winning *Children of God* into a film that distilled the real hero of Fisher’s novel directly into the title, renaming it

Brigham Young.¹⁰⁵ The film stars Dean Jagger as Brigham Young and Tyrone Power as a resourceful Mormon scout named Jonathan Kent. Due in part to the constraints of the Hays Office, which regulated film and forbade any negative portrayal of a religion, the film is very pro-LDS. But it becomes clear from the narrative that *Brigham Young* is a celebration of the American pioneer spirit, laying an essentialist claim to it as part of the enduring American character. In fact, other films impacted by the Hays Office, such as the film versions of Zane Grey's novels, had simply opted to omit any reference to Mormons rather than portray them in a positive light. This would obviously have been much more difficult to do with Fisher's novel, but the point remains that the constraints of the Hays Office did not automatically guarantee a favorable representation of Mormonism.

The film's opening scenes establish a pro-LDS angle of vision via depicting an anti-Mormon raid in Nauvoo that results in the death of several Mormons. The scene ends with a dramatic shot of a Book of Mormon being engulfed in flames—a very powerful visual motif for a country committed to freedom of religion. Joseph Smith, played by Vincent Price, is again depicted as a peaceful man, but after some persuasion, he agrees that it is time for the Saints to fight back. In a jump cut, he is immediately arrested for treason, and in the trial the prosecutor lambasts him for having the gall to say he speaks to God and for claiming Missouri as part of Zion. Smith sits silently, but Brigham Young stands and asks to address the court, another familiar motif and a significant shaper of Young's character for the audience as the scene did not happen in real life, nor in Fisher's novel.¹⁰⁶

This scene serves as an apologia for the misdeeds Mormons had been accused of for a century. Earlier, one man had asked, “What’s the difference between a white man and a Mormon?” The punch line was, “About fifty wives.” That joke set the Saints apart as an Other, acknowledging the very real history of anti-Mormonism and polygamy, and showing at least one way the film could have skirted the Hays Office and been more anti-Mormon. The joke was risky, in that the Hays production code prohibited “ridicule” of any religious faith. But presumably polygamy was fair game as it was a doctrine of the past and a frowned-upon practice. At any rate, it was important to concede that there had been polygamy and allow Young to knock down any lingering ill feelings. He emphasized the Constitutional right to worship God, appealing to the jury (and the audience) that he was just an “ordinary fellow.” A flashback shows him chopping wood with Smith, also portrayed as an ordinary man with extraordinary abilities. In the flashback, Smith talks of the United Order, a plan to level social distinctions and make sure no one goes in need. After again citing the importance of honoring the founders’ intent to protect religious freedom, he tells the jury, “If you convict, you will be traitors to history.”¹⁰⁷ In the popular culture of this period, history itself was at stake, and artists were making a push for a reevaluation of the character and worth of Brigham Young, and moving him from an “Oriental despot” to an American pioneer—a remarkable shift that deeply speaks to the needs and anxieties of the time.

Despite Young’s powerful speech, the jury does not even leave the courtroom before convicting. Smith is marched through the streets in a scene quite reminiscent of Jesus’s walk to Calvary Hill. As Smith waits in jail, and the mob gathers below, his followers beg him to ask God to intervene, but he refuses. With his last words he

prophesizes that one will come to lead the Mormons as Moses led his followers. Indeed, the Saints had always been linked with the Jews from their temples to their exodus, and in 1940, the film *Brigham Young* was read by many reviewers as an allegory about the contemporary Jewish pogroms in Europe.¹⁰⁸

As in Fisher's novel, a man of vision gives way to a more competent man of action and ability. Young is clearly the man to lead the church, but in an interesting twist, he does not have a revelation from God, but simply assumes command on the pretext of having had one. Young leads the Saints across the frozen river in the hopes the townspeople would not expect such a move, a scene clearly reminiscent of George Washington crossing the Delaware. The townspeople hear about the exodus and run to the river to shoot at the departing Saints. Young weathers the bullets and when the Mormons reach the other side of the river, he orders the band to play, thus depicting him as a pillar against adversity.¹⁰⁹

In a brief exchange with a non-Mormon who got caught up in the exodus, the filmmakers create a teachable moment when Zina, the outsider, says she is a Christian. Young looks at her and simply says, "So am I."¹¹⁰ The Mormons were constantly educating the public that they were indeed Christians. In 1954, in a representative example, *Look* magazine published a question and answer piece with Mormon elder Richard L. Evans. The second question was, "Are 'Mormons' Christians?" to which Evans rather tersely replied, "Unequivocally yes."¹¹¹ While Evans was a respected member of the church, his article reads dryly, and the power and succinctness in putting the words directly into the mouth of Brigham Young carries power. The Mormon Church

was being integrated into the religious tapestry of American life, and scenes like that paved the way for such inclusion.

In *Brigham Young*, the Mormons set off on the great trek, and it is portrayed with deep admiration. Everyone pitches in and they face difficulties with aplomb, even finding time to “wagon-school” their children as they traverse the thousands of miles of empty plains. The settling of Salt Lake City is told with equal fervor and includes a montage of concerted industry as the city is raised up and Young calls for “a mighty empire here based on labor and love and fellowship.”¹¹² Low angle shots make him into a giant, towering over his people and over the audience. Yet when crickets swarm the crops, Young experiences a moment of human doubt and almost confesses his lack of direct communication with God. The gulls come and eat the crickets (an actual occurrence important to LDS identity and mythology), saving the day, and Young’s wife turns to him and expresses the film’s message of hope: “[God] was talking to you all the time. Maybe that’s the way it is. Maybe he’s ready to say something any way you turn if you know how to listen. Maybe talk—speech like we use—maybe that’s not his language at all.”¹¹³ This scene is key to a reassessment of the LDS past, as one of the recurring complaints about the religion is that Smith claimed to have spoken with God—a charge that had been reiterated in the film in the earlier Illinois courtroom scene. Young, with his lack of divine revelations, is represented as a man without pretense. He is a leader with faith. Yet through his hard work, God still favors him and those in his community—a resonate message for the times.

The film is a testament to Mormon persistence in the face of adversity. There are several small references to polygamy, and Young is depicted as having twelve wives

though only one plays any kind of role. While the filmmakers were forbidden from focusing on any of the potentially tawdry aspects of polygamy, the narrative of the film follows Fisher's logic: Brigham Young saw plural marriage as a divine command, and his abilities as a leader were far more impressive than his count of wives. Indeed, the movie's promotional posters say it all: the name "Brigham Young" commands more attention than the stars' names or any graphics. The narrative of the Mormons had shifted from a scandalous tale of "harems" to a triumphant tale of industry and will. While the ghost of polygamy would continue to haunt the Mormon Church, the shouts had turned into matter-of-fact historical representations as well as using polygamy to explore not sexual licentiousness, but to plumb the myriad depths of human interpersonal relationships. In fact, polygamy shifts in this time period from a hated institution, a "relic of barbarism," to a domesticated narrative trope. At least one of the reviewers of *Brigham Young* actually complained that there was too much monogamy in the film—since polygamy was a historical fact, and since it was at that point several decades in the past, the reviewer suggested that it would make good sense from a plot perspective to explore it, as of course novelists successfully did.¹¹⁴

Yet the decision of many novelists to abandon "lurid historical props" such as the specter of the Danites and polygamy as a sexual motif extended to film as well. In 1950, Argosy Pictures bookended the decade that began with *Brigham Young* with their release of *Wagon Master*. This film clearly shows the evolving representations of Mormonism as well as the continued fascination with the American West. The film was directed by John Ford and it wrote the narrative of the Mormons more firmly into the story of the West. The film evinces a wry humor about the stereotypes in the past, thus creating new

meaning in the present. When two LDS elders are asked if they are Mormons, one says (echoing Wallace Stegner), “That’s why I keep my hat on all the time. So my horns won’t show. Why I got more wives than Solomon himself. At least, that’s what folks around here say. And if they don’t say it, they...think it.”¹¹⁵ The anti-Mormons are the clear villains in the film, and they are portrayed as bigots. The Mormons are brave, resourceful, and while they enlist “Gentile” help to get across the plains, they are painted as heroes of the West. *Brigham Young* had a great deal of exposition, while *Wagon Master* is focused more on action. There were no courtroom scenes here. Whereas Henry Hathaway, the director of *Brigham Young*, spent a lot of time telling the audience how worthy of inclusion the Mormons were, John Ford showed it.

Wagon Master did depict some intolerant behavior by a few Mormons who were reluctant to help any non-Mormons. In that sense, the film fell in with the many novels that were putting forth balanced treatment of the Mormons. Scholar R. Philip Loy argues that *Wagon Master* presents a “darker side” of Mormonism in addition to the more positive representations, but the film is more nuanced than that.¹¹⁶ In a very clear manner that is much easier to achieve in novels, the film presents a few individuals within Mormonism who are intolerant, but they are marked as unlikeable characters. The characters the audience can relate to are the “real” Mormons of the wagon train, and they win out over their less tolerant brethren every time.

The message of Mormonism as a net positive force in American society was reinforced again and again during this time period. Authors and filmmakers in this era were presenting the notion that on the one hand, individuals within the church performed evil actions that the church itself should not be held responsible for, yet most Mormons

were depicted as rugged, hardy, and industrious. The cultural labor of these authors and filmmakers portrayed the Saints as something their besieged nineteenth-century counterparts rarely saw in representations: American heroes worthy of respect, admiration, and more importantly, emulation.

Many other authors took on the story of the Mormons during this time period, including George B. Rodney (1933), Lorene Pearson (1941), Hoffman Birney (1941), Jonreed Lauritzen (1943), Richard Scowcroft (1945), Forrester Blake (1953), and others.¹¹⁷ They varied in degree in their positive representations, but each showed reverence for the industry and hardship of the pioneers. In fact, Rodney's 1933 *The Mormon Trail* stands as sort of a bridge between Zane Grey and an author like Maurine Whipple. It is one of the last of the period to uncritically treat the Danites as a clear and present danger and feature claims like, "The records of the early days of Deseret are filled with the account of acts, the mere narration of which is intolerable."¹¹⁸ In contrast, for example, Birney's characters in his novel *Ann Carmeny* mention the Danites as a "historical prop" a few times, but each time another character refutes the tales as lies. Blake's book comes off as anti-Mormon as well in that it highlights Mormon resistance to the federal army during the Utah war and lingers on the Mountain Meadows Massacre. But the preponderance of positive representations was overwhelming, and one reviewer of Blake even wrote, "The plight of the devout Mormons, sincerely convinced that resistance is the only way out, is sympathetically described...."¹¹⁹ Blake himself seemed conflicted about the place of violence in the West, ultimately concluding, "Massacres—they happen, that's all."¹²⁰ The narrative trope of the Mormons as sex-crazed, blood-thirsty polygamists was giving way to a more nuanced interpretation of the Mormon

experience in America. Vardis Fisher painted Joseph Smith as a weak man and built up Brigham Young. Maurine Whipple showed that the Saints were ordinary humans, which, in her eyes and the eyes of many authors that followed, made their achievements all the more extraordinary.

Re-presenting Tensions

The Mormons wanted to be a part of everyday American life, and through their own actions and through overwhelmingly positive representations in popular culture, they largely achieved that goal.¹²¹ They were in sync with America in the Depression, through World War II, and for much of the post-war boom. Novels, magazines, newspapers, musicals, the radio, and more extolled the industriousness of the pioneers and that connected to the modern Mormon Church as surely as plural marriage often did. Yet there were fissures. As the country moved towards the 1960s, the Saints grew out of step with much of the country. For example, from a geopolitical standpoint, Mormon leaders found themselves having to more clearly define their welfare program as the Cold War heated up. J. Reuben Clark, Jr., then first counselor in the first presidency said, “[C]ommunism is Satan’s imitation of the United Order. [Ours] is based upon individual ownership and stewardship.”¹²² The United States was also moving toward a more consumer-oriented way of living. World War II was in the distant past, the Depression was even further back, and the pioneer past no longer seemed quite as urgent a model to recover through popular culture.¹²³

More troublingly, as the Civil Rights Era dawned, the church still did not allow African American men to be priests, a position denied to no other “worthy” male. In 1959, *Time* magazine published a brief article criticizing the Mormon Church for their

racial policies.¹²⁴ While not the first to comment on the church's stance towards blacks, the article was a harbinger of the national attention that was turning towards the Mormons. The church's racial policies were debated in magazines and newspapers throughout the 1960s. Leaders at Stanford University dropped church-owned Brigham Young University from their athletic schedule in protest. Tensions once again began to mount and the palimpsest that had so recently featured the pioneer past was reconsidered, a fact neatly encapsulated by scholar and LDS member Armand L. Mauss in 1967 when he wrote, "Just when it was becoming almost respectable to be a Mormon, another skeleton is dragged out of the ecclesiastical closet..."¹²⁵ The civil rights movement awakened the nation to instances of discrimination across the country. The Mormon Church had been seen as an American church, but the culture was beginning to embrace diversity in ways in which Mormon theology did not permit. As contemporary author Wallace Turner noted at the time, "The [Mormon Church] has successfully become everyman's church—except it cannot be the African Negro's church." He argued that the LDS Church had been on the cusp of complete assimilation, but before moving fully into the mainstream must first deal with its "appalling...discrimination against Negroes."¹²⁶ Church leaders wanted the issue to remain a private theological concern, but when LDS member George Romney began mulling a run for the president leading up to the 1968 election, he drew increased scrutiny to the church's policy on blacks from such influential media as the *New York Times* among others.¹²⁷ Reflecting the changing views on Mormonism, an *Arizona Republic* editorial in 1965 familiarly lauded the Saints for their pioneer past while questioning the future of their policies on race.¹²⁸

Yet the author of the *Arizona Republic* piece also noted another curious fact: “Somewhat surprisingly [the LDS priesthood ban on blacks] is written about only sporadically....”¹²⁹ The church drew strong criticism to be sure, but as Mauss points out, “external developments” such as the Vietnam War, anxiety over youth culture, and the federal gains of the civil rights movement “helped deflect national attention away from Mormon racial policies,” especially during the 1970s, and the church extended the priesthood to black males in 1978.¹³⁰ Despite the deflected attention, the newspaper and magazine articles that did cover the issue hinted at another developing shift in non-Mormons’ understanding of the Mormon Church—one imbued once more with deep tension and ambiguous feelings that give us insight into the American culture of that era.

At the same time, Mormon leaders recognized that assimilation had a cost: Mormons could lose their distinctiveness, and their unique qualities had made them strong. These two issues combined to create a more ambiguous cultural consideration of the Mormons, but as this chapter has shown, just as polygamy had been firmly entrenched in the minds of Americans as a link to Mormonism, so too had the pioneer aspects of the church. While novels about the pioneer period abated, the qualities associated with the Mormons remained. Thus, the late 1950s marks an important turn in the country’s relationship with the Mormons. That relationship had been overwhelmingly troubled, then very conciliatory. From the early 1960s forward, there would be a tension evident in the representations of Mormonism in American culture, a tension examined in the next chapter that illuminates contemporary American cultural concerns, including the struggle for women’s equality, the attempts by the gay community to secure equal rights, as well as expanding notions of Mormon identity.

Chapter 5

Modern Mormon Representations, 1960s-2000s

Anyone attempting to write about the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, even a sliver of it, will immediately encounter the difficult task of accuracy. That is because on nearly every issue in the Church's past, and in regard to every person who has played a part in the Church's often remarkable life, there are at least two, and typically more, combative opinions on what each side sincerely calls "the truth."

–David Ebershoff

In 1959, *The Travels of Jaimie McPheeters*, by Robert Lewis Taylor, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.¹ The novel perfectly encapsulates the contradictory ideas swirling around about the Latter-day Saints at the dawn of the 1960s that began to at least partially reverse the overwhelmingly popular representations seen in films like *Brigham Young* (1940) and novels like *The Giant Joshua* (1941). More significantly, it forecast how ambiguous and multi-faceted representations would grow as one century came to a close and another began. This chapter shows that while popular representations as a whole did not retreat to the deluge of negativity seen in the nineteenth century, many texts evince an anxiety over the Mormon Church's past and its unwillingness to liberalize some of its key positions in the present, and there have also been many completely negative representations. In short, the tensions found in much of Mormonism's relationship with America, which had enjoyed a respite of sorts in the middle of the twentieth century, arose once again. But as the country began to trend toward liberal ideals in the 1960s, the Mormon Church remained firmly rooted in the values of an earlier era as seen in their unwillingness to grant the priesthood to black men among other tenets. As scholars note, the dawning of the 1960s saw "[d]ramatic changes" that fostered both "possibilities and fears."² This chapter examines how these positions gave rise to a new

layer of representations on the palimpsest of Mormonism in America that offer insight into both the religion and the rapidly changing country.

Sociologist Armand Mauss writes that there is an inherent contradiction in the Mormon community about how much to assimilate within their home culture in America and how much to cleave to spiritual distinctiveness.³ There is an optimum tension to be found between any religion and outsiders that will keep the faith strong, Mauss and other sociologists note. A religious body wants to maintain a certain separation from the rest of society to differentiate itself from other religious traditions, but does not want to become so distinct that it cannot function in that society. In developing this tension, the Saints have also bred contradictory representations in popular culture, ones that can be clearly seen in *Jamie McPheeters*.

Author Robert Lewis Taylor turns to pioneer times similar to the authors of the World War II Era, but he eschews the primary Mormon characters that typified so much of the LDS literature of the previous thirty years for an examination of the religion through non-LDS eyes. As the narrative proceeds, it is as if Taylor cannot make up his mind about the Mormons. One passage reads, “[Mormons] have been shamefully abused throughout their comparatively brief existence,” evoking the positive representations of the 1940s.⁴ One page later, he writes, “And while I believe the Mormons to have been treated shabbily often, . . . [w]ithout doubt, they have been in their travels as inflexible, bigoted, and mulish as most religious fanatics, and made no attempt to adjust to any host community where they settled.”⁵ Taylor even makes the theme of contradiction quite overt, writing, “[F]or purpose, industry, genius at organization and will to contend against odds, these people are in a class apart. What they have done with this essentially arid,

discouraging waste is in itself a miracle. But they are filled with contradictions....”⁶ For example, “They preached sport and jollity, holding dances, parties, hayrides and all, but for those who broke the rules there was an underlying threat of punishment that was downright scary.”⁷ In these few short passages, one can see how the many popular representations of Mormonism had seeped into national consciousness, providing narrative fodder to a diverse range of authors, filmmakers, journalists, and television producers.

In effect, the Mormon palimpsest had been rescripted during the mid-twentieth century, and the Saints had joined the national community as what many saw as emblematic Americans, but the old narratives of Mormon peculiarity still bled through, and U. S. culture was rapidly changing. The church leadership was also finding that being perceived as “true Americans” made them less distinct from other faiths, which impacted their corporate identity, or how they imagined themselves. How producers of popular culture used the ambiguities evident in the Mormon community reveals much about the past sixty years of American life and thought.

This chapter argues that the contradictions within Mormonism would come to a head in the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first and even go so far as to expose contradictions within American culture. Mormons would be exalted and reviled in equal measure, the palimpsest erased and rescripted again and again to the point where the imagined Mormon community is now almost whatever one wishes it to be, and an excellent barometer for assessing the cultural milieu. In other words, acts of interpretation take place within a social context, and how Mormonism is interpreted sheds a great deal of light on a given cultural moment. A tension exists in Mormonism to be

sure, but a mirror image of that tension exists in their representations in American culture as well, revealing as much of the portrayer as the portrayed.

The Ann Eliza Effect: Using the Past to Make Meaning in the Present

Terryl Givens has observed of Mormonism, “History as theology is perilous,” but he could have easily left out the theology and just noted that LDS history itself is filled with potential land mines, and how the church is represented impacts how people imagine it. While the novelists of the World War II Era interpreted the stumbling blocks of church history—polygamy, the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and doctrines such as blood atonement—through a generally understanding and forgiving lens, much of that goodwill shifted as American culture itself shifted, and opened the door to different and less sympathetic interpretations. The feminist movement in particular lent itself to a sharp reassessment of the patriarchal nature of the Mormon Church, and one of the driving forces behind a reassessment of LDS history began with the literary resurrection of Ann Eliza Young, Brigham Young’s plural wife and eventual ex-wife, by author Irving Wallace in 1961.

Ann Eliza Young had literally disappeared after the failed republication of her memoir in 1908—to this day, no one knows how she died or where she was buried.⁸ In his biography of Ann Eliza, Wallace meant to popularize her as one of the most significant women of the nineteenth century in a David versus Goliath saga that pitted Ann Eliza against the behemoth Mormon Church. As he writes with a flourish, “The gravestone is missing, but Ann Eliza Young’s monument still stands. Susan B. Anthony gave women the vote. Mary Walker and Victoria Woodhull gave women a career. But Ann Eliza Young, twenty-seventh wife, gave women the best gift of all—monogamy

triumphant....”⁹ Thus in one sense, his narrative is a reflection of the sensational modernist movement that arose in the Depression Era that fostered a “heightened consciousness about poverty, class distinctions, and the politics of cultural and social exclusion.”¹⁰ Yet because of his ulterior agenda of demonizing the LDS Church using worn narrative tropes of the nineteenth century that mocked plural marriage, he also evinces an overall condescending attitude towards women. Despite this condescension, the effects of his canonization still echo today in subsequent representations of Ann Eliza Young that owe much to Wallace and considerations of plural marriage within the nineteenth-century Mormon Church.

Wallace argued in his afterword that he had no bias against the Mormons or even any preconceived notions coming into the biography, but the text of his book reveals otherwise. While, like Taylor, acknowledging some positive traits of the Mormons, more often he uses other scholars to characterize their theology as a “cheap story” filled with “mumbo-jumbo.”¹¹ Wallace tells the story of the Mountain Meadows Massacre for no clear narrative reason other than to relate a sensational story, and he seems obsessed with Brigham Young’s domestic and even sexual arrangements, meticulously covering everything from what the Young family ate at the Lion House to the alleged chalk marks Young would make on his wives’ doors to remind him who he was sleeping with that night.¹²

Wallace also cast Ann Eliza as a hero of mythological proportions. The case Wallace made about Ann Eliza could easily be made about many other producers of popular culture, including Wallace himself: “For [her] the past was always as alive as the present and would ever be synonymous with the future.”¹³ In other words, people make

meaning in the present from stories of the past. In this instance, Wallace includes only data that matches his preconceived notions. Besides some stock remarks about the industriousness of the Saints, Wallace tends to select the quotes and stories that portray the Mormons at their most extreme. If he had simply been arguing that Ann Eliza played a pivotal role in eliminating plural marriage in the LDS Church, he would have been on firmer ground, but with the instincts of a novelist, every hero needs a villain, and in this case, the Mormon Church filled that role. Mormon scholar Hugh Nibley recognized this, writing, “[Wallace] is not really a narrator narrating a narrative at all, but a gossip purveying gossip.”¹⁴ Wallace provided a bibliography but no footnotes, and whatever his ultimate intentions, the sensational slant of the narrative is made clear by the cover of the book, which highlights that it is not about the fight against plural marriage, but against the “American harem.”

Wallace was writing in the early 1960s when interest in polygamy was particularly high because of an increased media spotlight on the issue. In 1953, a raid on a polygamous compound in Short Creek, Arizona, had produced a public relations disaster for the Arizona authorities and the mainstream LDS Church. Photographs of children ripped from their parents made the polygamists quite sympathetic, and magazines scrambled to obtain interviews. In an article with the provocative title, “Why I have Five Wives,” a thirty-four year old with twenty children pleaded his case to the American public by linking prejudice against Fundamentalist Mormons to past prejudice against the church, writing, “In my grandfather’s day Mormons were thought to have horns, and maybe I seem equally strange to you now. Actually, I’m not strange at all; I’m merely living celestial marriage, which is the law of God.”¹⁵ Retreating to nineteenth-century

Mormon arguments, he noted, “Here in Short Creek we do not love in secret disgrace, we love in honor; we do not have abortions, we have children.”¹⁶ He argued for the constitutional protection of his religion, and somewhat surprisingly the conservative Short Creek community got a sympathetic ear in articles such as these.

Yet as Wallace noted of Ann Eliza Young’s book and lecture tour, “the intimate secrets of the American harem would become public property....”¹⁷ It has remained in the public domain ever since. In the 1870s, Ann Eliza could lecture on polygamy to a scandalized audience because she was filtering it through a lens of religious tyranny. The Short Creek polygamists flipped that narrative and looked at plural marriage through a lens of oppression by the state. One reason for their sympathetic treatment was that unlike the nineteenth-century Mormon Church, they numbered in the hundreds; the entire fundamentalist community in Mexico, the western United States, and Canada numbered in the tens of thousands, and they posed no threat to anyone outside their community besides the reputation of the mainstream Mormon Church. Yet with the cultural liberalization of the 1960s, Wallace could filter polygamy yet again, and he did so through an oddly patronizing tale of female empowerment and sexual curiosity. But in the end, he still turned over much of his argument about the puritanical and religious aspects of polygamy that both nineteenth century and modern FLDS members made, writing, “Considerations of divine revelation aside, I am certain that polygamy had its good points, too—but then, I am a male.”¹⁸ Understanding modern polygamy would receive little help from Wallace.

Irving Wallace’s legacy does, however, extend directly to David Ebershoff’s novel, *The 19th Wife* (2008).¹⁹ Writing in the twenty-first century, Ebershoff again takes

the Ann Eliza Young story and molds it to modern concerns. The forty-seven years that separate the two novels, and the 132 years separating Ann Eliza's original publication of her memoir from Ebershoff's fictional tale underscores just how enduring—and malleable—her story is. Furthermore, the ultimate failure of the 1908 iteration of Ann Eliza's *Wife No 19* shows how inextricably the narrative and the given cultural moment are linked. Each author provides a mirror to his or her own time and simultaneously seeks to lead the culture in a certain direction. In 1908, people were, for the most part, willing to relegate LDS polygamy to an odd but buried historical curiosity. In the twenty-first century, as some polygamists join reluctant forces with gay rights activists to try and gain concessions from a monogamy-centered and heteronormative society, polygamous arrangements are again very much a topic of concern.²⁰ As opposed to Wallace, who casually throws around words like “hussy” and scorns what he perceives as women's obsession with fashion, Ebershoff writes from an earnestly feminist perspective and injects concerns into his novel about gay rights as well.

Ebershoff is writing about a fundamentalist sect of Mormons, and although former Mormon leader Gordon Hinckley and others have argued that there is technically no such thing as a fundamentalist Mormon since all polygamists have been excommunicated from the church, the various branches of the FLDS nevertheless do exist and constitute a visible reality for the Salt Lake City branch of Mormonism, in that with each new mention of polygamy, many Americans inevitably link the practice with the Mormon Church.²¹ The “Firsts,” as the fundamentalist Mormons call themselves in Ebershoff's novel, are clearly delineated from the modern Mormon Church, yet the mainstream Mormons are also critiqued. All of the familiar narratives are put forth once more, and the

Mountain Meadows Massacre and blood atonement gain another layer of representation. More persuasively, through the character Kelly Dee, a fictional student at Brigham Young University and a descendant of Ann Eliza and first husband James Dee, the LDS leaders are called to task for ignoring the fact that “plural marriage was so very much a part of [nineteenth-century Mormons’] daily lives...that to label it ‘minor’ or ‘noncentral’ is to, in effect, cast aside their very earthly experiences as ‘minor’ and ‘noncentral.’”²² Kelly argues that only by confronting the reality of polygamy can the modern Mormon Church truly distance itself from its offshoot cousins. She conducts a research project on Ann Eliza Young and polygamy but ultimately notes, “This isn’t a research project, these are people’s lives, people’s lives ruined by this doctrine [of polygamy] that is a by-product of *my church*.”²³ She actually thanks Ann Eliza for forcing the church to purge itself of polygamy, a direct link to the Ann Eliza of Irving Wallace’s estimation.

While Wallace presented a sensationalistic biography in tune with the 1960s, Ebershoff presents a novel more in sync with the cultural moment of the early twenty-first century. His book is postmodern in that it is fragmented into multiple voices and genres. The two driving narratives are a fictionalized re-telling of *Wife No 19* in Ann Eliza’s voice and a contemporary tale about a young gay man who was kicked out of the “Firsts” for holding hands with a girl when he was a child.²⁴ Interestingly, his homosexuality was not the reason for his excommunication. In the tawdry world of the “Firsts,” young girls are reserved for old men and even the smallest hint of possible romance brewing between a young man and a young woman will lead to banishment of the male. Jordan Scott, the hero of the contemporary tale, is trying to exonerate his mother, the accused nineteenth wife of a murdered polygamist. Ebershoff makes the implicit argument that just as

nineteenth wife Ann Eliza figuratively killed polygamy, the women in modern-day polygamy are in no such position and must turn to literal murder to escape their predicament. While Jordan's mother is ultimately cleared and chooses to return to the only culture she knows, the real killer took justice into her own hands because "no one [else] cares."²⁵ Ebershoff uses a fictionalized plea from Harriet Beecher Stowe, who in a real preface to another memoir linked polygamy to slavery, to give the issue gravitas: "Our response to the moral and spiritual enslavement of Utah's women and children will define us in the years to come."²⁶ While Stowe is writing in the nineteenth century, Ebershoff repeatedly links the past to the present, in this case having Jordan simply say, "I'm generally a live-and-let-live kind of guy, but it's all different when there are kids."²⁷

Ebershoff argues for a more moral world where people do care about the plight of women and children in abusive polygamous relationships. The website 19thwife.com and the Ann Eliza Young House are posited as (fictional) resources for those trying to escape polygamy, and a splinter Mormon Church for homosexuals that mirrors a real-life congregation is put forth as an ideal space where a true twenty-first ecumenical faith can be practiced through a neo-Mormon lens. When Jordan learns of the homosexual church, he asks, "Isn't a gay Mormon like an oxymoron?" His friend replies, "I don't want to be in their church. I want my faith. That's all. I don't need to go to their temples to have my faith."²⁸ *The 19th Wife* ultimately presents a very postmodern if pulpy argument for the power of spirituality over organized religion, and makes a plea for both women trapped in abusive situations and gay men and women who simply want to find a community where they can belong.

The gay themes that come up in *The 19th Wife* and similar cultural productions are arguably a direct reflection of the cultural tensions over the issue of gay marriage in the Mormon Church and are often powerfully explored through film. In 2008, the LDS Church poured millions of dollars into a campaign to win the Proposition 8 initiative in California, which defined marriage as between a man and a woman. The documentary, *8: The Mormon Proposition* (2010), lambasts the church for its support of the initiative. The filmmakers directly link the pain nineteenth-century Mormons felt over polygamy to the pain that modern advocates of gay marriage are feeling.²⁹

The 2003 film *Latter Days* also portrayed the Mormon Church as an enemy to homosexuality, showing horrific scenes of shock and ice therapy inflicted on gay members of the church. An LDS missionary played by Joseph Gordon Leavitt is depicted as a rabid and violent homophobe. The main character, Elder Aaron Davis, is a Mormon missionary who is discovering that he has feelings for other men. When church leaders find out, they whisk him away in a black car in the dead of night and put him in front of an excommunication board headed by his unforgiving and disgusted father. Just as 8 linked gay marriage to polygamy, at the hearing board in *Latter Days*, after his father calls him “abnormal and abominable” and berates him for the “shame you brought to our ancestors,” Aaron replies, “Your grandfather had half a dozen wives.” To Aaron, Mormonism represents “the original definition of alternative lifestyle.”³⁰ His pleas fall on deaf ears—he is excommunicated and ostracized even at home, where his parents worry that his lifestyle choices will bring shame on them in the tightly-linked LDS community. After he attempts suicide, he is sent away to the Dyer Treatment Center where he is subjected to torturous shock and ice therapies and forced to scrub floors with a

toothbrush. He ultimately escapes and finds his way back to the young man he had fallen in love with, whose name is Christian—a none-too-subtle argument about where the real morality lies. Aaron establishes a family with a loose network of friends and leaves his religion behind. In essence, the Mormon Church was once castigated for doggedly clinging to its religious belief in a particular lifestyle choice. It is now being berated in many representations for clinging to its religious belief *against* a particular lifestyle choice, indeed, often choices. As one character in *Latter Days* says, “Your church doesn’t like alcohol or homosexuals. Well, I’m definitely not joining. I can’t imagine heaven without both.”³¹

This sentiment of the importance of diversity and tolerance is echoed very clearly and even forcefully in the epic two-part Tony Kushner play, *Angels in America*. Originally premiering in San Francisco in 1991, it went on to be produced as a miniseries for HBO in 2003, and was revived on stage in 2010. While not specifically about Mormonism, the play contains three major LDS characters and evinces an undercurrent of Mormon history and theology. Joe Pitt, a conservative Mormon lawyer living in New York City, is depicted as a man awakening to his attraction to other men and in the process making his wife miserable. The action takes place in 1980s America as AIDS is beginning to surface in alarming numbers and Reagan conservatism is sweeping the land. Joe’s wife, Harper, and his mother, Hannah, eventually become educated and accepting of homosexuality and manage to keep their religion intact. In one dream sequence between Harper and the gay lead Prior, she says, “In my church we don’t believe in homosexuals.” He retorts, “In my church we don’t believe in Mormons.”³² Prior is ultimately depicted as inheriting the mantle from Joseph Smith and in the process the play develops the Mormon

theology of free agency. Joe Pitt, the firm and upright Reagan supporter and Joseph Smith namesake, rejects and even betrays everything he believes in to initiate a love affair with another man, literally stripping off the second skin of his endowment garments. Prior, abandoned by that same man, is named Prophet, Seer, and Revelator by an angel and given a book and “sacred prophetic instruments” very much like the Urim and Thummin Joseph Smith said he found with the golden plates. Instead of a wooded hill, Prior finds the instruments under his kitchen tile, as the angel literally breaks through and fragments his domestic life until he ascends in a prophetic dream to heaven where he faces a counsel of angels and rejects his mission. The angels want humanity to stop their frenzied movement, but Prior reminds them that progress is elemental to the human experience, a very Mormon belief. While it is true, as the spirit of a long-dead LDS pioneer woman tells Harper, that “change is unbelievably hard,” it must occur and not be frozen with the trappings of a book.³³ In the end, Joe’s choices leave him alone, while Prior is surrounded by a small cadre of disciples who are also his equals.

These representations underscore the fact that the history of the Mormon Church is so multifaceted, controversial, and contested that it can be applied to a multiplicity of cultural concerns. Oftentimes it is used for pure sensationalistic aspect. For example, David Ebershoff chronicles the Danites, the hand-cart tragedy, the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and a very libidinous Brigham Young who all but rapes new wife Ann Eliza Young in the back of his carriage. One of the characters in the novel argues that, “history...is a subjective art,” but the sensational aspects of Mormon history, at least in recent popular culture, are often interpreted in much the same way.³⁴ In an age of often exploitive reality television, violent procedurals, and religious-based terrorism, the old

stories of the miraculous seagulls and the epic trek west have given way to a bloody period of Utah history that is ultimately unknowable in its fullest extent, but is used by producers of popular culture to make meaning in the present.

Cultural Explorations of Religious Violence

Hugh Nibley once wrote that “One cannot long explore the dark half-world of the anti-Mormon classics without finding oneself in the lair of the terrible Danites.”³⁵ While the Danites certainly existed, their reach was never so far as producers of popular culture have posited, nor their deeds so bloody. Yet Danites, the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the Reformation, and blood atonement among others have become staples of even works that are not overtly anti-Mormon. Nibley was writing in the 1960s, and treatments of the Danites go back as far as the 1830s, so while this is certainly not a new phenomenon, it has taken on a different tenor in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks on America. Producers of popular culture, fascinated both with Mormonism and with the history and causes of religious violence, turn to the violence in Mormon history no matter what their ostensible topic. Probably the most visible example of this phenomenon is Jon Krakauer’s nonfiction exposé *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (2003). Before the book was even published, the Mormon Church put out a release protesting the book, arguing that “Krakauer does violence to Mormon history in order to tell his ‘Story of Violent Faith.’”³⁶

The author’s ostensible tale is about the fundamentalist LDS Lafferty brothers, Dan and Ron, who in 1984 committed the grisly murder of their sister-in-law and niece allegedly at the behest of God. But Krakauer argues that to fully understand the impulse behind the Lafferty’s act, one has to understand Mormonism from its earliest beginnings.

In so doing, he charts everything from Joseph Smith's alleged dabbling in necromancy and black magic to the ubiquitous Mountain Meadows Massacre. While there is much about Mormon history that is frustratingly unknowable, Krakauer chooses to examine sources from authors such as Fawn Brodie, Will Bagley, and even Ann Eliza Young, who paint an often negative view of the Latter-day Saints. This historical angle of vision leads Krakauer to not only blame Brigham Young for the Mountain Meadows Massacre, but in a digression to his digression, charge the Mormons with the murder of three explorers who were part of one of John Wesley Powell's expeditions.³⁷ While Krakauer writes that he admires much of Mormonism, he seems to see conspiracies everywhere, even noting as a non sequitur that many Utah politicians are descended from participants in the Mountain Meadows Massacre.³⁸

Krakauer thus links modern mainstream Mormonism to theological justifications for violence, making the argument that "[t]here is a dark side to religious devotion that is too often ignored or denied."³⁹ Denied, perhaps. But from the Crusades to the Inquisition to the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the potential "dark side" to religion has seldom been ignored. And the success of *Under the Banner of Heaven* arguably paved the way for other bestsellers that attack religion in general such as Sam Harris's *The End of Faith* (2004) and Christopher Hitchens' *God is not Great* (2007). While these authors make many valid points, they too often conflate individual acts with religious bodies, a major complaint from the LDS Church since the FLDS is in no way affiliated with them. Yet in the case of the Mormons, their cohesiveness, particularly in the nineteenth century, makes this conflation almost irresistible to authors such as Krakauer.

Krakauer does not fully develop how different LDS and FLDS interpretations of their common texts are, falling into the same camp as those who would blame all Muslims for the violent interpretation of the Koran by a minority of Muslims. He does begin by writing that “[w]hen Dan Lafferty quotes Mormon scripture to justify murder, the juxtaposition is so incongruous as to seem surreal.”⁴⁰ He further acknowledges that “the LDS leadership adamantly insists that Lafferty should under no circumstances be considered a Mormon.”⁴¹ But he continues, “Nevertheless, Mormons and those who call themselves Mormon Fundamentalists (or FLDS) believe in the same holy texts and the same sacred history.”⁴² In a similar vein, he writes of the Mormon founder that “[m]ore than a century and a half after his passing, the sheer force of Joseph’s personality still holds extraordinary sway over Mormons and Mormon Fundamentalists alike.”⁴³ While this is true, he does not mention how the two institutions’ understanding of Smith represent near-polar opposites. Krakauer also shows a lack of understanding of some parts of LDS history and theology; for example, while noting that Joseph Smith was a “religious genius,” he also states that “in both word and deed, Joseph repeatedly demonstrated that he himself had little respect for the religious views of non-Mormons...”⁴⁴ Yet this statement is shown to be untrue in that the Nauvoo charter had a clause guaranteeing religious freedom and Smith often advocated for the right to choose one’s faith, most notably in the King Follett discourse.⁴⁵ In another example, Krakauer mentions the three sacred texts of Mormonism without pointing out that the LDS faithful revere the Bible as well, a tactic often seen in anti-LDS evangelical tracts. Krakauer’s work adheres to almost all of the thirty-five “rules” Hugh Nibley argued that books unfavorable to Mormons followed, the most significant in this case being Rule 32: “be

bloody, bold, and resolute,” because “the more incredible an atrocity story is, the less proof it requires.”⁴⁶ Yet in the palimpsest of representation, Krakauer’s work becomes another level of “proof” used to showcase selective aspects of the LDS past.

Under the Banner of Heaven forms a distinct discursive link to the 2007 film *September Dawn*, which bills itself as a “historically accurate” narrative about the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Jon Voight plays a fictional LDS participant in the massacre, and Terrence Stamp plays Brigham Young. Both have chin hair and manic eyes, recalling LDS portrayals of over one hundred years ago.⁴⁷ The director, Christopher Cain, who also wrote the script along with Carole Whang Schutter, is simultaneously trying to ostensibly tell the story as accurately as possible and create a connection to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. The film’s narrative is overwhelmingly, even comically, anti-Mormon—at least for those who know LDS history. Those being exposed to the Mountain Meadows Massacre through *September Dawn* for the first time receive biased history and outright fiction. In one scene, a sermon on blood atonement by Brigham Young is interspersed with scenes of a man being graphically castrated and having his throat cut. Balanced histories usually note that the virulent anti-Mormon pogroms in Missouri and Illinois, coupled with the approach of a federal army on Utah, made the atmosphere in the 1850s ripe for violence. This viewpoint does not condone the violence against the Fancher train at Mountain Meadows, but does contextualize it. Simple omission would have been bad enough, but *September Dawn* makes the Mormons look like the only aggressors. In flashbacks, Voight and several men smash the anti-Mormon press in Nauvoo and call Joseph Smith a “second Mohammed.”⁴⁸ Voight promises his men celestial glory for their upcoming acts of violence at Mountain

Meadows, echoing the jihadist promise of virgins waiting in heaven for those who give their lives serving Allah. The massacre at Mountain Meadows would have been powerful enough to show, but the filmmakers add a coda of evil by having Voight's character methodically kill his son's "Gentile" paramour just as he is about to save her and a baby she was caring for.

The film is in almost every respect a return to nineteenth and early twentieth-century anti-Mormon depictions instigated by the filmmaker's interest in religious violence. In one scene, Fancher reassures another member of his party, "The bishop has an understanding with the Indians." In nearly a direct restatement of a line in the 1917 film *A Mormon Maid*, the woman replies, "It's not the Indians I worry about."⁴⁹ And the representation of Brigham Young in his eponymous 1940 film is markedly different—in this film he is "an uneducated madman" and "a crazy tyrant," much as he was in the novels of the 1800s.⁵⁰ Furthermore, plural marriage is shown to be a system of lust and power with no hint of religious devotion.

The extras on the DVD of *September Dawn* unapologetically compound the errors of the film by noting that Schutter did a year of research on the subject and by having Will Bagley endorse the accuracy of the narrative. Several of the real descendants of the Fancher train appear, linking the Mormons to radical jihadists, arguing that "The Mountain Meadows Massacre was the biggest example of...domestic terrorism that this nation has ever seen," and noting that "[r]eligious fanaticism and extremism is a dangerous thing."⁵¹

Less discussed is the fact that Cain makes an implicit argument that Mormons are not Christians. In one scene, Voight's character is saying a prayer, and Cain intersperses a

prayer said by the Reverend for the doomed wagon train. Voight's prayer is full of hate, cursing the "Gentiles" for, among other things, allowing a woman to wear pants. Conversely, the preacher's prayer is full of devotion and love. He thanks God for showing the Saints "Christian charity" as Voight clearly conveys through his prayer that the Mormons have no intention of being "Christ-like." Voight closes his prayer with "May these children of Satan go to hell!" The preacher for the wagon train blesses the Mormons and ends his prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. It is this argument, that Mormons are not really Christians, that has in the past few decades led to a huge representational challenge to the church. Leading the way against the Mormons are evangelical Christian ex-Mormons, whose memoirs spill over with anger at the church for giving them such a powerful communal identity and then stripping it away. These disaffected former members, more than in any other faith, underscore how powerful the Mormon social connection is, how it shatters one's identity when that is taken away, and how the imagined community of the Mormons can shift depending on which side of the fence one stands. Those who convert and then deconvert from Mormonism often display a great deal of anger and resurrect the nineteenth-century charges of Mormons "duping" the unsuspecting. And those who were born into Mormonism but fall away frequently evince a crushing sense of loss—especially those who have not replaced their former faith with another viable social system or spiritual following. How they represent the Mormon Church forms another powerful level of representation, and gives insight into the ways in which identity and self are impacted by being a Latter-day Saint, then losing that identity forever.

“When Earth Turns Over Heaven”: The Anti-LDS Autobiographies

Certain strains of Christian evangelicalism represent some of the most potent anti-LDS depictions in circulation today. Many Christians have felt threatened by the success of Mormonism from the earliest days of the church, and they can often be seen picketing Temple Square in Salt Lake City, particularly during General Conference. From anti-LDS tracts of the nineteenth century to *The Christian Statesman* of the early twentieth century to *Apostasy Magazine* in the 1950s, evangelical Christians have attacked the Latter-day Saints from multiple angles. For example, in the October 1952 issue of *Apostasy Magazine*, authors spoke of Mormonism as “darkness,” “heresy,” and an “enslaving power.” One still sees that language in effect today, so it did carry on a significant template from the earliest days of anti-Mormon evangelicalism. But following the explosion in popularity of memoir, the voice of this campaign has shifted from pastors to ordinary individuals, and while they relentlessly attack the theology of Mormonism, they claim that most Mormons do not even know the tenets of their church, and only need proper proselytizing to be set free.

Mormonism, Mama, and Me, by Thelma Geer, is one of the clearest examples of this trend. The book was first published in 1980 and has been through several editions. Geer was raised a fourth-generation Mormon but converted to Protestantism at age thirty-one. In her memoir, she speaks often of “my Mormon people” and writes that her book “is prompted by my deep love and concern for my beloved Mormon people.”⁵² Using the same line of reasoning that Wallace, Krakauer, and other use, she argues that “one cannot really divorce modern Mormonism from its pioneer influences,” but she is actually referring to the positive aspects of Mormon history, such as the fabled community and

industry of its people.⁵³ She attacks the theology of the church, and does so with vigor, but to interrogate the qualities of its people would be to dismantle her younger self, other members of her family who never left Mormonism, and even some remaining aspects of her own identity. It is much easier for those who have never been Mormon to overlook *any* positive aspects of the church. But conversely, their ultimate anti-LDS passion does not usually run as deep as those who have left the church, either.

Indeed, after Geer writes a few lines of praise, she immediately shifts into a sustained critique of Mormonism that conflates the past with the present. Interestingly, she is the great-granddaughter of John D. Lee, so that gives her room to discuss the Mountain Meadows Massacre and how Brigham Young served Lee up to authorities as the lone person punished for the murders. Geer also argues that “[p]olygamy and Mormonism can *never* be divorced,” and that “Blood Atonement doctrines *are not obsolete*.”⁵⁴ Her goal is to convince Mormons to leave the church, so she is not content to provide a historical overview. She argues that nothing has changed since the 1830s. She even goes so far as to state that “some Mormon elders” still “marry numerous wives” in the temples.⁵⁵ Using Republican rhetoric from 1856, she attacks the “twin evils of Mormonism, Blood Atonement and polygamy.”⁵⁶ And to counter the Saints’ veneration of Joseph Smith, she claims that other Mormons killed him “as a traitor, an adulterer, and a horse thief.”⁵⁷

Geer also takes the most esoteric examples of Mormon theology and trumpets them to her audience, trying to paint Mormonism as cultish, making a direct comparison of Mormons to the followers of Jim Jones.⁵⁸ She venerates her mother, who deconverted from Mormonism on her deathbed, and laments that her father is in hell because he never

did the same.⁵⁹ The message is clear: those who drink the Kool-Aid of Mormonism will come to a tragic end whether in this life or the next. Her most egregious errors are when she quotes Mormon speakers who have stated doctrine not endorsed by the church such as the Virgin Mary being married to God or the idea that Adam, the first man, is God. While the latter was a notion floated by Brigham Young, the doctrine has been clearly repudiated by subsequent church leaders.

Judy Robertson's *Out of Mormonism* (1997) serves as a companion piece to Geer, in that Geer was born into the religion whereas Robertson was a convert. Robertson seeks to counter the many positive representations of Mormons as industrious, frugal, and family-oriented by answering the question, "How can such good people be wrong?"⁶⁰ She returns to the "humbug" allegations of the nineteenth century by arguing that Mormonism is nothing less than a "slick package" designed to ease converts in before exposing them to more radical doctrines.⁶¹ Whereas Geer was born into the Mormon faith and can thus remain unapologetic, even celebratory, about her pioneer heritage, Robertson comes off as almost embarrassed by her conversion, assuring her readers that she and her husband thought that the Mormons had a "weird story," but their family lives were so "exemplary" that it seemed like a good idea to try out the religion.⁶² Following the pattern established by countless stories of this kind, she reveals the sacred temple ceremony of the Saints, telling her readers that she "felt defiled, ashamed, and bewildered," as she went through the rituals.⁶³ She cites the "blatant spiritual errors" demonstrated in the ceremony and asks rhetorically, "Why didn't I get up and run out? *Why?*"⁶⁴ In a new twist on the old Mormon captivity story, she writes of her experience in an LDS community, "But somehow I could not escape from this nightmare. It was real."⁶⁵ She eventually escalates

the rhetoric by proudly showcasing a letter of support calling the church a “satanical cult.”⁶⁶ The Mormons are thus charged with being seductive brainwashers in league with the devil—an old charge in a new package that simultaneously excuses Robertson’s seeming heresy to her fellow Christians and also castigates the Mormons.

As is so often the case with deconversion, something had to fill the vacuum left by the former identity as Mormon. In Robertson’s case, she became an ardent evangelical, wanting to run to her former friends and shout, “The church is not true...! [Joseph Smith] was a charlatan....! You’re committing yourself to Lucifer!”⁶⁷ She started a group called Concerned Christians whose mission is to educate people about “the subtle deceit of Mormonism” and the fact that it is, in the words of her friend, “a cult.”⁶⁸ Robertson laments the fact that Mormonism is such a social religion, which makes it even harder to break away. When she herself finally decided to leave the church after only seven years as opposed to the decades many stay in the faith, it was still such a large change in her identity that she went out to the desert and burned everything associated with the Mormon Church. After it was over, “The backbreaking weight of Mormonism lay in a pile of ashes.”⁶⁹

These memoirs by Geer and Robertson and so many others illustrate a significant point: the bulk of these narratives since the nineteenth century have been written by women. From a feminist standpoint, the patriarchy of the church seen in decisions such as not giving women the priesthood and the church’s opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment have made ex-LDS women particularly driven to write about their deconversion from Mormonism. Yet men are joining their ranks more and more, compelled by the evangelical Christian alarm at the continued success Mormonism enjoys

despite decades of their best efforts to paint the church as a cult. James R. Spencer's memoir *Beyond Mormonism* (1984) mirrors Julie Robertson's in many ways (not to mention the similarity in the titles), down to the burning of Mormon literature in the desert to be "completely free."⁷⁰ Spencer was converted as a young man after being visited by two missionaries who were "everything I had never been—clean-cut, innocent."⁷¹ Like Robertson, he details the temple ceremony and tells his readers he went home "repulsed" and "angered" at the rituals he went through inside.⁷² He points out the extremism of Mormon theology, and eagerly attends his own excommunication hearing (as opposed to resigning from the church) so he can confront Mormon leaders who "had been steeped since childhood in doctrines born in hell."⁷³ Yet as Spencer himself notes, Mormonism is "more than a religion....[I]t touched every part of a member's occupational, social and family life," and that makes breaking away extremely difficult.⁷⁴ He almost lost his wife before convincing her to leave behind everything she had ever known. In the absence of this community, those who have deconverted often convert to a vigorous and active anti-Mormonism in the hopes to supplant and repudiate that old all-encompassing identity. All of these books provide resources and support networks at the end of the main text in an attempt to replicate the community they had once known and desperately fight against the understanding of Mormons as a good and industrious people.⁷⁵

The anti-LDS memoir is a cottage industry of sorts with dozens of titles readily available through mainstream web retailers such as Amazon.⁷⁶ Quasi-memoirs that are really just platforms for statistics and lessons on anti-Mormonism such as *The God Makers* (which was also made into a film), aggressively make the rounds of people who

are already converted to evangelical Christianity (though *The God Makers* takes implicit credit for what they see as stagnant Mormon growth in the United States). Indeed, tracts such as this are significant in that they grant that Joseph Smith actually did have a supernatural experience—a marked turn from those Christians who claim he simply made it all up. Unfortunately for Mormons, in *The God Makers* (1984), authors Ed Decker and Dave Hunt allege that Joseph Smith was visited by Satan, who helped him create LDS theology. As they say, “Careful investigation indicates that Joseph Smith was in touch with a suprahuman source of revelation and power that has been the common inspiration behind all pagan religions down through history.”⁷⁷ Joseph Smith, they argue, was literally “visited by Satan masquerading as God....”⁷⁸ They even manage to link Smith to Hitler and Stalin.⁷⁹ *The God Makers* is very popular within the community it represents, and by arguing that Joseph Smith was not a charlatan but a Satanist, they ratchet the argument and the urgency up a level that has spawned an entire new industry of anti-Mormon tracts and memoirs and according to Decker and Hunt’s publishers led to the printing of no less than 300,000 copies of their book. This paradigm can be seen in James Spencer’s memoir, when a friend tells him, “I always get sick when I go by a Mormon church. I mean, you can just *feel* the blackness!”⁸⁰

By arguing that Satan tricks Mormon members into believing LDS doctrine, these authors simultaneously achieve five objectives. They explain their own initial conversion to Mormonism, they make it allowable to attack the religion despite the goodness of its people, they explain away the success of the church in that Satan has dominion over the Earth until the Second Coming, and they create a sense of urgency in the evangelical community to try and convert Mormons. Finally, at the basest level, they create a

compelling hook about a “Luciferian legacy.”⁸¹ Decker and Hunt promise that “occultism and Satanism” are “just the tip of the iceberg.”⁸² This sensationalism keeps the reader invested and ultimately creates a fervor that becomes self-replicating.

Despite the success of these memoirs, they do not reach anywhere near the visibility as those written by ex-Mormon women such as Sonia Johnson and Martha Beck who eschew commenting on unique Mormon theology for discussing the patriarchal elements of the religion—a very clear reflection of the feminist movement within American culture.⁸³ Sonia Johnson was the pioneering Mormon woman who was the most visible face of Mormons for ERA, a moniker the *New York Times* equated with “astronauts for a flat earth.”⁸⁴ Johnson’s memoir *From Housewife to Heretic* (1981) represents a clear case of fragmented identity as she details losing her religion and all of the social ties that went with it. In the preface to her fourth edition, she writes of herself and her memoir, “I have changed so radically that I hardly recognize myself as the same woman who wrote it. But of course I am....”⁸⁵ Yet autobiography theory posits that we are *not* the same people we once were as we move through time, and Johnson’s referral to herself in third person underscores this notion. She writes, “At the end of [the first edition], I mourn the loss of ‘my church.’ Reading that now makes me feel eerily detached from the woman who wrote this book, as if I were her so long ago that it must have been in a previous incarnation.”⁸⁶ Arguably, it was. As autobiography scholar Paul John Eakin observes, our “former selves can seem as discrete and separate as the other persons with whom we live our relational lives.”⁸⁷ As Johnson’s understanding of the Mormon Church changed, her identity changed with it. She closes her preface with a dedication of sorts to her former self: “I am grateful to the Mormon housewife Sonia for

having the courage to step off the edge of the known world, and to the Mormon elders for loosing me into this marvelous destiny....”⁸⁸ Indeed, it is that step off the known world that drives this narrative and so many others. Martha Beck, another ex-Mormon, writes after her deconversion:

The Chinese have a phrase to describe the confusion that accompanies the change of dynasties: ‘when earth turns over heaven.’ I kept remembering this phrase as I slogged through my days, watching everything I’d thought solid and reliable fall into the sky, while unexpected new beliefs appeared in parts of my mind and heart I had thought were empty space.⁸⁹

Because these identity shifts are so powerful, they provide some of the most potent representation of Mormonism today.

Johnson uses her platform to indict the Mormon Church and men in general for patriarchal worldviews. The narrated “I” sometimes gives way to the narrating “I” in self-rebuking asides such as, “*I was a perfectly conditioned patriarchal woman.*”⁹⁰ Johnson makes meaning of the present out of the past, but the past is now filled with tension and ambiguity since her deconversion. She writes of the Mormons as “my people” and notes that for her parents, “Mormonism is almost part of their genetic makeup; it is in their very blood and is confirmed in each beat of their hearts,” an imagined biological heritage that they could and did pass on to their children.⁹¹ Thus, cultural and to a point even theological Mormonism still resonates with Johnson much as it does with Thelma Geer. It is the political vision of Mormonism, which is of course an extension of its cultural and theological foundations, that disturbs her the most. She writes, “[T]he fact that Mormons are now wielding national political power makes understanding of their notions of allegiance to prophetic authority, and their view of themselves as the chosen people, painfully relevant to every American.”⁹²

Johnson and other ex-Mormons go through a critical interstitial space where they are of a double mind—both Mormon and ashamed to be Mormon at the same time, instinctively wanting to defend their church, but bothered by some of the tenets. In the end, Johnson did not quit the church—she was forced out. She lost her husband and her church in the same year, a devastating blow to her sense of selfhood. In a bewildered and reeling state, she writes, “And so, as a mythical character, I began my life outside the Mormon church.”⁹³ In a direct reversal of her claims in the preface, she notes, “How many different me’s there have been between that girl and the present Sonia!”⁹⁴ She effectively dismantles the male leaders of the church through powerful feminist rhetoric, yet still claims that although she has “said good-bye to Mormonism as a viable religion...I am in many ways...irrevocably Mormon and would not change that even if I could.”⁹⁵ She thus through representation echoes the journalist who asked, “Can’t we have Mormons—but without Mormonism?”⁹⁶ The fact is that we do. Mormonism evinces so many ethnic qualities that those who leave the faith often cling to the parts that they loved whether consciously or unconsciously, and when they share their story with the world, they thus reify the notion of Mormonism as a distinct Other.

Martha Beck’s *Leaving the Saints* (2005) is easily the most complicated of the memoirs considered thus far—and the most controversial. Beck’s narrative was coaxed into existence when a “recovered memory” of her father raping her surfaced in her late twenties. Her memoir is situated in a “present” where she is interrogating her father in a hotel room. This fictive present is interspersed by past recollections of growing up Mormon.⁹⁷ The book is so controversial because her father is Hugh Nibley, one of the giants of the Mormon intellectual tradition and its foremost apologist for decades until his

death in 2005. Her nine siblings have all branded her a liar and she has become an outcast from her former community. However, despite (or perhaps because of) the book's psychological twists (Beck is a Harvard-trained sociologist and throws around esoteric quotes throughout the book), the narrative reveals how Beck's deconversion from Mormonism shaped her vision of the religion and changed it into the representation found in her memoir.

This memoir is important because it is one of the few memoirs that lead the Mormon-born author to a full deconversion and thus opens up a space of powerful and at times distanced critiques. Former Mormons such as Thelma Geer reject the Christianity of Mormonism but cleave to its notions of community and many of its ideals. Beck completely rejects her Mormon faith, but the reader must disentangle and address her alleged rape before moving to the faith-based account of her memoir. In other words, the critic must ask how much of her identity has been shaped by the memory of the rape, and how much has been shaped by her rejection of Mormonism. Autobiography scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue that self-referential writing is "an intersubjective process that occurs within the writer/reader pact, rather than...a true-or-false story."⁹⁸ As readers, we will never truly know whether Beck's claims about her father are true. As critics, though, it is imperative to shift (as Smith and Watson advise) from "assessing and verifying knowledge to observing processes of communicative exchange and understanding."⁹⁹ Unfair though it may be to Beck's father if her assertions are untrue, it is important in understanding Beck to remember John Sturrock's claim that "[i]t is impossible for an autobiographer not to be autobiographical."¹⁰⁰ In other words, Beck reveals herself to the reader through every story she relates, and the ultimate "truth" of her

narrative is beside the point when it comes to assessing her notions of identity and of the Mormon Church and the representation she creates. Whether true or not, like so many other representations, she constructs powerful images with lasting effect.

Beck seems to realize how faulty memory can be when she writes, “[m]emory is anything but constant, anything but indubitable.”¹⁰¹ Yet just a few sentences later she backs out of this idea by stating, “[o]f one thing I am certain: I haven’t invented a single thing.”¹⁰² The stakes of memory are much higher for her than for other disaffected former Mormons. If Beck is wrong, then she has left her religion and her family for nothing. But if she is right, her identity was severely compromised by her father and the religion that protected him when she was raped at only five years old. For the purposes of this inquiry, we must note that the memory is real to her and has shaped her identity as a former member of the Mormon faith. While one may expect the rape to be the larger part in shaping her identity, it is ultimately conflated with her rejection of Mormonism.

Beck is on a “spiritual quest” in the beginning of her memoir to solidify her identity in a religion she has begun to doubt.¹⁰³ She begins her narrative in the pre-recovered memory stage of her life as a young woman teaching at Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah. In addition to her teaching duties, she is trying to finish her Harvard dissertation. She is surrounded by a Mormon community she views as caring, and deeply loves her husband and three children, but the narrated and narrating “I” are individualized and seething with a fury sometimes overt, and sometimes cloaked in deep sarcasm. Anger permeates the memoir and that anger is not directed at her father as one might expect, but rather at the Mormon Church. Beck is an accomplished writer, and she uses a withering sarcasm to cut down Mormon rituals and create a space of identity for

herself. The reader is left in the dark for much of the book as to why she is in that hotel room with her father. There is clearly an unresolved issue from the past that she and her father are intellectually dueling over, but she does not divulge the purpose of the meeting until almost halfway through the book. As odd as it may sound, she presents the physical rape as secondary to what she sees as the emotional rape that the church committed against her family. She believes that because her father was the foremost Mormon apologist of his generation, he was forced by the Mormon Church to tell lies on its behalf. This coercion by the church was possible, Beck alleges, because her father was on BYU's payroll and had ten children to support, and the Mormon Church owns BYU. Beck states that if he did not follow their every dictum, they would have fired him. Beck writes that her father discovered evidence that Mormonism was false but was forced to suppress it, thus leading to a psychological break that "forced" him to rape her. This realization led to the writing of her memoir in the belief that "telling the story is the only way to let go of the trauma" —for both her and her father.¹⁰⁴ It also throws into question some of the great works of the apologist Mormon tradition.

Beck states more than once Anne Lamott's maxim that "forgiveness is giving up all hope of having had a different past," yet memoir allows her to have exactly that: she creates new meaning in the present by reinterpreting events from her past as well as renegotiating her perceptions of Mormonism.¹⁰⁵ She begins the process of reclaiming her selfhood by visiting therapists, talking to friends, and speaking out against the Mormon Church in her classes at BYU and in the media. Beck writes that many of her colleagues were being forced out of BYU in what amounted to an ideological witch hunt, but she remained largely unconcerned, believing that "[t]he only thing scarier than telling my

secrets would be keeping them. When the ‘sensitive information’ you carry is your own history, going mute to protect the system doesn’t keep you from being destroyed; it just means that you destroy yourself.”¹⁰⁶

When Beck began questioning “the Mormon way of seeing the world,” she equates the beginning of her deconversion to “being born again” and experiencing “my disowned self moving back into my body.”¹⁰⁷ This is a very postmodern conflation of the language of evangelical Christianity and more New Age notions. Her questioning of her faith is a very solitary process that leads directly to an individualized identity and a sharp attack on the Mormon Church. Beck’s husband leaves the church and asks if she will join him, and when she finally does decide to deconvert, she writes that drastic changes in her life involved “kill[ing] off my self, my ego, the way I saw the world.”¹⁰⁸ Sonia Johnson writes that the Mormon Church will never forgive her or stop hating her because it “has committed a grave offense against me.”¹⁰⁹ But that cuts both ways in Beck’s case. By leaving the church voluntarily rather than being forced out, by turning away from the only culture she had really every known, she essentially is forced to kill off her old life, and that makes it very difficult to have any sympathy at all for the Mormon Church. Just as Henry Adams “[took] his own life” by preemptively writing an autobiography before others could write about him, Beck is putting her voice into the public realm to assert her individualized selfhood in the face of what she calls lies from her family and the Mormon Church.¹¹⁰ She creates a different past, writing, “I am free, and always have been.”¹¹¹ But her representations of the church are now public property, and the polarizing reviews on Amazon.com as well as the letters of support and hate she has received and posted on

leavingthesaints.com shows just how much is at stake in representing the story of the Saints.¹¹²

The memoirs of ex-Mormons present a powerful representational challenge to the church. These are works by insiders—those who have lived the doctrines of the church but found them wanting. They purport to give readers the ultimate representation not lost to an unknowable history but accessible as a recent past. The fact that Mormonism spawns so many memoirs from those who have left the church underscores just how powerful an identity it gives its adherents. A countermeasure to these memoirs would be works by current members of the church. There are plenty of representations of Mormonism circulating, from films by, for, and about Mormons such as *The Singles Ward* (2002), *Baptists at our Barbecue* (2004), *Mobsters and Mormons* (2005), and the films of Richard Dutcher. The church makes numerous pamphlets available, and the Book of Mormon itself is available for free to anyone who is curious. Yet the Saints who reach the largest number of people and put forth some of the most sophisticated explanations of their religion are those who do so through discussing the tenets of their faith with rarely a mention of Mormonism. These individuals represent a potent mode of discourse from an often polarizing religion that reaches out into mass culture with positive representations of Mormonism.

Imagining Mormonism in Contemporary Popular Fiction

Amidst all of the representations of the Saints currently in circulation, Mormons of course continue to try and manage their own story. For example, critics (often Mormon) in the LDS-themed academic journal *Dialogue* and the magazine *Sunstone* frequently engage with representations involving Mormonism. But far more momentous

in reach has been the introduction of Mormon values into popular culture via fiction. Whereas the Latter-day Saint novels of the mid-twentieth century in particular were overtly Mormon in character, theme, theology, and history, more recent Mormon novels have developed fundamental LDS beliefs without at times ever mentioning the word “Mormon.” This aspect is important to consider because these texts have reached a far wider audience than those novels by, for, and about Latter-day Saints, and they form a compelling counter-narrative to more unfavorable works about Mormonism. They also present to a mass audience LDS theology, beliefs, and values. As C. S. Lewis said of his insertion of Christian themes into his fiction,

I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to....But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.¹¹³

In a similar vein, LDS authors present the story of Mormonism through the lens of fiction, disseminating the Mormon story into mass culture in a favorable light, “stealing past” those who might otherwise be hostile to the faith and offering counter-narratives to modern anti-Mormon texts.

Perhaps the most significant example of Mormon values being interpolated into mass culture can be found in Stephenie Meyer’s popular *Twilight* series. An examination of this series underscores the ways in which some Mormon authors convey important LDS theological points and Mormon beliefs and values to a worldwide audience. In so doing, they effectively control their own representation while presenting positive

viewpoints of their religion. The *Twilight* series is a juggernaut of a text that has spawned four best-selling books and a movie franchise that will reach into 2012. Tweens (and adults) tweet about various plots and academics debate the significance and symbolism of the books at conferences. The series is about the relationship between a human, Bella Swan, and her significant other, Edward Cullen, a vampire. Jacob Black, a werewolf, plays a role as friend to Bella and potential third point of a love triangle. In all of the thousands of pages of text, there is not a single mention of Mormonism, yet many have linked her work to Mormon theology. Indeed, Mormon-themed *Sunstone* magazine even devoted an entire issue to *Twilight*.¹¹⁴ Meyer herself has cited her religious upbringing as informing her characters, and journalists often reference her Mormon background.¹¹⁵ In short, she is one of the more visible members of her faith, and in very sophisticated ways, her *Twilight* books put forth a reader-friendly vision of what Mormonism looks like from the mortal life to the eternity to be found in the celestial kingdom. In so doing, she reaches millions of potential converts and puts a familiar and reassuring face on some of the thornier points of the Mormon belief system.

The simplest connection to Mormonism in *Twilight*, and one that commentators usually note, is the sexual abstinence of the characters. Bella is a teenage girl and Edward is frozen forever as a teenage boy, yet they are slow to kiss and determined to save sex until marriage. Indeed, they are both virgins, even though Edward has been in existence for 110 years. When they finally determine that they will marry, Bella makes the initial argument that sex is now permissible. Edward, who along with the other Cullen family members, consistently represents Mormon points of view, tells Bella he is determined to protect her virtue. He goes so far as to argue the commitment to sexual virtue is akin to

the commitment not to murder.¹¹⁶ When, through a series of dramatic events, Edward finally agrees that consummating their union prior to marriage would be permissible, Bella has sufficiently internalized his lessons that she is able to be the virtuous one, saying, “I’m following all the rules, Edward. Your soul is far, far too important to me to take chances with.”¹¹⁷ When they do wed, they marry as Latter-day Saints do: for all eternity. They constantly talk about how they will be together forever, and as vampires are immortal in Meyer’s world, so they will be. They even change their wedding vows from “till death do us part” to “as long as we both shall live.”¹¹⁸ In the last few pages of the series, the word “forever” is repeated almost like a mantra, and by this point Bella and Edward have a child and Bella has successfully been turned into a vampire. Just like the Mormon definition of eternal family, this family will indeed be together for all of eternity. This narrative discourse thus makes a strong case for abstinence with the promise that upon marriage the rewards will be literally eternal.

Sexual abstinence is a key connection from the *Twilight* world to the world of the Latter-day Saints, but the theological connections run deeper at more subtle levels. Abstinence runs to blood as well, and by denying themselves human blood, the Cullens are in essence arguably following a modified Word of Wisdom. They abstain in many ways: sex before marriage, human blood, alcohol, cursing, smoking, and killing in general. They are enacting a reformation of sorts among vampires in the same way the early Mormons did among Christians. This theme is developed over and over throughout the book. The series opens with Genesis 2:17 in the Mormon-preferred King James English: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”¹¹⁹ In traditional Christian theology,

Eve's temptation of Adam led to the fall and all the human misery that came after. In LDS theology, the fall was a necessary prerequisite for the opportunity to have eternal families and to eventually become gods, as the Cullens are in a way.¹²⁰ It also opened the door for the key Mormon belief in freedom of choice, and this theme is highlighted throughout *Twilight*.

The Cullens are represented as a clear Mormon congregation. The “parents,” Carlisle and Esme, are vampires who were frozen as adults and thus simply pretend to be the parents of Edward, Jasper, Emmett, Alice, and Rosalie, who were frozen as teenagers and young adults. Each “child” chose to come into that family of abstinence rather than take the typical path of other vampires who are ruled by their passions and who feed off of humans. Like Mormons, the Cullens welcome all vampires who wish to follow their way of life, and also like Mormons they do not force their beliefs on others, though they share their message with other vampires. Carlisle only creates vampires out of humans who are near imminent death, and when Edward came into being as a vampire, he relates that “I wasn’t sold on [Carlisle’s] life of abstinence, and I resented him for curbing my appetite.” He continues, “It took me only a few years to return to Carlisle and recommit to his vision.”¹²¹ Nothing is more important than freedom of choice—to the Mormons, it is part of God’s plan for humanity. In fact, when the villainous vampires of the series make their final showdown against the Cullens, one of the most serious charges hurled against the antagonists is that “[t]hey seek the death of our free will.”¹²² Carlisle, as head of the family, freely extends choice to others. Having chosen, there is nothing more important to the converted Edward and his siblings and mother than family.

When Bella first goes to Edward's house, one familiar with the history of Mormon representations is struck by the parallel to those who once believed Mormons had horns. Edward sees Bella's wondering gaze and says, "No coffins, no piled skulls in the corners; I don't even think we have cobwebs...what a disappointment this must be for you."¹²³ Jacob plays the role of hostile outsider so familiar to the persecuted Mormons, often calling vampires "filthy bloodsuckers." Yet the Cullens treat him with kindness and eventually win him over to their way of seeing the world. The Cullens also practice a form of the gathering that was so central to early Mormonism. Alice, Edward's "sister," notes, "We Cullens are unique in more ways than you know. It's...*abnormal* for so many of us to live together in peace." Carlisle believes "that abstaining makes it easier for us to be civilized, to form bonds based on love rather than survival or convenience."¹²⁴ The same exact message is preached to young LDS adults all over the world.

Throughout the series, Bella pines for "[a] simpler place, where love was defined in simpler ways."¹²⁵ She worries about being inaccurately labeled as a pregnant teen when she decides to marry Edward right out of high school. But when she finally gives herself over completely to the Cullen vision, she finds that simple world she had been searching for, and an eternal family in the bargain. Indeed, Bella makes the perfect convert—most new vampires in Meyer's world are wild and uncontrollable. But Bella has worked her way methodically through their belief system, and when she literally converts, she is born again into what she views as a kind of heaven. As she awakes anew, she thinks, "Everything was so clear. Sharp. Defined."¹²⁶ And much as the Mormons believe that humans will have physical bodies in the afterlife, Bella marvels that "[i]t was a relief and revelation to discover how much of my essential core traits had come with me into

this new body.”¹²⁷ In a scene reminiscent of the theological basis for baptism for the dead, Bella greets her father in her afterlife and exults, “It seemed too good to be true. Could I really have both my new family and some of my old as well?”¹²⁸ While he was not made a vampire, he was still part of the family.

The Cullens sacrifice a great deal, but get even more in return, forming a link to the demands the Mormon Church makes on its members. One outside observer of the Cullens notes, “I have witnessed the bonds within this family...These strange golden-eyed ones deny their very natures. But in return have they found something worth even more, perhaps, than mere gratification of desire?”¹²⁹ The clear answer is yes. Being a vampire or being a Mormon does require sacrifice. As Alice says, “Part of being a Cullen is being meticulously responsible.”¹³⁰ Much the same has been said of Mormonism throughout its existence, and for their responsibility, the rewards for them are represented as literally eternal and far outstrip the sacrifices.

Interestingly, in the final book of the series, Meyer quotes fellow Mormon author Orson Scott Card. The quote has little or nothing to do with Mormonism, but Card stands with Meyer as one of the most visible LDS authors living, and his main genre of science fiction complements her fantasy works. Moreover, in science fiction and fantasy novels, he promotes the Mormon story just as she does.¹³¹ Card is a prolific and award-winning author who has a penchant for long-running series. The famous *Ender* cycle of books puts forth many religious values in general such as proof of a soul, the sanctity of marriage and of all life, and the dangers of religious tyranny. The *Homecoming* saga follows the plot of the Book of Mormon, and Card, like Meyer, has indicated that his Mormon heritage has influenced his writing. In *The Tales of Alvin Maker*, he sets aside science fiction and

enters a world of magic. The American frontier that Joseph Smith grew up in sat in a liminal space between folkloric magic and hard science. Many evangelical commentators have even compared Joseph Smith to a kind of sorcerer. Orson Scott Card takes this idea to its logical conclusion and presents Alvin Maker as a fictionalized Joseph Smith, and magic as the spark inside every human that is nothing less than a gift from God. Card's reimagining of Smith through Alvin opens a space to discuss the influences a culture steeped in magic had on early Mormonism, and in a similar vein as Meyer, present LDS theology and the life of Joseph Smith in a non-threatening fashion to a mass audience.

The parallels between Alvin Maker and Joseph Smith are undeniable. Both are born on the American frontier to a peripatetic family. They are both named after their fathers even though neither was the first son. They each have unparalleled wrestling skills, a teasing personality, and the charisma to attract followers to their vision. Indeed, much of Alvin's early life parallels Smith's exactly. There is a preacher who tells him that God is done interacting with the world and science is now the preferred mode of discourse. Alvin has a religious mother and an indifferent father, and he asks his brother much as Smith asked God, "[H]ow do I know which one is right?"¹³² Like Joseph Smith, Alvin has a catastrophic leg injury that should have required amputation. And like Smith, Alvin asks himself how a God without a body makes any sense. Through questions such as these, over a series now spanning six books with at least one more to come, Card develops several intricate points of LDS theology, in effect teaching a mass audience about early Mormonism and humanizing Joseph Smith into a fictional hero.

In the *Alvin Maker* series, Orson Scott Card creates a fantastic parallel America that never became the United States we know, where George Washington is beheaded for

treason against the king, William Blake roams the countryside as a “Taleswapper,” and Benjamin Franklin is known far and wide as the country’s greatest wizard. Within this framework, fans of Card can and do enjoy the novel without knowing anything of Mormonism. But just as one can interpret Mormon history in many ways, the *Alvin Maker* series makes a clear link to Mormonism. And as the narrator says, “Truth is, the story ain’t over yet, and I hope it never will be, so the most I can hope to do is set down the way it looks to this one fellow at this exact moment, and I can’t even promise you that tomorrow I won’t come to understand it much better than anything I’m writing now.”¹³³ Card perfectly encapsulates the difficulty in interpreting the Mormon story, but this world of fantasy allows him to expound on many theological tenets of his religion and present Joseph Smith to his audience through a completely new lens thus creating, as Eugene England notes, “a sophisticated contribution to Mormon thought.”¹³⁴

The main thrust of the series is Alvin’s quest to become a “Maker” and build the City of God, also known as City Beautiful, which clearly represents Nauvoo. A “Maker” is a parallel to a prophet. As with prophets, “there hadn’t been a Maker in the world in a thousand years or more....”¹³⁵ Alvin is set upon his path by the visit of “the Shining Man,” representing Moroni, who schools him to “Make all things whole.”¹³⁶ Alvin eventually sees a vision of a city where “nobody was hungry, and nobody was ignorant, and nobody had to do something just because somebody else made them do it.”¹³⁷ Just as in Stephenie Meyer’s work, though more literally here, Alvin takes a bite of fruit in a mystical place, and then “all he wanted now was to bring his family to the same tree, and let them eat; to bring everybody he ever knowed, and even strangers, too, and let them taste it. If they’d just taste it, Alvin figured, they’d know.” When asked what they would

know, Alvin replies, “Just know. Know everything. Everything that’s good.”¹³⁸ He develops a clear Mormon theological tenet, asking, “[W]asn’t that their natural right, to know the truth so as to be able to let the truth lead them to do good or evil, as they chose?”¹³⁹ Again, freedom of choice is key to the human experience, and the only way to get there is through the fall. This representation is one of the clearest battles between producers of Mormon-themed ideological popular culture. Christian evangelicals say they taste of the fruit of Mormonism and it is of Satan. Mormons argue that that same fruit is essential to God’s plan.

Another key piece of LDS theology that Card develops and presents to a mass audience is the idea of the gathering. Card argues that only by coming together and working towards a common goal—in this case, the building of the “City of God,” can people really make a difference. Imagining people as a hive working together, Alvin realizes that “people could be like atoms, too. Most of the time people were all disorganized, nobody knowing who anybody else was, nobody holding still long enough to trust or be trusted, just like [he] imagined atoms might have been before God taught them who they were and gave them work to do.” Alvin would build his people “together into something new, something strong, something as real as iron,” just as Joseph Smith did.¹⁴⁰ Shortly after this realization, Alvin baptizes his first follower, a young black boy being chased by slave hunters. In Card’s alternate reality, Alvin, as a Maker, can actually change the boy’s physical signature so the magically-enhanced slave trackers will never be able to find him. In a metaphor for the many demands the LDS Church makes on its followers, a character muses, “Was it worth it? To lose part of who he had been in order to live free? Perhaps this new self was better than the old.” The character realizes that, “In

a way, he lost some of himself...and therefore some of the choices he might have had in life. But in losing those, he gained so much more freedom, so much more power, that he was clear winner in the bargain.”¹⁴¹

Alvin’s wife-to-be, Margaret, a “torch” who can glimpse possible futures, sees all too clearly that Alvin, like Joseph, will die in a hail of gunfire in Carthage before his work is completed. Yet Alvin sees the bigger picture, and is content: “See, the city ain’t the crystal towers that I saw, the city’s the people inside it....”¹⁴² Alvin’s death is foreshadowed throughout the series, and as with Joseph Smith, Alvin’s wife foresees that “[I]t’s his death that saves [his friends]” after “a life of great accomplishments [where] the best things [he] make[s] will last for as many lifetimes as I can see.”¹⁴³ No clearer parallel can be drawn between the lives and deaths of Alvin Maker and Joseph Smith, and Card’s reimagining of Smith in a sense creates him as the literary hero of an important social movement.

Just as Joseph Smith is irrevocably tied into the Book of Mormon, Card uses the metaphor of a golden plow as a parallel to that link. In book three of the series, Alvin serves as an apprentice blacksmith (thus becoming Alvin Smith, another link to Joseph). For his masterpiece, he creates a golden plow that is “alive.” Alvin’s master wants him to use the plow to be “kings of the world together,” but Alvin simply wraps the plow in burlap and sets off as a journeyman.¹⁴⁴ While a plow may seem an odd metaphor for a book, the links to the Book of Mormon come to make sense. In book four, Alvin finds himself in trouble for allegedly seducing a young woman, a charge familiar enough to students of Joseph Smith. Alvin is innocent, but the lawyer Daniel Webster collects affidavits against him much as Philastus Hurlbut did against Joseph Smith. Alvin is

ultimately arrested for stealing the golden plow from his master, and the affidavits are to be used against him to show his poor character. To this point, it is unclear that the plow is going to serve as a metonym for the Book of Mormon, but then the judge orders three witnesses to verify its existence underneath the burlap. One of the witnesses named Marty hangs back just as Martin Harris did. Then the judge orders eight more witnesses to view the plow and testify about it in open court. While so many others wanted to see the plow, just as with the Book of Mormon, “That these eight had seen for them. It would have to be enough.”¹⁴⁵ In a rebuke to those who think the Book of Mormon is just nineteenth-century cultural commentary, when the judge asks Alvin if he would actually plow with his instrument, Alvin replies, “I can’t think why else I made it, if it ain’t for plowing. I mean, if I was making a bowl I got the shape wrong, don’t you think?”¹⁴⁶ The suggestion is that the Book of Mormon is thus a religious text that will be used to convert people to Mormonism much like a plow makes fallow soil fertile. Indeed, it becomes an instrument for the gathering. Alvin’s future wife, Margaret, muses, “[P]erhaps unwittingly all these others had also crossed sea or mountains or vast reaches of prairie and forest to find the place where the Maker Made his golden plow.”¹⁴⁷ Just as Joseph Smith was always linked to his famous book, Alvin is linked to his plow. And as for the eight witnesses, all of their futures “led to a crystal city by the banks of a river.”¹⁴⁸ In an answer to those critics who charge Mormonism with brainwashing, Margaret thinks, “[T]he plow opened up a door in their lives so they could enter into the future they most longed for. A place, a time...where they could be part of something larger than any of them were capable of creating on their own.”¹⁴⁹

Orson Scott Card also links Mormonism with the destiny and promise of America, an old narrative trope but one that still resonates with many people. As Alvin says, “I don’t know that my work could be done anywhere else [besides America]. If there’s any reason to my life at all, then there’s a reason I was born here and not in England or Russia or China or something.”¹⁵⁰ In Card’s alternate reality, the Puritan colony became its own country, but it is one where they failed to build the City of God. They instead succumb to fear and cast magical talents as tools of Satan, executing those who use what Alvin sees as gifts from God. The popular religion of the people is eschewed for rigid religious dogma, and civilization in Puritan country stagnates. In America, Alvin is free to learn everything about governing and building while simultaneously developing his magical powers so he can more effectively constitute his city, all in the name of God. In a commentary to those who would charge Joseph Smith with being a tool of the devil like so many of the evangelical works do, Card has Alvin Smith simply say, “[W]hatever knack I have came from God.”¹⁵¹ Just to be clear, Card also has Alvin identify himself explicitly as a Christian, and more explicitly an American Christian, with nationality making all the difference to who he is as a leader and a man.¹⁵²

This alternate America is also a place where Card can allow his version of Smith to pursue his most ambitious plans, wherein Smith’s best characteristics are thus magnified and his personal failings deemphasized. Alvin and his wife embark on a massive crusade to free the slaves of the Southern colonies, a plan reminiscent of Joseph Smith’s anti-slavery presidential platform. While advocating for freedom in New Orleans, malaria breaks out and Alvin heals many, just as it is reported Smith did in the swamps of Nauvoo. Alvin leads the thousands of slaves of New Orleans on an exodus across Lake

Pontchartrain that calls to mind Brigham Young's great trek, complete with comparisons to Moses, and they all wind up together in a swampland off the Mississippi River that will become the fictional Nauvoo. Just like the real city, Alvin manages to get a special charter to protect them from outside forces.

Here in Alvin's crystal city, Card furthers Mormon life and theology. The women bond together and form a parallel to the Relief Society. The citizens donate a few hours of their week to building what they call the tabernacle, but which represents the temples of Mormonism. And in the tabernacle, just as in the temples today, there is no priest, or rather everyone is a priest, and each man and woman and child thus has a place to "go inside and find out where [God] live[s] in our heart."¹⁵³ Fantasy has essentially become religious history, but a carefully filtered one that highlights only the best aspects of the story of Joseph Smith.

As much as Alvin accomplishes, the final piece of theology Card develops is the most central Mormon tenet of all. Alvin says to his wife, "I will love you forever. The family we make together, that will be our best Making."¹⁵⁴ Just as with Meyer's vampires, the family is eternal in Card's world. And each citizen of the City of God is doing the same thing, and each family and marriage and house helps Alvin realize "that all those somethings, they add up to everything...."¹⁵⁵ In the end of the sixth book, which is as of this writing the most recent, Alvin stands with his baby and his brother Measure, who represents Hyrum, and says in a speech very reminiscent of Joseph Smith, "I didn't choose this place. I didn't choose my life, or the powers I have, or even most of the things that have happened to me. But for all the things that have been forced on me, I'm still a free man. And you know why? Because I choose them anyway. What was forced on me, I

choose just the same.”¹⁵⁶ In Orson Scott Card’s fictional world, Mormon theology is the best way to live, but just as in the real world, each person has the freedom to choose or reject it. As Joseph Smith once said, human agency is “that free independence of mind which heaven has so graciously bestowed upon the human family as one of its choicest gifts.”¹⁵⁷ Authors such as Meyer and Card forcefully and repeatedly emphasize that point in their fiction.

The importance of the “free independence of mind” is also developed in Glenn Beck’s *The Christmas Sweater* (2008). Beck is the popular Fox News talk show host both seen on his television show and heard on his radio program. He is continually in the public eye, and he is also Mormon, a fact that he rarely mentions. He neither overtly hides nor actively promotes his chosen faith, presumably because of his large evangelical Christian audience that might have an issue with his beliefs. In *The Christmas Sweater*, Beck presents, in much the same way as Meyer and Card, a seemingly generic version of faith that is actually deeply Mormon. In so doing, he puts forth a representation of Mormonism to his core audience that is often suspicious of the Saints, and in that respect, Beck’s reach and influence could ultimately bridge the divide that sometimes exists between evangelical Christians and Mormons.

Family is at the heart of *The Christmas Sweater*, thus underscoring that preeminent Mormon value. The narration proceeds in the first person through the character of a young boy named Eddie, a fictionalized version of Beck’s younger self. Throughout the story, Eddie is constantly admonished to rely on family, and never the government. At his father’s bakery, those who use food stamps are pitied, or even scorned when they are perceived to be able to work but take food stamps anyway. Eddie’s father

tells the impressionable boy and the audience about one customer who “can work, but...chooses not to. Anybody who can earn money has no business taking it from others.”¹⁵⁸ Even if Eddie’s family actually needed government assistance, the father counsels never taking it. That message is heeded when Eddie’s father dies. Eddie’s mother struggles to make ends meet, but she feels that “a hand-up [is] the same as a hand-out,” so Eddie learns, after initial resistance to the idea, that happiness does not come from material goods.¹⁵⁹ Beck thus connects basic Mormon values to core right wing political values.

The Mormon connections in *The Christmas Sweater* are apparent for those who know the faith, but are cloaked in such a way that those not familiar with Mormonism would only pick up on the Christian overtones. The family follows a generic version of Catholicism, but the popular Mormon refrain “All is well” is echoed at several points in the book.¹⁶⁰ Reflecting the Mormon belief that God wants humans to be happy, several characters reaffirm the mystical old man at the heart of the book who says, “You know people are meant to be happy, Eddie....”¹⁶¹ This man, called Russell, is intriguing because he could easily be interpreted as Jesus, but anyone with a knowledge of Mormon folklore would instantly recognize him as one of the three Nephites. In Mormon folklore, the three Nephites are the last remnant of the Nephite tribe and will walk the Earth until the Second Coming. They are usually described as older men, dirty travelers who seek shelter in tests of generosity and often impart sage wisdom.¹⁶² In Beck’s story, Russell is depicted as a dirt-caked older man—a point Beck repeatedly emphasizes. Yet, like the Nephites, there is evidence of something more. Beck writes, “[Russell] gave off a warmth that made me feel comfortable and secure. He had all the dirt of every farm on earth on

him—yet he felt clean, peaceful.”¹⁶³ His beard was “naturally white,” and when Eddie finally takes to heart the lesson that freedom of choice leads to happiness, Russell becomes “bright and ageless” with “a whiteness that [Eddie] had never seen before.”¹⁶⁴

The man disappears as mysteriously as he came, and no one else ever sees him.

Importantly, Beck leaves the door open for audience interpretation in an afterword, noting that he knows who Russell was to him, but “who he is *to you* is something that only you can decide.”¹⁶⁵

Beck emphasizes free agency, family, and self-reliance, all foundational Latter-day Saint values. The broad strokes could reflect many religious beliefs as well as an ideology of American exceptionalism, but the details are clearly Mormon. In the dense acknowledgements, he thanks his “home ward” as well as LDS president Thomas Monson without mentioning anything about Mormonism. He also thanks his LDS friend Pat Gray who gave him “faith.”¹⁶⁶ The subtle approach is also clearly working. Whereas Thomas Monson was one of the most admired men in 2008, he has disappeared from the list in recent years. Beck, however, has been in the top ten for the past two years.¹⁶⁷

Authors such as Beck, Card, and Meyer are all members of the LDS Church and are all successful authors. Their works portray Mormonism in a favorable light and form compelling and potent counter-narratives to those texts that attack the faith. By using symbolism to address the LDS faith, they, much like C. S. Lewis, popularize religion and create a space for their core beliefs and values in mass culture. This point clearly shows yet another way in which Mormonism can be imagined.

* * * * *

The Mormon image has become nearly as fragmented as so much of modern life. The historical misrepresentations, the autobiographies, and the more subtle pro-Mormon views all mix together with thousands of other representations to shape our understanding of the Mormon faith. In the process, they also tell us a great deal about America. With favorable and unfavorable ratings of Mormonism evenly split according to national polls, it is more important than ever to be able to view LDS representations with a critical eye. The role of the critic in this case is to recognize the astonishing amount of power representations have to affect the public's understanding of institutions, and how tensions within representations impact identity and reveal cultural beliefs and values. How we imagine something informs how we relate to it, and those imaginings also, of course, provide a window into the stresses and strains of our culture. While perhaps no representation of the complicated religion and lifestyle known as Mormonism can ever really be "true," we can recognize the naturalizing power of these social constructions and analyze what they tell us about American culture. As we move into the second decade of the twenty-first century, Mormonism continues to play a large role in American life, and positive, negative, and nuanced representations continue to impact Mormonism and provide a window into current American trends. Through insights of how people imagine the Mormon community in representations such as those considered in this chapter, we come to a greater understanding of the multifaceted role Mormonism plays in American civic and religious life.

Conclusion

There always remains around any final meaning other possible meanings, and any meaning can always be interpreted.

–Roland Barthes

In June of 1890, LDS member Benjamin F. Johnson published an open letter to the editor of the *Arizona Republican* asking for space “for a few plain facts with common sense scripture and reason in answer to your ‘Mormonism as an Issue.’”¹ According to Johnson, the *Republican* had carried the story of the infamous Wham robbery, reporting that the thieves were Mormon. Johnson denied that this was the case, although they were at the very least former Mormons, one being, in a connection that must have dismayed the Saints, the brother of Ann Eliza Young. Johnson noted that even if they were Mormon, it should not be a reflection on the church. He then ticked off offenses committed by Methodists, Catholics, and others, and pointed out that no one holds those religious traditions responsible for the acts of its individuals.²

While Johnson’s point is oversimplified, it is true that “Mormon” has become an adjective in a way that Methodist, Baptist, and Catholic usually no longer are. Religious identity continues to be deeply intertwined with American identity, but it generally maintains the ability to become invisible in a way Mormonism does not. And it must be said that part of that identification can be placed at the doorstep of the Saints themselves. They have created an imagined community that stresses their Mormonism over almost every other identity. This dissertation has shown how the often conflicted representations of the Saints are at times refined and at times obscured through the process of palimpsest and the adaptation of cultural producers to different cultural concerns. Arguably, much of the future of Mormon identity, especially as it is viewed through a non-LDS lens, rests on

the future of Mormon representation, and there are several current trends which are worth noting.

Cultural and Religious Adaptation

The current cultural landscape that features representations of Mormonism looks very similar to the nineteenth century in some popular culture texts such as *Under the Banner of Heaven* (2004), but it has changed in complicated ways. Both Mormonism and cultural representations of Mormonism have evolved. Even stock anti-Mormon representations such as those found in the film *September Dawn* (2007) are more mirrors of their own times than direct critiques of modern-day Saints. While *September Dawn* is showcasing Danites and the Mountain Meadows Massacre, it is really using a distortion of that event to examine religious terrorism and the destruction of the World Trade Center. The old stories about Mormonism *are* much the same, but they are continuously being put to new uses. While that is no doubt frustrating to the Mormon Church, it is *not* the same as those nineteenth-century novels that called for the complete eradication of Mormonism, or even those early-twentieth-century films that attacked the church while it was still negotiating a cautious *détente* with the rest of the nation. Mormonism's place in society is more secure than ever, so while it is often still represented as the Other, it has deep resources to produce counter-representations.

In addition to mass culture representations of Mormonism changing, the church has evolved as well. Benjamin Johnson was writing in June of 1890, mere months before Wilford Woodruff would release the manifesto that would change the course of the Saints' story in America forever. Johnson wrote that church members would be waiting for "evolutions in the near future, through which the now despised principles of our

religion will be the solar centre of light and life.”³ He also noted the significance of the doctrine of “Survival of the Fittest” to religion. Johnson was indicating that the Saints’ ability to adapt to their surroundings would give them an edge in the future. Plural marriage never became the “solar centre” of society, but he was right about the Saints’ adaptive abilities.

An example of a manifestation of that adaptation can be found in Mitt Romney’s presidential bid of 2008. Romney is in some ways a fellow traveler with the likes of Stephenie Meyer, Orson Scott Card, and Glenn Beck, in that he is proud of his Mormon heritage, but tends to downplay it in favor of more general declarations of faith. He is, like them, a very public Mormon figure who represents his beliefs and values in his speeches and actions. The link between Mormonism and politics has been fraught with tension since the church’s beginning, coming to a head with the dismissal of B. H. Roberts from the House of Representatives and the contentious seating of Reed Smoot in the Senate. Since that time, people have for the most part accepted the role of Mormons in public life—at least until Mitt Romney’s father, George, ran for the Republican presidential nomination in 1967. In fact, the elder Romney’s run instigated the first Gallup Poll about Mormons. It asked if people would vote for a presidential candidate who happened to be Mormon, and 1 in 4 people said that they would not. That number had actually gone *up* by three percentage points by the time Mitt Romney was ready to run for the presidential nomination. In a 2007 Gallup Poll, 95% of people said that they would vote for a Catholic presidential candidate, 94% for a Jewish candidate, but only 72% for a Mormon. Of religious choices listed, only “atheist” scored lower at 45%, and that represented an increase of a factor of three as opposed to the slight decline in those

who would vote for a Mormon.⁴ Facing these numbers, Mitt Romney felt that he had to make a statement that clarified his beliefs and values, and on December 6, 2007, he stepped in front of television cameras at the George Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas, and delivered a speech he called “Faith in America,” a speech that adroitly highlights Mormonism’s place in the American cultural tableaux.

Romney’s speech was designed to clear up voter doubts about his potential allegiance to the Mormon Church, and was much compared to John F. Kennedy’s 1960 speech on his Catholicism. However, where Kennedy mentioned the word “Catholic” no fewer than twenty times, Romney only referenced “Mormon” once. Much like Meyer, Card, and Beck, he let an explication of his values do the talking, but unlike them, he generally omitted Mormon theology and developed the theme of a civil American religion shared by all. He mentioned the word “America” or a variation thereof thirty-one times, not including the title of his speech; Kennedy stated the word twelve times. Yet the other themes of Romney’s speech were slightly muddled, in that he was developing a rationale for religious liberty wherein religion should not matter while at the same time acknowledging by the very necessity of his speech that religion matters. Arguing that “freedom and religion endure together, or perish alone,” Romney reminded voters—particularly the evangelical wing of the Republican Party—about “our grand tradition of religious tolerance and liberty.”⁵ At the time of the speech, he was in a tight race against Christian evangelical Republican Mike Huckabee in Iowa, and he wanted to assure his audience that he was ready to concede that there are “questions regarding an aspiring candidate’s religion that are appropriate.” He argued that his church would have no effect on his policy decisions, but at the same time he makes it clear he will not distance himself

from Mormonism: “I believe in my Mormon faith and I endeavor to live by it.” He quickly followed this by saying, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God and the savior of mankind.” The speech is rather dexterous in this regard. He is simultaneously trying to appease critics like Sonia Johnson who would argue that he would simply be a puppet for Mormon leaders and those like Ed Decker who would not vote for him because he is, in Decker’s view, not Christian.

Indeed, the idea of a Mormon president had been dreaded by Decker and his ilk for years. In *The God Makers* (1984), Decker and Dave Hunt write, “While the election of a Mormon U. S. President seems unlikely, it is highly probable under the present swing toward conventional morality and conservatism that a Mormon could one day become a Republican Vice-Presidential nominee,” and then, in their estimation, essentially take over the United States.⁶ Evangelicals like Decker and Hunt comprise a significant part of the Republican base; Romney sought to reassure potential voters such as these. To appease those critical of his Mormon heritage, Romney posited a more civil religion that all denominations could share in, a “great moral inheritance we hold in common.” Romney switched the discourse by arguing that the most important question was not a candidate’s faith, but whether he shared the same American values that make us “a nation ‘under God.’”

The one Mormon doctrine that Romney did develop was the importance of family—very safe territory given his audience and a vaunted identity marker for Mormonism. Citing the importance of his own family in his life, he also called for people to remember that we are all part of a human family, and that, “These American values, this great moral heritage, is shared and lived in my religion as it is in yours.” He pitted

“us” against those who practice “violent jihad,” and chided that anyone who cannot be committed to their faith and at the same time appreciate another’s (though presumably not Islam) is no better than the intolerant European nations of old. Thus, in the final analysis, Romney’s speech is a fine piece of rhetoric, which if evangelical Christians followed to its logical conclusions, would give them little choice but to respect Romney for his religious convictions and his commitment to family values. While that did not happen for the most part, it was another very visible appearance of Mormonism in the public square and an example of how adherents of the faith adapt to American culture, complete with newsmagazine covers putting forth the handsome, clean-cut Romney as the very face of the Mormon religion.

Romney’s speech continues to carry a great deal of relevance as speculation increases that he will make a bid for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination. Former Utah governor and Mormon Jon Huntsman, Jr., is also being mentioned as a potential candidate. The election of a Mormon president is in many ways one of the last cultural hurdles facing Mormonism. They have excelled in all areas of life through their long process of adaptation. But there were also unintended consequences as the Mormons adapted themselves to their host society. Biologist David Sloan Wilson has subjected religion to evolutionary mechanisms, concluding that “we should think of religious groups as rapidly evolving entities adapting to their current environments.”⁷ Yet society evolves as well. And one of the more surprising developments in the history of representations of Mormonism is the shifting view of polygamy within popular culture, a view that will impact not only how Americans think about Mormonism, but arguably how they view alternative lifestyles as well.

The New Face of Polygamy

Ever since word leaked that Joseph Smith was practicing plural marriage, the institution has been vilified. Reactions to polygamists as “white slavers” over the decades has revealed a great deal about the way Americans think about sex in particular and domestic relations in general. While polygamy is still an extremely controversial issue that excites fervent passion from its harshest critics, in recent years the face of modern polygamy has undergone a drastic shift with implications for the mainstream LDS Church and for America as a whole. For years, a man with a half-beard and manic eyes was the typical plural marriage patriarch and a series of cowering or even invisible women were the typical plural wives. That depiction is slowly being augmented. The old bearded man can still be found within popular culture to be sure, but a new figure is being drawn onto the palimpsest that reflects a shift in the ways in which Americans view plural marriage and how people understand the different branches of Mormonism.

The fictional character Bill Henrickson most visibly represents recent shifts in depictions of polygamists. Bill is the lead on HBO’s popular series *Big Love* (2006), which as of this writing is about to enter its fifth and final season. He is played by the handsome, charismatic, and mainstream Hollywood actor Bill Paxton. The fictional Bill and his three wives live not on a compound out in the desert, but in Sandy, Utah, a suburb of Salt Lake City. Bill does come from one of those compounds, the fictional Juniper Creek settlement, where his father-in-law Roman Grant heads up the United Effort Brotherhood and serves as the much more common representation of a polygamist. Yet Bill looks every inch a mainstream Mormon with his clean-cut image and healthy lifestyle. While one of his wives, the daughter of Roman, dresses in a stereotypically

Fundamentalist Latter-day Saint (FLDS) manner with her long pioneer dresses, the other two women are modern in every sense of the word. And that presents a problem of representation for the mainstream church. After the very first episode of *Big Love*, in accordance with an agreement with the mainstream Mormon Church, the producers of the show displayed a disclaimer: “The Mormon Church officially banned the practice of polygamy in 1890.” Yet the show does often not draw a clear distinction between the Henricksons and other Mormons, and indeed, often makes Mormonism look intolerant of any viewpoints that brook their own.

One of the more consequential decisions of the show is the way in which it uses sex to explore human nature in a familiar context within polygamy. Several of the episodes open with Bill having sex with one of his wives, and throughout much of the early part of the series he is on Viagra. While the very first episode of *Big Love* cheaply implies the polygamy as lust motif by having Bill leave money on the table for a woman he had just had sex with, who we later learn to be his wife, ultimately the Viagra comes to represent in many ways his impotence within society. Bill is trapped between a conventional life represented by the non-polygamous Mormon community that quite literally surrounds him and the clannish Juniper Creek community where his parents and brother reside, and where he and his second wife hail from. The sex itself comes to be an expression of deep love. When courting a potential fourth wife, he tells Margie, his third wife who has come to love the woman, that he cannot marry the woman because he is just experiencing lust.⁸ Bill and his first wife, Barb, start an “affair” where they meet up to have sex outside of the normal rotation of wives, but eventually end it because they find it morally wrong.⁹ Bill and his family are presented as exemplary suburban Americans,

while many of the mainstream Mormons in the show are depicted as too-rigid ideologues, and the Juniper Creek residents are usually portrayed as throwbacks to another era. As the worst example of the FLDS, Roman, the elderly prophet of Juniper Creek, has several wives, including young teenagers.

Indeed, much as Mormons are often referred to as exemplary Americans, Bill is referred to in one episode as “the quintessential embodiment of the American dream...”¹⁰ The character who says that line thinks Bill is mainstream LDS, but his statement remains true. In the fragmented twenty-first century, Bill has a home in the suburbs, a thriving business, and beautiful children. He just happens to have three wives. Throughout the series Bill is shown as a kind and caring man, and the message seems to be that while, as *Angels in America* emphasized so elegantly, change is unbelievably hard, the personal choices that someone makes in the privacy of his or her own home should not carry punishment. The mere fact of living often carries punishment enough as the family undergoes its triumphs and tragedies, including jealousy among the wives and the impact of a polygamous lifestyle on the children, particularly the older ones who feel pressured to choose their family or mainstream society.

The idea of the ultimate sanctity and personal nature of lifestyle choices was underscored even more as the show has developed the character of Albert Grant, Roman’s son. With the death of Roman, “Alby” becomes the putative new prophet—one who happens to be gay. He desperately tries to suppress his urges, but ultimately gives in when he meets a mainstream LDS man who is also gay. Their love affair underscores the recent battle between the church and proponents of gay marriage.¹¹ Again, the show seems to be indicating that sex is a private act and should be respected by all institutions.

While the show had generally kept its distance from linking itself to mainstream Mormonism, the third season marked an important change that shows how the past is a contested arena that heavily influences identity in the present. In one episode, Bill and his family take a road trip across the country to visit sites important to LDS history, ultimately ending up at the Hill Cumorah Pageant in New York, which commemorates Joseph Smith finding the golden plates on that hill. The trip was nothing less than a disaster for the family, but along the way they challenged a mainstream LDS man about Joseph Smith's polygamous past and buried a time capsule on Cumorah.¹² The message is clear: the past of the LDS Church cannot be owned by just the mainstream church. The various branches of Mormonism have a shared history open to interpretation, but in the present, the various groups laying claim to that past *are* different. The show underscored this difference by showing Barb participate in the LDS temple ceremony just before excommunication. While not an active member, she got a "temple recommend" through her estranged mother, and the scene, while in some ways disrespectful in that it divulged sacred temple rites, was a powerful statement about how the LDS Church does view its theology of eternal families—a theology it shares with offshoot Mormon branches. But by showing Barb excommunicated soon after, the show seems to suggest that while the mainstream church has lost itself in a pursuit of power and acceptance, it should not be linked to polygamy.¹³

This theme of clearly delineating the different Mormon branches was nicely summed up in an exchange during season two between Bill and an ATF agent who was trying to apprehend a band of violent polygamists. Bill was a cooperating witness, but the agent gave him a shrewd look and asked him how many wives he had. Bill told her that

he was not like those other polygamists. She retorted, “Just because you drive a nice car and live in Sandy doesn’t mean you’re any different than any of them in my eyes. And where I come from you’re all the same—Mormons, LDS, polygamists. You can’t just wrap it up in God and make it okay.” Bill looked at her levelly and asked what religion she was raised in. She snapped, “It’s none of your business.” Bill softly but firmly replied, “Exactly.”¹⁴

The character of Bill found a real life counterpart in the personage of Kody Brown. In 2010, the network TLC aired the reality show *Sister Wives*, about a Utah man and his three wives, a potential fourth wife he is dating, and all of their children. The show parallels *Big Love* in many ways; indeed, one of the show’s advertisements boasted that *Access Hollywood* had labeled the show “A real life ‘Big Love,’” but one striking way it differs from the fictional show is in its utter banality. Kody has married three age-appropriate women, and the potential fourth wife is a divorced woman with three children. His lifestyle mirrors that of many nineteenth-century Saints who married widows and orphans. Also, Kody is not a forbidding patriarch, but a playful man who tosses around phrases like, “I know you are but what am I,” and is usually deferential to his wives. The show has been adapted to the typical reality show format, and the wives, the girlfriend, and Kody are often featured on a couch discussing their feelings. They are trying to represent themselves as completely ordinary people with the same hopes and dreams as anyone else. One wife argues, “Even though Kody and I are in a polygamous relationship, we can live happily ever after too.” And as Kody says in the introduction to the show, “I’m a polygamist, but we’re not the polygamists you think you know.” Indeed, he probably unintentionally uses the language of gay liberation by saying that they are

“coming out” as polygamists, while paradoxically asking to be left alone as he allows cameras into their living room.

This new emphasis on positive representations of polygamists is not just confined to suburbia, either. After the initial sympathy generated over the Short Creek raids in 1953, Americans largely adopted a turn-a-blind-eye policy to the compounds, a sort of modified don't ask-don't tell. Yet polygamous leaders such as Warren Jeffs kept breaking the law in egregious ways, forcing the hands of authorities, and in 2008, cameras once again turned their lenses on the seemingly strange world of the FLDS as the authorities raided the Yearning for Zion ranch in Texas. While the women and children came off as highly sympathetic, several of the male leaders were branded as child rapists through their alleged practice of marrying teen girls. In an effort to counter this view of polygamy, the FLDS leaders invited *National Geographic* into their community and the result was a February 2010 cover story that forms another discursive link with these twenty-first-century representations of polygamists.

The author of the story says that to visit the FLDS communities of Hildale, Utah, and Colorado City, Arizona, is to come away with a “nuanced view.”¹⁵ The article is critical of Jeffs and other leaders behind bars, but extremely sympathetic to others in the community. And just as in the *Life* cover story of mainstream Mormons in the 1950s, the photographs accompanying the *National Geographic* story convey a great deal.¹⁶ Shot by Stephanie Sinclair over the course of a little over a year, they bring to mind the rustic world longed for by Ansel Adams and Dorothea Lange; indeed, the Adams-Lange idealized world of Gunlock, Utah, is only seventy miles away from Hildale. In Sinclair's photographs, the community of the fundamentalist Mormons is shown to be fun-loving,

hard-working, and family-oriented, a very powerful message for the economically uncertain world of 2010. The photograph on the cover shows a smiling, grandfatherly man surrounded by grinning women and children. The caption reads: “One Man, Five Wives, 46 Children.” It is fundamentally different from the usual scowling photos of polygamous patriarchs and their miserable-looking wives. Another photograph shows a man leaving a funeral with his six wives, their arms all interlocking in love and support.¹⁷ Another shows a scene of domestic bliss with children playing outside of a modern-looking brick house as adults look on.¹⁸ In the most visually arresting photograph, four children have swung a homemade swing completely parallel to the ground. Sinclair has caught them at the apex of their ride, their faces showing wonder. Long shadows of adults can be seen in the foreground. The message of the photograph when placed in context with the article and other visuals seems to suggest that children—in particular young girls—are in no way endangered by plural marriage on these compounds.¹⁹ The article speaks of a “wholesome environment” where children are free of many of the trappings of modernity such as junk food.²⁰

Another photograph suggests a similar motif as three sisters in a pond support their other sister as she reaches for an out-of-frame cable trolley with all of her might. She is standing on her sister’s shoulders as the other sisters support her for balance. A man in the background is taking a picture, but he is no lecher—he is their father.²¹ In fact, women occupy an empowered place within the community according to the article, as men must be worthy to marry in a community where multiple women marry one man. One photograph shows an FLDS elder being taken away by the police, which is a more familiar view of polygamous men, but in the context of the article it suggests that law and

order do reign on the compounds, and those who break the law pay for it with their freedom.²² Those who remain are good, law-abiding people.

The text accompanying the photographs is the final piece that ties the *National Geographic* profile to that *Life* magazine profile half a century before. The captions tell the reader that the FLDS members all have cell phones, cars, and computers, and in fact are highly computer literate.²³ But none of those items are seen in the pictures. The community has managed to find an enviable balance between technology and humanity, and in their world, the human touch is real, near, and tangible. This idea was reinforced in a 2010 *National Geographic* documentary on an offshoot independent polygamous community in Bountiful, Canada. They had broken away from the group commonly known as the FLDS, thus marking another layer of distinction from the mainstream Mormon Church. Winston Blackmore, the group's leader, is depicted as an ordinary man who happens to have more than twenty wives and over one-hundred children.

Brady Udall's bestselling novel, *The Lonely Polygamist* (2010), also made a contribution to this new way of understanding fundamentalist Mormons. Its protagonist, the hapless polygamist Golden Richards, can best be described as Kody Brown on a compound. In the FLDS community where Golden lives, women are respected and loved, and as suggested by the *National Geographic* story, wield a surprising amount of power. Golden does not marry teenagers, and while he is portrayed as a lackluster father and husband, it has very little to do with his lifestyle, and more to do with his emotional alienation after the death of a beloved child.

While mainstream Mormons may bemoan these portrayals as unfair links to their religion, this new trend in representation actually has a great deal of significance for the

mainstream church and for America as a whole. As polygamists are portrayed with greater sympathy in works that are reaching larger sections of the population, the distinction between the LDS, the FLDS, and independent groups is beginning to come into focus for many who were previously uneducated on the subject. While the discursive link between the mainstream Mormons and polygamy remains high, it was mainly representations that made it so. New representations that clarify the doctrinal differences between the LDS and FLDS will put a new layer upon the palimpsest and help people distinguish between the two.²⁴ Kody Brown tells viewers that there is a “big difference” between his religion and mainstream Mormons. The *National Geographic* article underscores that the FLDS is a “polygamous offshoot of the Mormon Church” whose founding members were “cast out of the LDS.”²⁵ Udall makes the distinction between them clear, writing, “The Mormons—who had abandoned the Principle [of plural marriage] a hundred years ago...had many things the fundamentalists did not,” including grandiose temples and millions of members.²⁶ Udall also goes as far as to say that the Mormons were “suspicious, even openly antagonistic” towards the FLDS.²⁷ Whereas usually in anti-LDS works the distinction between the Mormons and the FLDS is buried, or even omitted, David Ebershoff has his main character in *The 19th Wife* (2008), who comes from a polygamous background, say, “I should tell you right off we weren’t Mormons.”²⁸

While the old understanding linking all Mormons to polygamy will still show through, more and more people will become educated about modern polygamy and how it is a different entity than mainstream Mormonism. They share a history and some of the same holy texts, but their doctrinal differences are so great that polygamy warrants

immediate excommunication from the mainstream church, and on the other hand, those who wish to practice the early teachings of Mormonism often leave the mainstream body for the fundamentalist enclaves. On a separate note, the greater transparency being developed in the polygamous world also means that as more and more people discuss polygamy, this opens the door for new discourses about sexuality and domestic arrangements in America to appear, and those polygamous compounds that do practice abuse are more likely to be exposed.

The Future of Representations of Mormonism

Modern representations of Mormonism evince a deeply intertextual map of conflict, ambiguity, and tension that continues to engage with the broader surrounding culture. Past representations of the Mormons have seeped into the national consciousness and continue to be reinforced in mass culture. The embodiment of this tension was captured in the popular 2007 PBS documentary about the Mormons. While the documentary categorized the Saints as “the embodiment of the mainstream” and referred to them as a “very American religion,” it also featured controversial conflicting points on polygamy and the violence of the Mormon past.²⁹ In the 2005 documentary *American Mormon*, two LDS men went cross-country with a camera and a microphone to ask people about their understanding of Mormonism and its people (without mentioning that they were Mormons until after the interview). While almost everyone mentioned polygamy, it is also true that almost everyone also mentioned their perceived kindness, morality, and familial devotion. In a similar vein, a 2007 Gallup Poll that asked what people thought of when they thought of Mormonism, polygamy came in first, but “good people, kind, caring, strong morals” came in third after the more neutral “Salt Lake

City.”³⁰ In an episode of the television show *South Park* (1997), the irreverent creation by Matt Parker and Trey Stone that often skewers various religious traditions among almost every other imaginable social concern, a new Mormon family moves to the titular town of South Park, Colorado. All of the schoolboys want to beat up their new LDS classmate because he is so knowledgeable and nice. The show manages to portray the story of Joseph Smith accurately but mockingly, with a male chorus that charges those who would believe the tale of Joseph and his golden plates as “dumb.” Yet the young Mormon gets the last word. He tells the other boys who have shunned him,

Maybe us Mormons do believe in crazy stories that make absolutely no sense. And maybe Joseph Smith did make it all up. But I have a great life, and a great family. And I have the Book of Mormon to thank for that. The truth is, I don't care if Joseph Smith made it all up, because what the church teaches now is loving your family and being nice and helping people. And even though people in this town might think that's stupid, I still choose to believe in it.³¹

While the Mormons might bristle at the “crazy stories” barb, there are worse things than being charged with teaching a love of family and altruism, a cultural representation that continues to form an important positive identification of Mormons alongside the representations emphasizing their perceived peculiarities. In other words, cultural representations of Mormonism are still fraught with tension and continue to reveal the anxieties and concerns of modern American life.

As Mormonism becomes a global religion, its representations will also take on a more transnational flair. While many Mormons still reside in Utah, there are now more Saints outside of the United States than inside of the country.³² And with thousands of missionaries traversing the globe, that number will only grow. Already the creators of *South Park* are finishing up a Broadway musical about Mormon life to premiere in March

2011. The plot involves two missionaries as they try to gain converts in Africa. As temples continue to be erected across the world, the religion will gain stakes that will open leadership to a deep cross-section of the global community, and thus more diversity. Aihwa Ong points out that missionaries also convert new immigrants in the United States by offering “reassurance and structure” in a time of “unsettling social change” all the while negotiating a troubled history of “racial domination.”³³ With the priesthood finally opened to black men in 1978, there is an opportunity for growth and commentary there as well. Furthermore, as *The Economist* points out, with the fact that there are many Latin American Mormons, the church leadership’s stance on immigration policy is being heavily scrutinized.³⁴

But while representations, especially negative ones, have always been a source of concern for the LDS Church, it is now well established enough that it no longer needs to worry about persecution. As a miffed Ed Decker noted in *The God Makers*, the Mormon leadership did not even bother to respond to his charges.³⁵ The 2002 Olympics painted the Saints in a very favorable light, and as the twenty-first century progresses, while representations will always have a powerful effect on how we imagine the Mormons, the Saints have a great deal of cultural power to shape those representations.³⁶ This dissertation has clearly shown the ways in which the tension seen in pro- and anti-Mormon representations has shaped people’s perceptions of the Latter-day Saints and revealed pressing undercurrents in American society. Cultural representations are powerful tools that have the ability to reflect, shape, or even create cultural understanding. By examining these representations through an interdisciplinary lens we can clearly see their connections and also underscore how the tensions between them

influence the success of the Mormons and reveal overt and more subtle trends in American society.

* * * * *

The story of Mormonism is a story deeply connected to the American cultural landscape; indeed, the two are intricately intertwined. Joseph Smith intervened in a popular dialogue about the origin of Native Americans. Novelists of the nineteenth century noted the popular appeal of stories about polygamy and wrote accordingly. Zane Grey refashioned those narratives into a mythological West that fostered new dialogue about Mormonism. Later novelists and filmmakers focused on the pioneer aspects of the Saints. And to complete the circle, *South Park* featured a cartoon Joseph Smith talking to the Native American angel Moroni. Each layer is written on top of the other layers, but rarely is anything completely erased. There are countless representations of Mormonism to examine, but the ones in this present work form the clearest examples of how Mormons have been perceived within American culture. Elucidating the complex interdependency between Mormonism and popular culture teaches us a great deal about how religious identities, values, and communities are formed, understood, and maintained, and how popular culture can actually be a conduit for not only helping people imagine and understand a religion, but also helping that religion thrive. An interdisciplinary analysis of how all of the complicated moving parts of the Mormon experience in America fit together is essential to fully understanding that history.

The story of Mormonism is a narrative that has been told countless times in diverse media. Each new telling adds a layer to the palimpsest and a new way of seeing the Saints. Mormons themselves add to those representations, and in fact, the folk aspects

of Mormonism that contribute to their identity and the way in which non-Mormons view them are vast: the great trek and the grasshoppers of the nineteenth century reach into the twenty-first to provide meaning to the Latter-day Saints. It is the Mormon story. But it is also part of the American story. And with each passing year, it is becoming part of the world story. As Mormonism continues to grow, cultural representations will continue to proliferate as well, reflecting not only LDS beliefs and values, but also transnational hopes, fears, and identities.

Endnotes

Introduction Notes

¹ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the official and preferred name of what is popularly often called the Mormon Church. “Mormon” is a nickname for the church and its members, and they are also referred to as Latter-day Saints (LDS) and the Saints. While the church itself prefers people to refer to it by its full official name, or the Church of Jesus Christ, or simply the Church, for variety and to reflect the usage and understanding of the broader culture, in this dissertation I will use the official name as well as the nickname of the church.

² See Jeremy R. Ricketts, “Tennessee’s 1884 ‘Mormon Massacre’ and the Cane Creek Vigilante Movement,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2008), 208-235.

³ For a lucid overview of the story of early Mormonism, see Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

⁴ Ricketts, “Tennessee’s 1884 ‘Mormon Massacre’ and the Cane Creek Vigilante Movement.”

⁵ For detailed newspaper reaction, see *ibid.*, 228.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁷ The murdered elders had been removed to Utah and given martyrs’ burials. The two converts who were murdered remain in that small graveyard to this day.

⁸ For an overview of the early persecutions of the Mormons, see Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 44-64.

⁹ Thomas F. O’Dea, *The Mormons* (1957; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

¹⁰ For contemporary scholarly reflection on O’Dea, see Cardell K. Jacobson, John P. Hoffman, and Tim B. Heaton eds., *Revisiting Thomas F. O’Dea’s The Mormons: Contemporary Perspectives* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008).

¹¹ Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹² Armand Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 8.

¹³ “Americans View of the Mormon Religion.” <http://www.gallup.com/poll/26758/Americans-Views-Mormon-Religion.aspx>. (accessed December 14, 2010).

¹⁴ <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/4809/mormon.html>. (accessed February 7, 2008).

¹⁵ This information was accessed February 15, 2008.

¹⁶ Stephan Thernstrom, ed. *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

¹⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983; repr., London: Verso, 2006).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹ Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn’t* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 5.

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957), 129.

²¹ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics* (London: Routledge, 2002), 157.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 12.

²⁴ Leon Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 260.

²⁵ Dorothea Lange, Ansel Adams, and Daniel Dixon. “Three Mormon Towns.” *Life*, September 6, 1954, 91.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ See Appendix A.

²⁸ Lange, Adams, and Dixon, “Three Mormon Towns,” 92-93.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 94-97.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

³² *Ibid.*

Chapter 1 Notes

- ¹ “Mormonism,” *Frederick Town Herald* October 22, 1831.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 149.
- ⁴ Charles Lippy, *Being Religious, American Style: A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 10.
- ⁵ Gordon Wood, “Evangelical America and Early Mormonism,” *New York History* 61 (October 1980), 364.
- ⁶ R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 27.
- ⁷ Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Deseret Book Company, 1980), 1:6.
- ⁸ Shipps, *Mormonism*, 32.
- ⁹ Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:11-15.
- ¹⁰ Clyde R. Forsberg, Jr., “Retelling the Greatest Story Ever Told: Popular Literature as Scripture in Antebellum America,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1996), 86.
- ¹¹ The Second Great Awakening is recognized by historians as a wave of evangelical revivals that swept the United States in the early nineteenth century. Gordon Wood neatly links this revival spirit to Mormonism in his article “Evangelical America and Early Mormonism.” See 360-382 for a succinct overview. For an overview of how notions of magic functioned on the early American frontier in which Joseph Smith grew up, see D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (1987; repr., Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).
- ¹² Wood, “Evangelical America and Early Mormonism,” 352.
- ¹³ Mormon scholar Terryl Givens points out that the theology of the book was nowhere near as significant (at least at first) as how the book came into being. If one believed the Book of Mormon divine, then the complicated history and theology in the book was something a follower could take or leave in terms of actually sitting down to read it. But as so many early LDS diaries attest, people did read the book in great number. See Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 86.
- ¹⁴ Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:52-58. Their testimonies can still be found in current editions of the Book of Mormon.
- ¹⁵ Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1872; repr., New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 89.
- ¹⁶ Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews; or the Ten Tribes of Israel in America*, 2nd ed. (Poultney, VT: Smith and Schute, 1825).
- ¹⁷ David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 16. Robert A. Rees develops similar themes from an LDS perspective in “Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the American Renaissance,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 83-112.
- ¹⁸ Forsberg, “Retelling the Greatest Story Ever Told,” 79.
- ¹⁹ Reprinted in the *Huron (Ohio) Reflector*, “A Glance at the Mormons,” December 8, 1840.
- ²⁰ Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:103-104.
- ²¹ Ibid., 34-35.
- ²² Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:506.
- ²³ Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:207.
- ²⁴ Peter Williams, *Popular Religion in America: Symbolic Change and the Modernization Process in Historical Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 5.
- ²⁵ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 121.
- ²⁶ The Book of Abraham is now part of the larger LDS scriptural collection, the Pearl of Great Price.
- ²⁷ Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 449.
- ²⁸ A significant piece of LDS theology was also revealed when Smith was headquartered at Kirtland, Ohio, that had the potential to weed out free riders and has since become an important part of Mormon culture and distinctiveness. Smith received the revelation known as the “Word of Wisdom.” The “Word of Wisdom” is

a doctrine that could easily have been penned in the health-conscious twenty-first century. It instructs Mormons to abstain from strong liquor and tobacco as well as hot drinks, and to eat healthy natural foods. Much like a modern personal trainer, Smith noted that those who follow the doctrine will “run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.” While many early Latter-day Saints did not follow this doctrine rigorously, in later years it became a key marker of difference to set them apart from other denominations. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:329.

²⁹ Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:79.

³⁰ Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 97.

³¹ Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:34-35.

³² Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 9-11.

³³ Zadak Knapp Judd, 1937, *Autobiography 1830-1844*, Utah Historical Society.

³⁴ J. Matthew Shumway, “Membership Growth by States and Countries,” in *Historical Atlas of Mormonism*, ed. S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard H. Jackson (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 122-123.

³⁵ *Evening and Morning Stars*, June 1832.

³⁶ “Prospectus of the *Times and Seasons*,” *Times and Seasons* 1 (November 1839), 16. The prospectus was initially circulated in July 1839 to drum up subscriptions, and was reprinted in the cited Volume 1, Number 1 that November.

³⁷ Eliza Snow, “The Slaughter of Shoal Creek, Caldwell County Missouri,” *Times and Seasons* 1 (December 1839), 2.

³⁸ Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:197-209.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ No less a personage than Brigham Young claimed that upon hearing of the doctrine of plural marriage, he “desired the grave.” See Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (1984; repr., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 100-101.

⁴¹ The sermon can be found in its entirety in Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:302-317.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Twain, *Roughing It*, 86.

⁴⁷ Obadiah Dogberry, “The Book of Pukei,” *Palmyra Reflector* June 12, 1830.

⁴⁸ Obadiah Dogberry, “Gold Bible No. 5,” *Palmyra Reflector* February 28, 1831.

⁴⁹ Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 82.

⁵⁰ Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 3-4.

⁵¹ “Mormon Emigration,” *Wayne Sentinel* May 27, 1831.

⁵² Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (1945; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 88.

⁵³ R. Laurence Moore persuasively argues that Mormons and Joseph Smith in particular were aware of the cohesive power of being persecuted and actively courted it. See Chapter 1 of *Religious Outsiders and the Making of America*.

⁵⁴ Alexander Campbell, “Delusions,” *Millennial Harbinger* February 7, 1831.

⁵⁵ *Ohio Star*, October 13, 1831. Booth wrote nine letters that were published between October and December of 1831.

⁵⁶ Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:352.

⁵⁷ Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:2-3.

⁵⁸ Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, OH: Published by the Author, 1834), 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁶¹ “History of Mormanism,” *Ohio Repository*, August 4, 1836, 5. Intriguingly, the author also stated that Smith was a noted juggler.

⁶² Preeminent Joseph Smith biographers Fawn Brodie and Richard Bushman discredit the theory. Brodie devotes an entire appendix to the debate and argues the theory is based on a “tenuous chain of evidence” which ultimately “breaks altogether” (Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 453). Bushman dismantles the

theory and notes, “In the half century since Brodie, all the critics have assumed that Joseph Smith wrote the *Book of Mormon*,” in Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 91. In addition to various blogs and websites that continue to promote the Spaulding theory, Wayne L. Cowdrey et al wrote a 2005 book entitled, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?: The Spaulding Enigma*. Also, solomonspaulding.com is dedicated to proving the link between Spaulding’s novel and the Book of Mormon.

⁶³ Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 288.

⁶⁴ LaRoy Sunderland, *Mormonism Exposed* (New York: Office of the N. Y. Watchman, 1842).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:375.

⁶⁷ John C. Bennett, *History of the Saints* (Boston: Leland and Whiting, 1842), 8.

⁶⁸ “Poem,” *Warsaw Signal* February 7, 1844. The asterisk after “priest or king” leads the reader to a note that identifies Brigham Young as the priest and Orson Hyde as the king.

⁶⁹ *Warsaw Signal* May 8, 1844.

⁷⁰ William Harris, “Mormonism Portrayed,” (Warsaw, IL: Sharp and Gamble, 1841), 34.

⁷¹ Ibid., 44.

⁷² *Nauvoo Expositor*, June 7, 1844.

⁷³ *Warsaw Signal*, June 11, 1844.

⁷⁴ James F. W. Johnston, “Joe Smith and the Mormons,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* June 1851, 66.

⁷⁵ Sarah Beriah Fiske Allen Ricks, *Autobiography*, Utah Historical Society from the files of Daughters of Utah Pioneers.

⁷⁶ The Mormons who chose to remain behind either joined other denominations or splintered off into different branches of Mormonism. Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph’s mother, was one of those who stayed behind. She supported the succession of Joseph’s son, Joseph III, to the presidency of the church, and when he ultimately took on that role, he formed what would become the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), now known as Community of Christ. The RLDS Church never came close to being as successful as the Utah Mormons, nor as persecuted, nor as represented in mass culture, largely because it disavowed polygamy and much of the Nauvoo theology developed by Joseph Smith, Jr.

⁷⁷ Ann Eliza Coffin Garner, handwritten story, Utah Historical Society.

⁷⁸ Judd, *Autobiography*, 15.

⁷⁹ Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*, 37.

Chapter 2 Notes

¹ David L. Bigler, *Forgotten Kingdom: The Mormon Theocracy in the American West, 1847-1896* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005).

² Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (1966; repr., London: Routledge Classics, 2007), 47.

³ Blood atonement is the doctrine that states some actions are so heinous (such as murder) that only by spilling the perpetrator’s blood can the sin be redeemed. Brigham Young mentioned the doctrine in some sermons, but it is unclear how much the doctrine was ever practiced, and the modern church disavows it. For a brief overview, see Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 50-52.

⁴ Gustive O. Larson, *The “Americanization” of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1971); Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958); Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Nancy Bentley, “Marriage as Treason: Polygamy, Nation, and the Novel,” in *The Future of American Studies*, ed. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002): 341-370.

⁵ Leonard J. Arrington and Jon Haupt, “Intolerable Zion: The Image of Mormonism in Nineteenth Century American Literature,” *Western Humanities Review* 22, no.3 (Summer 1968): 243-260.

⁶ Hugh Nibley, *Sounding Brass: Informal Studies of the Lucrative Art of Telling Stories About Brigham Young and the Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), preface.

⁷ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 48.

⁸ For an extended overview of the case and its aftereffects, see Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

- ⁹ *Downes v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 244 (1901). The decision can be accessed at <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=182&invol=244>. (accessed October 15, 2010).
- ¹⁰ *Downes v. Bidwell*.
- ¹¹ Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*.
- ¹² Bentley, "Marriage as Treason: Polygamy, Nation, and the Novel," 341-370; Charles A. Cannon, "The Awesome Power of Sex," *The Pacific Historical Review* 43, no.1 (Feb. 1974), 61-82.
- ¹³ For an overview of the legal aspects of the "Mormon Question," see Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
- ¹⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
- ¹⁵ Arrington and Haupt, "Intolerable Zion," 244.
- ¹⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887, repr., Stilwell, KS: Digireads.com, 2005), 72.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.
- ²⁰ *New York Tribune*, June 28, 1851.
- ²¹ Charles Farrar Browne, *The Complete Works of Artemus Ward* (New York: W. Carelton & Co., 1875), 183-187.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 34.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 93.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.
- ²⁵ Arrington and Haupt, "Intolerable Zion," 243.
- ²⁶ Alfreda Eva Bell, *Boadicea: The Mormon Woman; Life Scenes in Utah* (Baltimore: A. R. Orton, 1855), 21.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ²⁸ Said, *Orientalism*. See Chapter 1.
- ²⁹ Bell, *Boadicea*, 25.
- ³⁰ J. H. Beadle, *Life in Utah; Or, The Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism, Being an Exposé of the Secret Rites and Rituals of the Latter-day Saints* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1870), 260.
- ³¹ For an overview of how Asian women were portrayed in popular culture, see Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), particularly Chapter 3.
- ³² David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 2 (1960), 211.
- ³³ Metta Victoria Fuller, *Mormon Wives: A Narrative of Facts Stranger than Fiction* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1856), vi.
- ³⁴ Maria Ward, *Female Life Among the Mormons* (New York: J. C. Derby, 1855).
- ³⁵ Fuller, *Mormon Wives*, v.
- ³⁶ For the complete list of the fifty anti-Mormon novels of the nineteenth century, see Arrington and Haupt, "Intolerable Zion," 257-260.
- ³⁷ Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (1985; repr., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 295.
- ³⁸ Larson, *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood*, 64-72.
- ³⁹ Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1872; repr., New York: Pocket Books, 2003), 72.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 73. Charles Farrar Browne, aka Artemus Ward, had previously noted that Brigham Young's power was equivalent to that of a "sovereign," but his observations, made a decade earlier than Twain's, did not have the same nuanced depth that another ten years of anti-Mormonism would supply. See Browne, *The Complete Works of Artemus Ward*, 59-63; 208-215.
- ⁴¹ Twain, *Roughing It*, 79.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 97.
- ⁴³ The question of whether Brigham Young ordered the attack or not still rages today, but most historians concur that a local group of men acted independently of Young, sparked by a climate of fear at the advance of a federal army, and with the motive of revenge, as the pioneers were Missourians and Arkansans. Missouri was of course a sore spot for the persecuted Saints, and church leader Parley Pratt had recently

been murdered in Arkansas. Around 120 men, women, and children were murdered, and the Mountain Meadows Massacre became a cornerstone of anti-Mormon rhetoric that persists to this day. For a comprehensive look at the issue see both Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (1950; repr., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), and Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets*.

⁴⁴ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 16.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Stenhouse's husband paired her memoir with a critical history of the Mormons. See T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (1873; repr., Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2006).

⁴⁶ Harriet Beecher Stowe in Fanny Stenhouse, *Tell It All: A Woman's Life in Polygamy* (Hartford, CT: A. D. Worthington, 1874), preface, np.

⁴⁷ Bentley, "Marriage as Treason," 343.

⁴⁸ Stenhouse, *Tell It All*, xiii.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 605.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 295.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 607.

⁵⁴ Job Welling, diary, 1875-1876, LDS Church History Library and Archives.

⁵⁵ For example, Irving Wallace wrote a fictionalized version of Ann Eliza's life in his 1961 novel *The Twenty-Seventh Wife* (New York: Simon and Schuster), as did David Ebershoff in his 2009 novel *The 19th Wife* (New York: Random House).

⁵⁶ Ann Eliza Young, *Wife No. 19* (1875; repr., Stilwell, KS: Digireads.com, 2007), 108.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 395.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 321.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 591.

⁶¹ Stenhouse, *Tell It All*, 276.

⁶² "Utah," *Daily Record of the Times* (Wilkesbarre), August 31, 1874.

⁶³ Young, *Wife No. 19*, 604.

⁶⁴ Schuyler Colfax, "Speech of Vice-President Schuyler Colfax," 1869, LDS Church History Library and Archives, 4.

⁶⁵ John Taylor, "Elder Taylor's Reply to Vice-President Colfax's Speech," 1869, LDS Church History Library and Archives, 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Schuyler Colfax, "The Mormon Question," LDS Church History Library and Archives, 16.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* Colfax's speech, Taylor's reply, and Colfax's coda are collected in a pamphlet in the Church Archives. Taylor's letter to the editor originally appeared in the *Deseret News*, and Colfax's reply was originally printed in the *New York Independent*.

⁷⁰ Marie A. Walsh, *My Queen: A Romance of the Great Salt Lake* (New York: G. W. Carelton & Co., 1878), 222.

⁷¹ Charles Heber Clark, *The Tragedy of Thompson Dunbar: A Tale of Salt Lake City* (Philadelphia: J. M. Stoddart & Co., 1879), 38.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷³ Walsh, *My Queen*, 381.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 383.

⁷⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 57.

⁷⁶ *Reynolds v. United States*, 98 U. S. 145 (1878).

⁷⁷ "The Fruits of Mormonism" (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Steam Printing, 1878), 9.

⁷⁸ Mrs. [Cornelia] A. G. Paddock, *The Fate of Madame La Tour: A Tale of the Great Salt Lake* (New York: Howard and Hurlbut, 1881), 65.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁰ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

- ⁸¹ Prof. J. M. Coyner, "Letters on Mormonism," in *Hand-Book on Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Hand-Book Publishing Company, 1882), 10.
- ⁸² R. W. Sloan, "The Great Contest Reviewed," (Salt Lake City, 1887), 24.
- ⁸³ Paddock, *The Fate of Madame La Tour*, 283.
- ⁸⁴ Reprinted in *ibid.*, 4. The book contained dozens of favorable press releases, some linking Paddock's missions explicitly to the cultural labor done in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
- ⁸⁵ Jennie Bartlett Switzer, *Elder Northfield's Home, or, Sacrificed on the Mormon Altar* (1882; repr., Boston: B. B. Russell, 1894), 3-4.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁸⁷ Nibley, *Sounding Brass*, 177.
- ⁸⁸ Saïd, *Orientalism*, 12.
- ⁸⁹ Switzer, *Elder Northfield's Home*, 319.
- ⁹⁰ Lee, *Orientalism*.
- ⁹¹ Rosetta Luce Gilchrist, *Apples of Sodom: A Story of Mormon Life* (Cleveland: W. W. Williams, 1883), 113.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 208.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 245.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 291.
- ⁹⁵ For an account of the "Mormon Massacre," see Jeremy R. Ricketts, "Tennessee's 1884 'Mormon Massacre' and the Cane Creek Vigilante Movement," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2008), 208-235.
- ⁹⁶ *New York Tribune*, reprinted in *Nashville Daily American*, August 19, 1884, 2.
- ⁹⁷ *Waverly (Tenn.) Times-Journal*, reprinted in *Nashville Banner*, August 25, 1884, 2.
- ⁹⁸ *Memphis Daily Avalanche*, reprinted in *Nashville Banner*, August 18, 1884, 2.
- ⁹⁹ "The Utah Problem and the Solution," 1882, LDS Church History Library and Archives, np.
- ¹⁰⁰ "Opinions of the Leading Statesmen of the United States on the Edmunds Law," Tract in LDS Church History Library and Archives, 4.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 8-9.
- ¹⁰³ "Speeches of Hon. George G. Vest, of Missouri, and Hon. Wilkinson Call, of Florida, in the United States Senate" (Washington, 1887), 11.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.
- ¹⁰⁵ "Admission of Utah," LDS Church History Library and Archives, 2.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 74, 78.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.
- ¹¹¹ "The Fruits of Mormonism," 3.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, 9.
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ¹¹⁴ "Opinions of the Leading Statesmen...", 12.
- ¹¹⁵ "To the Patriotic Citizens of America," in *Handbook on Mormonism*, 94; Rev. R. G. McNiece, "The Christian Conflict with Mormonism," in *ibid.*, 41.
- ¹¹⁶ While the primary argument of the *Handbook* acknowledged that Mormon women seemed to accept plural marriage, the publishers of the tract did get Cornelia Paddock of *The Fate of Madame La Tour* fame to write a one-page statement of at least *one* plural wife who had been miserable. See Coyner's letter on page 11, and Paddock's brief narrative on page 88.
- ¹¹⁷ "'Mormon' Women on Plural Marriage," Tract in Utah Historical Society, 6.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ¹²⁰ Jennie A. Froiseth, "Work and Influence of the National Anti-Polygamy Society," in *Handbook on Mormonism*, 65. Froiseth would go on to publish a massive work five years later that related the alleged

stories of “real” victims of plural marriage. The book is dedicated to “the happy wives and mothers of America, whose homes are protected from invasion by the majestic arm of the law.”

¹²¹ Alvah Milton Kean, *Trean, or, The Mormon's Daughter: A Romantic Life Story of Life Among the Latter-day Saints* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, 1889), 56.

¹²² De Los Lull, *Father Solon, or, The Helper Helped* (New York: W. B. Ketcham, 1888), 160.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 197-198.

¹²⁴ Kerr, *Trean*, 90.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹²⁸ *Mormon Church v. United States* 136 U.S. 1 (1890).

¹²⁹ William Loring Spencer, *Salt Lake Fruit: A Latter-day Romance* (Boston: Franklin Press, 1884), iv.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, v-vi.

Chapter 3 Notes

¹ Hans Christensen, *Memoirs of Hans Christen* (1890; repr. Salt Lake City: Utah Humanities Research Foundation, 1936), np.

² Church leaders believed they could continue to sanction plural marriages where it did *not* violate local law. Under LDS interpretation, Mexico and Canada were such places. Thus, plural marriages continued to be performed until a second manifesto in 1904 ended the practice for good in the mainstream Mormon Church. There were also some plural marriages performed surreptitiously in the United States between 1890 and 1904.

³ LDS Church Hymnal, Hymn 326. Utah Historical Society.

⁴ Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁵ Richard W. Santana and Gregory Erickson, *Religion and Popular Culture: Rescripting the Sacred* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 2.

⁶ While virtually no one thinks twice about a Mormon senator anymore, and LDS member Harry Reid was majority leader of the Senate, it is interesting to note that people still have doubts about a Mormon being president.

⁷ R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 43.

⁸ *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, in “The Mormon Church Choir Special,” Compiled by E. H. Peirce, Salt Lake City: 1910, 44.

⁹ “World’s Fair Ecclesiastical History of Utah” (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons Co., 1893), vi. The report was printed by an LDS publishing company, and the Mormon section took up most of it, but it is noteworthy that eight other denominations decided to participate in the venture.

¹⁰ J. Connell, *Some Humorous Experiences of a Globe Trotter* (Battle Creek, MI: Ellis Publishing Company, 1915), 119-120.

¹¹ “Music by Mormons—Great Choir from Utah to Arrive Here Tomorrow,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, September 4, 1893, in Peirce, “The Mormon Church Choir Special,” 7.

¹² “The Trip to Chicago to Compete at the Great World’s Fair Musical Contest, 1893,” *Denver Republican*, August 31, 1893, in *ibid.*, 1.

¹³ “The Tabernacle Choir Visits the Temple Lot,” *Kansas City Star*, September 1, 1893, in *ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ “The Mormon Concert,” *St. Louis Globe Dispatch*, September 3, 1893, in *ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷ “Five Hundred Sweet Voices,” *Hawarden (Iowa) Independent*, (January 25, 1894), 2.

¹⁸ “Music by Mormons,” in Peirce, “The Mormon Church Choir Special,” 6-7.

¹⁹ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

²⁰ Connell, *Some Humorous Experiences of a Globe Trotter*, 118.

- ²¹ *Chicago Record*, September 9, 1893, in Peirce, “The Mormon Church Choir Special,” 7; *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, September 3, 1893, in *ibid.*, 8.
- ²² “Utah at the World’s Columbian Exposition,” (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Lithographics Co., 1894), 55.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 53
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.
- ²⁶ Peirce, “The Mormon Church Choir Special,” 7.
- ²⁷ *San Francisco Bulletin*, April 18, 1896, in *ibid.*, 15.
- ²⁸ *San Francisco Call*, April 18, 1896, in *ibid.*, 17.
- ²⁹ “The Mormon Tabernacle Choir Given an Ovation,” *Evening Session*, n.d., in *ibid.*, 22.
- ³⁰ *Sacramento Record Union*, April 22, 1896, in *ibid.*, 20.
- ³¹ *San Francisco Call*, March 17, 1896, in *ibid.*, 26.
- ³² Hal Rothman, *Devil’s Bargain: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).
- ³³ “Five Hundred Sweet Voices,” *Hawarden (Iowa) Independent*, 2.
- ³⁴ Bruce Kinney, *Mormonism: The Islam of America* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1912).
- ³⁵ “Dr. Parry Talks of Utah,” *Salt Lake City Daily Tribune*, November 12, 1898, in Peirce, “The Mormon Church Choir Special,” 42.
- ³⁶ Levi Edgar Young, *The Great Mormon Tabernacle with its World-Famed Organ and Choir* (Salt Lake City: Bureau of Information, 1917), 23.
- ³⁷ Rabbi Leon Harrison in James S. Martin, “For Great America,” *The Christian Statesman* 50, no. 1 (1916), 23.
- ³⁸ “Individual Comment,” in Peirce, “The Mormon Church Choir Special,” 43.
- ³⁹ Ben E. Rich, “Two Letters to a Baptist Minister,” Pamphlet, LDS Church History Library and Archives, 1899, 4, 9, 12, 22.
- ⁴⁰ Scholars have also rightly noted the importance of LDS president Joseph F. Smith in bringing the Saints into mainstream America. Smith placed a renewed emphasis on his uncle’s “First Vision,” the result of which “contained the elements necessary to fill the historical, scriptural, and theological void left by the abandonment of plural marriage” [Flake, *The Politics of Religious Identity*, 118]. Smith also issued a 1904 manifesto that closed the polygamy loophole. From that point, any plural marriages conducted anywhere would be grounds for excommunication. He furthermore expelled two Mormon leaders from the high-ranking Quorum of Twelve who disagreed with the manifesto, and finally excommunicated one of these leaders of the church who refused to abandon his beliefs on plural marriage—a powerful statement that showed how serious Smith was about joining mainstream America. Smith’s relevance is undeniable—he was the face of the church during his seventeen years as president, and the first of the second generation of Mormons to serve in that post. Yet I maintain that from a cultural standpoint, Roberts had a larger impact.
- ⁴¹ B. H. Roberts, *The Autobiography of B. H. Roberts* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 218.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ B. H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints Vol. 1* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907), 5.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22, 21.
- ⁴⁶ Harry Leon Wilson, *The Lions of the Lord: A Tale of the Old West* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Co., 1905).
- ⁴⁷ Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints Vol. 1*, 70.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ “The Joseph Smith Memorial,” *New York Times*, August 28, 1909.
- ⁵¹ *Harper’s Weekly*, September 11, 1909, qtd. in “The Mormon Curse,” International Reform Bureau, 1910.
- ⁵² “Mormons to Honor Smith,” *Washington Post*, July 23, 1905, 1.
- ⁵³ “Mormon Shrine in Vermont,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 6, 1905, 21.
- ⁵⁴ Nephi Anderson, *Added Upon* (1898; repr., Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1912), 113.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

- ⁵⁸ Peirce, "The Mormon Church Choir Special," 46.
- ⁵⁹ "Mormons and Mormonism: Why They Have Been Opposed, Maligned and Persecuted-Inside History of Present anti-Mormon Crusade" (Salt Lake City: Magazine Printing Company, 1899), 22.
- ⁶⁰ Sumner Lawrence Gleason, "Defense of the Mormons," LDS Church History Library and Archives, 927.
- ⁶¹ "Mormons and Mormonism," 6.
- ⁶² Franklin S. Spalding, "The Proper Attitude Toward the Mormon Church and People," *The Christian Statesman* 48, no. 5 (May 1914), 213.
- ⁶³ "Do You Wish the World to go Mormon?" Binghamton, New York, Flyer in LDS Church History Library and Archives.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Shelby M. Cullom, "The Menace of Mormonism," *North American Review* (September 1915), 384.
- ⁶⁶ Hans P. Freece, *The Letters of an Apostate Mormon to His Son* (New York City: The Wolfer Press, 1908), 11.
- ⁶⁷ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft Volume XXVI: History of Utah: 1540-1886* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1889), 544.
- ⁶⁸ James S. Martin, "For Great America," *The Christian Statesman* 50 (1916), 24.
- ⁶⁹ Oscar F. Davis, "Vivisection of Mormonism," *The Christian Statesman* 50 (1916), 429.
- ⁷⁰ "The Truth About Mormonism," *The Christian Statesman* 48, no. 2 (February 1914), 89.
- ⁷¹ "Reply," *The Christian Statesman* 48, no. 3 (March 1914), 131.
- ⁷² Robert F. Coyle, "The Mormon Menace," *The Christian Statesman* 48, no. 4 (April 1914), 166.
- ⁷³ "The Press and Mormonism," *The Christian Statesman* 48, no. 5 (May 1914), 193.
- ⁷⁴ Mrs. Howard B. McAfee, "Mormonism: An American Product," *The Christian Statesman* 50, no. 11 (1916), 476.
- ⁷⁵ "Review of Address to the World," in Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints Vol. 2*, 287.
- ⁷⁶ Roberts, "Answer to Ministerial Association Review," in *Defense of the Faith and the Saints Vol. 2* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1912), 336.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 349.
- ⁷⁸ "An Attitude for Christians," *The Christian Statesman* 48, no. 5 (May 1914), 215.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., 216.
- ⁸⁰ Richard Alan Nelson, "Commercial Propaganda in the Silent Film: A Case Study of 'A Mormon Maid,'" *Film History* 1, no. 2 (1987), 30.
- ⁸¹ It is interesting to note that the heroine of the film, played by Mae Murray, brings the plural marriage ceremony to a screeching halt when she drops the bombshell that she is not a virgin. The audience had seen that the revelation on celestial marriage called for the bride to be a virgin. The wedding was off. Later in the film she tells her true love that she was lying.
- ⁸² *A Mormon Maid*, DVD, Reelclassicdvd.com.
- ⁸³ Ibid.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ "On Stage and Screen," *Trenton Evening Times* (June 15, 1917), 7.
- ⁸⁶ "Mormon Foes Branded as Mercenaries," *Syracuse Herald* (September 17, 1918), 6.
- ⁸⁷ Julius C. Birge, *The Awakening of the Desert* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1912), 347.
- ⁸⁸ Clarence Badger, *Hands Up!* DVD. 1925. (Grapevine Video, 2007).
- ⁸⁹ B.H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 6 vols, 1930), 6:414.
- ⁹⁰ "Statement by the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Reference to Magazine Slanders," Address to the General Conference, April 9, 1911, 4.
- ⁹¹ Walter P. Monson, "Character of Anti-Mormon Propaganda," (Independence: Zion's Printing & Publishing Company, 1916), 3.
- ⁹² "Theodore Roosevelt Refutes Anti-Mormon Falsehoods," Pamphlet in Utah Historical Society, 10.
- ⁹³ Ibid., 11.
- ⁹⁴ Jack London, *The Star Rover* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1915), 135.
- ⁹⁵ Birge, *The Awakening of the Desert*, 325. Fittingly, Birge went on to quote Bancroft at length.
- ⁹⁶ William R. Handley, *Marriage, Violence, and Nation in the American Literary West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 112.

- ⁹⁷ Zane Grey, *The Heritage of the Desert* (1910; repr., New York: Forge, 1997), 5.
- ⁹⁸ Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 87.
- ⁹⁹ Grey, *The Heritage of the Desert*, 54.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 274.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 70.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 17.
- ¹⁰³ The book was the best seller of 1912 and is still in print today. Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (1974; repr., New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1960), 313.
- ¹⁰⁴ Stephen J. May, *Zane Grey: Romancing the West* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997), 67.
- ¹⁰⁵ Handley, *Marriage, Violence, and Nation in the American Literary West*, 103.
- ¹⁰⁶ Zane Grey, *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912; repr., New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 14.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 236.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 264.
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ¹¹¹ Zane Grey, *The Rainbow Trail*, 15.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, 35.
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 39.
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.
- ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 221.
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 231-232.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 294.
- ¹²¹ Grey, *Riders of the Purple Sage*, 129.
- ¹²² Grey, *The Rainbow Trail*, 53.
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*, 235.
- ¹²⁴ Joseph F. Smith, "An Address: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the World," in B.H. Roberts *Defense of the Faith and the Saints Vol. 2*, 253.
- ¹²⁵ Roberts, "Answer to Ministerial Association Review," 362.
- ¹²⁶ <http://mormontabernaclechoir.org/faq#top>. (accessed January 15, 2011).

Chapter 4 Notes

- ¹ Press Clippings, Utah Historical Society.
- ² "80,000 LDS In Service," October 8, 1944, Utah Historical Society.
- ³ "Her Hymn is Pop Hit." *Life* (October 5, 1959), LDS Church History Library and Archives.
- ⁴ Leon Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 258.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 278.
- ⁶ Lewis had actually been writing Mormons into his narratives since 1920's *Main Street*. *Main Street* reflected the anti-Mormon prejudice of the time in a scene where a bombastic preacher railed against the Saints in a church service. Lewis has his main character sleep through the sermon. The book was reissued in 1948 and complements his other writings that included references to Mormonism. See Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1948), 329-331.
- ⁷ Sinclair Lewis, *Dodsworth* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1929); *Ann Vickers* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1933).
- ⁸ Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1935). Herman Melville did much the same thing as early as 1852 (though not with the frequency of Lewis) in his novel *Pierre*, wherein a character owns a "very fine set of volumes," including the Book of Mormon. See page 396, also available on Google Books. Today, Tom Clancy often uses Mormon characters and Mormonism in general to represent the embodiment of patriotic Americanism. For a contextual overview, see Terryl L. Givens, *The*

Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 163.

⁹ Sinclair Lewis, *Cass Timberlane* (New York: Random House, 1945), 194.

¹⁰ John Kord Lagemann, "What It's Like to be a Mormon," *Los Angeles Times* (This Week Magazine), July 20, 1947, 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³ Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 523.

¹⁴ "The Mormon Centennial." *Millard County (Utah) Chronicle*, April 3, 1930, 3.

¹⁵ "Talk Given by Prof. Evan Stephens Before the Daughters of the Pioneers," February 5, 1930, LDS Church History Library and Archives.

¹⁶ "What is the 'Mormon' Church Welfare Plan?" The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Pamphlet), 1939, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6. Reprinted from April 1937 General Conference speech.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹ It is important to note that several authors discussed in this chapter comprise what is known among scholars as the "Lost Generation" of Mormon authors. These authors, including such influential figures as Vardis Fisher, Maurine Whipple, and Virginia Sorenson, were Mormons who were coming to terms with increasing LDS assimilation and the concomitant erosion (though by no means disappearance) of a distinctive Mormon lifestyle. While discussion of these authors as a collective is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is an important part of the LDS story. For a concise overview, see Edward A. Geary, "Mormondom's Lost Generation: The Novelists of the 1940s," in *Tending the Garden: Essays on Mormon Literature*, ed. Eugene England and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 23-33.

²⁰ Vardis Fisher, *Children of God: An American Epic* (New York City: Harper and Brothers, 1939), 127.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

²² *Ibid.*, 281.

²³ Accessed August 1, 2010.

²⁴ Fisher, *Children of God*, 316.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 375.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 520.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 471.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 568.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 427.

³⁰ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Viking Press, 1939). The 1940 Pulitzer prize winners can be found at <http://www.pulitzer.org/awards/1940> (accessed January 17, 2011).

³¹ Fisher, *Children of God*, 481.

³² *Ibid.*, 591.

³³ *Ibid.*, 588.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 587.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 738-739.

³⁶ Quoted in Davis Bitton, "Brother Brigham on the Silver Screen," *Meridian Magazine* July 11, 2002, <http://www.ldsfilm.com> (accessed July 1, 2010).

³⁷ "A Tribute to Mormon Leader" *New York Times* June 2, 1950, 31.

³⁸ Fisher, *Children of God*, 427.

³⁹ See "A Statue of Brigham Young," *New York Times* February 19, 1897, 3.

⁴⁰ Maurine Whipple, *The Giant Joshua* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1941), preface.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 267.

⁴³ Edith H. Walton, "'The Giant Joshua' and Other New Works," *New York Times* January 12, 1941, BR6.

⁴⁴ Whipple, *The Giant Joshua*, 214.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 473.

- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 632.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 61.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 135.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 364-366.
- ⁵¹ Walton, "'The Giant Joshua' and Other New Works," BR6.
- ⁵² Ibid., 409-410.
- ⁵³ "20 Critics Select 'Best' Books of 1941," *New York Times* April 23, 1941.
- ⁵⁴ Whipple, *The Giant Joshua*, 594.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 593.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 629.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 632.
- ⁵⁸ Ardyth Kennelly, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949), 36.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 292.
- ⁶⁰ The character of Linnea reappears in a 1955 sequel to *The Peaceable Kingdom* to deal with life in the post-polygamous era. See Ardyth Kennelly, *Up Home* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1955).
- ⁶¹ Hoffman Birney, "People who Live Their Religion," *New York Times* October 20, 1946, BR4.
- ⁶² Helen Hinckley, *The Mountains Are Mine* (New York City: The Vanguard Press, 1946).
- ⁶³ Ibid., 13.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 93.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 108.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 103.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 384.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 394.
- ⁶⁹ Marian McIntyre McDonough, *Sun in the West* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Company, 1937), 11.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 269-270.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 224.
- ⁷² Rhoda Nelson, *This is Freedom* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940), inside cover.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 80.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 25.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., 73.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 298.
- ⁷⁷ "Books for Younger Readers," *New York Times* (November 10, 1940).
- ⁷⁸ Virginia Sorenson, *A Little Lower than the Angels* (1942; repr., Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 104.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., 413, 388.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., 195.
- ⁸¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, vi.
- ⁸² Paul Bailey, *The Gay Saint* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, Inc., 1944), 63.
- ⁸³ Ibid., 95.
- ⁸⁴ For an overview of how producers of popular culture engaged with World War II, see Ashby, *With Amusement for All*, 263-301.
- ⁸⁵ Bailey, *The Gay Saint*, 164.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 169.
- ⁸⁷ Paul Bailey, *For this My Glory* (1940; repr. Hollywood: Murray & Gee, Inc., 1944), 42.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., 88.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., 110.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., 136.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., 140.
- ⁹² Ibid., 159.
- ⁹³ Ibid., 234.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., 277, 282.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., 288.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid., 305.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid., 329.

- ⁹⁸ Ibid., 327.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., 336.
- ¹⁰⁰ Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* (1942; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 347.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., 99.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., 65, 62.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., 188.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 20.
- ¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, Twentieth-Century Fox thought Brigham Young was known well enough in the West for the title to stand alone. In the East, they added the post-colon appellation *Frontiersman*, thus introducing Young to unfamiliar audiences as a man in the mold of Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone.
- ¹⁰⁶ Henry Hathaway, *Brigham Young*, DVD, (1940; Twentieth Century Fox, 2003).
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁸ Bitton, “Brother Brigham on the Silver Screen.”
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁰ Hathaway, *Brigham Young*.
- ¹¹¹ Richard L. Evans, “What is a Mormon?” *Look* October 5, 1954, np (copy in LDS Church History Library and Archives). The first question covered the fact that there was technically no such thing as a “Mormon,” as that was just a nickname for the church.
- ¹¹² Hathaway, *Brigham Young*.
- ¹¹³ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁴ Bosley Crowther, “The Screen in Review,” *New York Times* September 21, 1940, 20.
- ¹¹⁵ John Ford, *Wagon Master*, DVD, (1950; Warner Home Video, 2009).
- ¹¹⁶ R. Philip Loy, “Saints or Scoundrels: Images of Mormonism in Literature and Film about the American West,” *Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas* 21 (October 1990), 70.
- ¹¹⁷ George B. Rodney, *The Mormon Trail* (New York City: Edward J. Clode, Inc., 1933); Lorene Pearson, *The Harvest Waits* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941); Hoffman Birney, *Ann Carmeny* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1941); Jonreed Lauritzen, *Arrows into the Sun* (1943; repr., New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944); Richard Scowcroft, *Children of the Covenant* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945); Forrester Blake, *Wilderness Passage* (New York City: Random House, 1953).
- ¹¹⁸ Rodney, *The Mormon Trail*, 176.
- ¹¹⁹ “‘Wilderness Passage’ Offers Pace Change in Western Stories,” *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* August 23, 1953, 12C.
- ¹²⁰ Blake, *Wilderness Passage*, 78.
- ¹²¹ Jan Shipps, “Surveying the Mormon Image Since 1960,” *Sunstone* 118 (April 2001), 58.
- ¹²² LDS Welfare Newspaper Clippings, Utah Historical Society.
- ¹²³ Ashby, *With Amusement for All*, 300-301.
- ¹²⁴ “Religion: Mormon and Civil Rights,” *Time* (April 13, 1959). Accessible at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,810998,00.html>. (accessed January 15, 2011).
- ¹²⁵ Armand L. Mauss, “Mormonism and the Negro: Faith, Folklore, and Civil Rights,” in *Neither White Nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church*, ed. Lester E. Bush, Jr., and Armand L. Mauss (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1984), 9.
- ¹²⁶ Wallace Turner, *The Mormon Establishment* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), 218, 217.
- ¹²⁷ For example, see Wallace Turner, “Mormon Stand on Negroes Poses Problem for Romney if He Runs for Presidency,” *New York Times* (December 28, 1965).
- ¹²⁸ Robert W. Glasgow, “Civil Rights Question a Dilemma for Mormons,” *Arizona Republic*, August 8, 1965.
- ¹²⁹ Ibid.
- ¹³⁰ Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 233.

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¹The awards for that year can be found at <http://www.pulitzer.org/awards/1959>. (accessed December 1, 2010).

- ² Leroy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 348.
- ³ Armand Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
- ⁴ Robert Lewis Taylor, *The Travels of Jaimie McPheeters* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Company, Inc.: 1958), 304.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 337.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 320.
- ⁸ Irving Wallace, *The Twenty-seventh Wife* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), 425.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 428.
- ¹⁰ Joseph B. Entin, *Sensational Modernism: Experimental Fiction and Photography in Thirties America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 7.
- ¹¹ Wallace, *The Twenty-Seventh Wife*, 57, quoting Bernard DeVoto.
- ¹² For an example of Wallace's meticulousness, see *ibid.*, 218.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 278.
- ¹⁴ Hugh Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*, vol. 2 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1991), 522.
- ¹⁵ Edson Jessop with Maurine Whipple, "Why I Have Five Wives," *Collier's* (November 13, 1953): 27. The fact that Whipple is the co-author is fascinating given the mainstream church's feelings about their polygamous cousins. It underscores just how touched she was by the plight of plural marriage during her research on nineteenth-century Mormonism for her novel *The Giant Joshua*.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.
- ¹⁷ Wallace, *The Twenty-seventh Wife*, 15-16.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 429.
- ¹⁹ It is difficult to trace all of Brigham Young's wives, thus the difference in the titles. Apparently, when Ann Eliza was married to Young, she was his nineteenth living wife, and twenty-seventh overall.
- ²⁰ The difficulty of this union is nicely showcased on the popular HBO television series *Big Love*, about polygamous life in modern America. In one episode, FLDS compound leader Roman Grant argues to reporters that if gay marriage is gaining acceptance so too should polygamy. Much to his chagrin, one reporter takes his words out of context and reports him as simply saying, "We're just like homosexuals." Season 1, Episode 3, "Home Invasion." June 1, 2010 (originally aired March 26, 2006).
- ²¹ For a brief overview of how the mainstream church prefers polygamist Mormons to be called "polygamous sects," see <http://newsroom.lds.org/article/polygamist-sects-are-not--mormons--church-says>. (accessed January 25, 2011). As far as linking Mormonism with polygamy, see the 2007 Gallup poll that asked for "top-of-mind impressions of the Mormon religion." Polygamy was the most cited response. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/26758/americans-views-mormon-religion.aspx>. (accessed January 31, 2011).
- ²² David Ebershoff, *The 19th Wife* (New York: Random House, 2008), 129-130.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 395.
- ²⁴ Lifetime Network aired a film version of the novel and chose to cut out any references to the main character's sexuality. (aired September 13, 2010).
- ²⁵ Ebershoff, *The 19th Wife*, 39.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 473.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 310.
- ²⁹ Reed Cowan and Steven Greenstreet, 8: *The Mormon Proposition* (2010; DVD, Wolfe Video, 2010).
- ³⁰ C. Jay Cox, *Latter Days* (2003; DVD, tlareleasing, 2004).
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* (2003; DVD, HBO Video, 2004).
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Ebershoff, *The 19th Wife*, 363.
- ³⁵ Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*, 646.

³⁶ Richard E. Turley, "Faulty History: A Review of *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*," *The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research* (2003).

<http://www.fairlds.org/pubs/Krakauer.pdf> , 5 (accessed December 12, 2010).

³⁷ Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heave: A Story of Violent Faith* (2003; repr., New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 231.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., xxi.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 5.

⁴³ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 112, 109.

⁴⁵ Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Deseret Book Company, 1980), 6:302-317.

⁴⁶ Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*, 537-538.

⁴⁷ One of Krakauer's sources told him that the Lafferty brothers "have this ability to charm the socks off you. They have this look in their eyes." The mesmerizing power of the Mormons is clearly a powerful and recurrent trope. Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 152.

⁴⁸ Christopher Cain, *September Dawn* (2007; DVD, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2008).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., DVD extras.

⁵² Thelma Geer, *Mormonism, Mama, and Me* (1979; repr., Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 12, 14.

⁵³ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 122, 159.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 148.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 127-128.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 180.

⁶⁰ Judy Robertson, *Out of Mormonism: A Woman's True Story* (1997; repr., Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 13.

⁶¹ Ibid., 22.

⁶² Ibid., 25.

⁶³ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 123.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 130.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁷⁰ James R. Spencer, *Beyond Mormonism: An Elder's Story* (1984; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1993), 175.

⁷¹ Ibid., 35.

⁷² Ibid., 62.

⁷³ Ibid., 153.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 75.

⁷⁵ Some evangelical Christians even make entire careers out of criticizing Mormonism. Critics such as Jerald and Sandra Tanner publish prolifically on what they see as the falsehoods that the Mormon Church perpetuates. For an overview of the Tanners, see Lawrence Foster, "Career Apostates: Reflections on the Works of Jerald and Sandra Tanner," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1984), 35-60.

⁷⁶ Such examples include Latayne C. Scott, *The Mormon Mirage: A Former Member Looks at the Mormon Church Today* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008); Jack B. Worthy, *The Mormon Cult: A Former*

Missionary Reveals the Secrets of Mormon Mind Control (Tucson, AZ: Sharp Press, 2008); and R. Philip Roberts, *Mormonism Unmasked* (Nashville: B & H Books, 1998).

⁷⁷ Ed Decker and Dave Hunt, *The God Makers: A Shocking Exposé of What the Mormon Church Really Believes* (1984; repr., Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1994), 25. Decker also runs Saints Alive in Jesus, an organization dedicated to toppling Mormonism and gaining converts from its ranks.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁸⁰ Spencer, *Beyond Mormonism*, 157.

⁸¹ Decker and Hunt, *The God Makers*, 84.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸³ Another example is Deborah Laake, *Secret Ceremonies: A Mormon Woman's Intimate Diary of Marriage and Beyond* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1993).

⁸⁴ Quoted in Sonia Johnson, *From Housewife to Heretic: One Woman's Spiritual Awakening and Her Excommunication from the Mormon Church* (1981; repr., Albuquerque: Wildfire Books, 1989), 121.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, np.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 93.

⁸⁸ Johnson, *From Housewife to Heretic*, np.

⁸⁹ Martha Beck, *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith* (2005; repr., New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006).

⁹⁰ Johnson, *From Housewife to Heretic*, 29.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 144.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 394.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 322.

⁹⁷ That is, the portion of her narrative in the hotel room is written in the present tense, while every other scene is written in past tense. By "fictive present" I do not mean to suggest the scene did not happen, but rather I mean to draw attention to it as a literary device in that while Beck was writing these scenes, they were actually in the past.

⁹⁸ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰¹ Beck, *Leaving the Saints*, 22.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁰⁵ Anne Lamott is an author of several works of fiction and nonfiction. The quote Beck references is from Lamott's *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ Beck, *Leaving the Saints*, 210.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, *From Housewife to Heretic*, 224.

¹¹⁰ G. Thomas Couser, *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 63.

¹¹¹ Beck, *Leaving the Saints*, 326.

¹¹² Accessed December 15, 2010.

¹¹³ C. S. Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said," in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (1975; repr., San Diego: Harvest, 2002), 37.

¹¹⁴ *Sunstone*, December 2009.

- ¹¹⁵ Among many other examples, see Meyer's 2008 interview with *Entertainment Weekly* at <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20049578,00.html> (accessed December 12, 2010).
- ¹¹⁶ Stephenie Meyer, *Eclipse* (2007; repr., New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2010), 454.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 620.
- ¹¹⁸ Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 49.
- ¹¹⁹ Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (2005; repr., New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006), np.
- ¹²⁰ This message is most clearly elucidated in M. Russell Ballard's *Our Search for Happiness: An Invitation to Understand the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1993).
- ¹²¹ Meyer, *Twilight*, 342.
- ¹²² Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 719.
- ¹²³ Meyer, *Twilight*, 329.
- ¹²⁴ Stephenie Meyer, *New Moon* (2007; repr., New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 428.
- ¹²⁵ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 325.
- ¹²⁶ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 387.
- ¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 474.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 517.
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 717.
- ¹³⁰ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 581.
- ¹³¹ Orson Scott Card has, however, represented the Mormon story through historical fiction using characters such as Joseph Smith and settings such as Nauvoo. See *Saints* (1984; repr., New York: Tor, 1988).
- ¹³² Orson Scott Card, *Seventh Son* (1987; repr., New York: Tor, 1988), 73.
- ¹³³ Orson Scott Card, *Alvin Journeyman* (1995; repr., New York: Tor, 1996), 2.
- ¹³⁴ Eugene England, "Beyond 'Jack Fiction': Recent Achievements in the Mormon Novel," in *Tending the Garden: Essays on Mormon Literature*, ed. Eugene England and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 173.
- ¹³⁵ Orson Scott Card, *Prentice Alvin* (1989; repr., New York: Tor, 1989), 72.
- ¹³⁶ Card, *Seventh Son*, 65.
- ¹³⁷ Orson Scott Card, *Red Prophet* (1988; repr., New York: Tor, 1988), 164-165.
- ¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 220.
- ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 273.
- ¹⁴⁰ Card, *Prentice Alvin*, 280-281.
- ¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 296.
- ¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 308.
- ¹⁴³ Orson Scott Card, *The Crystal City* (2003; repr., New York: Tor, 2004), 155, 322.
- ¹⁴⁴ Card, *Prentice Alvin*, 314.
- ¹⁴⁵ Card, *Alvin Journeyman*, 278.
- ¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 280.
- ¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 309.
- ¹⁵¹ Orson Scott Card, *Heartfire* (1998; repr., New York: Tor, 1999), 298.
- ¹⁵² Card, *Prentice Alvin*, 284.
- ¹⁵³ Card, *The Crystal City*, 328.
- ¹⁵⁴ Card, *Alvin Journeyman*, 359.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 339.
- ¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 340.
- ¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Terryl Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8.
- ¹⁵⁸ Glenn Beck, *The Christmas Sweater* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2008), 10.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.
- ¹⁶⁰ See for example, *ibid.*, 122.
- ¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁶² See for example Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* (1942; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 158-170.

¹⁶³ Glenn Beck, *The Christmas Sweater*, 168.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 167, 252.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 268.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁶⁷ The 2009 rankings can be found at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124895/Clinton-Edges-Palin-Admired-Woman.aspx>. (accessed January 15, 2011). The 2010 poll can be accessed at http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2010-12-27-most-admired-poll_N.htm?csp=hf. (accessed January 15, 2011).

Conclusion Notes

¹ Benjamin F. Johnson, "Mormonism as an Issue," Pamphlet. LDS Church History and Library Archives.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴ For a breakdown of the numbers, see <http://www.gallup.com/poll/26611/some-americans-reluctant-vote-mormon-72yearold-presidential-candidates.aspx> (accessed December 10, 2010).

⁵ Mitt Romney, "Faith in America." For a transcript of the speech, see <http://www.wapt.com/r/14788890/detail.html> (accessed September 18, 2010). All of the quotes from the speech are taken from that transcript.

⁶ Ed Decker and Dave Hunt, *The God Makers: A Shocking Exposé of What the Mormon Church Really Believes* (1984; repr, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1994), 257.

⁷ David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 35.

⁸ *Big Love*, "Dating Game," Season 2, Episode 6 (aired July 16, 2007)..

⁹ *Ibid.*, "Affair," Season 1, Episode 5 (aired April 9, 2006).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, "Where There's A Will," Season 1, Episode 11 (aired May 21, 2006).

¹¹ The relationship ends in tragedy when Alby's lover, Dale, becomes so worried about being exposed as a homosexual that he hangs himself. See *Big Love*, "Under One Roof," Season 4, Episode 6 (aired February 14, 2010).

¹² *Big Love*, "Come Ye Saints," Season 3, Episode 6 (aired February 2, 2009).

¹³ *Ibid.*, "Outer Darkness," Season 3, Episode 9 (aired March 15, 2009).

¹⁴ *Big Love*, "Kingdom Come," Season 2, Episode 8 (aired July 30, 2007).

¹⁵ Scott Anderson and Stephanie Sinclair, "Polygamy in America," *National Geographic*, (February 2010), 48.

¹⁶ See Appendix B.

¹⁷ Anderson and Sinclair, "Polygamy in America," 37-39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

²² *Ibid.*, 48-49.

²³ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁴ Prominent LDS historian Philip Barlow has also noted the ways in which the mainstream church is confronting its history more directly, particularly with the Mountain Meadows Massacre. He argues that with new openness, "The Saints and their leaders are apt to see that the Church will not be undermined by an authentic probing of difficult as well as inspiring contours of its own history. We can look for more treatments, perhaps of polygamy, perhaps of the history of blacks in the LDS culture." See "Roundtable on Massacre at Mountain Meadows," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 118.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁶ Brady Udall, *The Lonely Polygamist* (New York: W. W Norton and Company, 2010), 270-271.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 268.

²⁸ David Ebershoff, *The 19th Wife* (New York: Random House, 2008), 8.

²⁹ *American Experience Frontline: The Mormons*, 2007.

³⁰ "Americans' View of the Mormon Religion." <http://www.gallup.com/poll/26758/Americans-Views-Mormon-Religion.aspx#1>. (accessed January 11, 2011).

³¹ *South Park*, "All About the Mormons," Season 7, Episode 12 (aired November 19, 2003).

³² <http://www.pbs.org/mormons/faqs/structure.html>. (accessed January 15, 2011).

³³ Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, The New America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 200. Ong is specifically discussing Cambodians.

³⁴ "When the Saints Come Marching In," *The Economist* online, http://www.economist.com/node/18284013?story_id=18284013&fsrc=rss. (accessed March 4, 2011).

³⁵ Decker and Hunt, *The God Makers*, 22-23.

³⁶ For an overview of how the 2002 Olympics shaped perceptions of Mormonism, see Jan Shipp, "Spinning Gold: Mormonism and the Olympic Games." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 147-164.

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