

“Those Amazing Mormons”: The Media’s Construction of Latter-day Saints as a Model Minority

Chiung Hwang Chen and Ethan Yorgason

THE AUGUST 4, 1997, ISSUE OF *Time* featured on its cover a shot of the Angel Moroni atop the Salt Lake City Temple, illuminated against a night sky; the cover’s caption read “Mormons, Inc.: The Secrets of America’s Most Prosperous Religion.” The accompanying article portrayed Mormons as a practical, capable people.¹ It seemed to be just the kind of story that would make most Mormons proud. But the story troubled us. The more we thought about it, the more it resembled model minority depictions of Asian-Americans.

Early Mormons and Asian-Americans experienced similar persecution and discrimination, and remarkable parallels in present-day images remain. Both overcame early setbacks and became exemplary American citizens. The media noted both groups’ family focus, hard-working attitudes, educational achievements, and economic successes. Articles describing Mormon success sometimes appear nearly identical to those on Asian American success.² Stories about Mormon success sit within what might be called “model minority discourse,” even though Mormons are not specifically labeled a “model minority.” While overtly complemen-

1. David Van Biema, “Kingdom Come,” *Time*, 4 August 1997.

2. “A Church in the News: Story of Mormon Success,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 26 September 1966; “Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S.,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 26 December 1966; Andrew Hamilton, “Those Amazing Mormons,” *Coronet*, April 1952; James C.G. Conniff, “Our Amazing Chinese Kids,” *Coronet*, December 1955. See also Figures 1 and 2.

tary, this discourse is profoundly problematic when applied to Mormons, just as it is for Asian-Americans.³

Each term of the phrase "model minority discourse" is important. Our use of the term "model" plays upon two important connotations. Models are worthy of emulation and admiration. But model also implies a frozen, static representation of something inherently more real. Models are strangely ahistorical in this sense. "Minority" gains meaning through opposition to the majority. Minority can be defined sociologically (as an identifiable group smaller than another group—the majority) or culturally (as a group whose values or practices clarify the boundaries of the mainstream by symbolizing opposition to majority norms). We depend more on the latter definition. To the dominant culture, minorities constitute sites of difference, strangeness, and otherness. As for the term "discourse," we rely on the Foucauldian conceptualization.⁴ Discourses are historically variable frameworks through which particular topics are discussed. Discourses are both epistemologically productive and confining: they open up ways to gain knowledge, yet limit the shape this knowledge takes. "Model minority discourse" encompasses a complex set of ways to create meaning. It glorifies certain culturally dominant values and practices. And it positions a group of people as representatives of, but not full participants in, the social life of the majority. This paper situates U.S. media coverage of Mormons within model minority discourse and explains the problematic nature of that discourse.⁵

3. Thomas K. Nakayama, "'Model Minority' and the Media: Discourse on Asian-America," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 12 (1988): 65-73; Keith Osajima (1988), "Asian-Americans as the Model Minority: An Analysis of the Popular Press Image in the 1960s and 1980s," in *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian-American Studies*, eds. Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur Hansen, and John M. Liu (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1988), 165-74.

4. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972). Because our argument concerns a discourse, it should not be read to imply anything about the motives of individual journalists or the "truth" or validity of individual articles.

5. This paper is based on articles dealing with some aspects of Mormon success published since 1936, when, according to Jan Shipps, the sense that Mormons were worth emulating first crystallized. "From Satyr to Saint: American Attitudes toward the Mormons, 1860-1960," unpublished paper, 1973. We focus on journalistic coverage of Mormons in order to understand the image that emerges from institutions assumed to represent fairness and objectivity. We use mainstream news magazines because of: a) the dominant presumption that they are not greatly biased in one way or another; b) their wide distribution; and c) their easily retrievable nature. We recognize that applications of this study to other media or to the Mormon image as a whole are somewhat speculative at this point.

THE MORMON IMAGE

Many scholars of Mormonism note that Mormon images in the popular American media have shifted over time. In Jan Shipps's memorable phrase, the Mormon has gone from "satyr to saint."⁶ As Mormon lifestyles approached the mainstream, Mormons have gone from facing fierce derision, to grudging tolerance, to open admiration. Shipps argues that although journalists gradually saw post-Manifesto Mormons as capable and productive people, 1930s Mormon self-reliance allowed portrayals of a good people, prospering through adherence to a decent system, administered by wise leaders.⁷ The church's increasing public relations efforts also helped reshape the Mormon image.⁸ Post-World War II codifications of journalistic objectivity, which mandated presenting both sides of an issue, may also have played a role.⁹

Dennis Lythgoe, writing in 1968, saw the Mormon image peak in the 1950s. During that decade, Mormons appeared as ideal citizens. But during the 1960s, Mormon attitudes toward race brought greater negativity.¹⁰ Lythgoe and Stephen Stathis identify a quick reversal during the 1970s.¹¹ Journalists generally had been painting a positive picture of Mormons through attention to family home evening, LDS health habits, genealogy, prominent Mormons, and the Tabernacle Choir.¹² But events soon forced another reversal. The 1978 priesthood revelation, mobilization against the Equal Rights Amendment, recurring rumors about the Solomon Spaulding/Book of Mormon connection, the First Presidency's

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 21, 24-25.

8. See Thomas G. Alexander, "Reshaping the Latter-day Saint Image," in *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 239-57; Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 23.

9. Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

10. Dennis L. Lythgoe, "The Changing Image of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1968): 45-58.

11. Jan Shipps reads these years a bit differently. Her object (all U.S. mass media) differs a bit from Lythgoe and Stathis's (the print media). She considers approximately 1963-1976 to be the "golden age" of the positive Mormon image, despite the media's apparent negativity on LDS racism. She importantly argues that the country's preoccupation with the Vietnam War and domestic counterculture allowed the patriotic and orderly Saints to easily represent American virtue (Jan Shipps, "The Mormon Image Since 1960," paper presented at 1998 Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, 3-6, 23-24).

12. Stephen W. Stathis and Dennis L. Lythgoe, "Mormonism in the Nineteen-Seventies: The Popular Perception," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10, no. 3 (Fall 1977): 95-113. The church's newly organized Public Communications Department probably helped convey such an image (Dennis L. Lythgoe, "Marketing the Mormon Image: An Interview with Wendell J. Ashton," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10 (Fall 1977): 15-20).

stand against the MX missile, and concern about church wealth combined to prevent the media from stamping Mormonism and Mormons with a whole-hearted seal of approval.¹³ Jan Shipp notes that sectarian and secular media complaints about Mormons throughout the latter 1980s converged around and were underscored and even legitimized by the Mark Hofmann controversy. But, she suggests, a less sensationalistic and more positive image returned in the 1990s.¹⁴

As important as these analyses of the changing Mormon image are, however, they obscure as much as they illuminate, especially to the extent that they categorize coverage according to a positive/negative scheme. We prefer to subject these "positive" images to more careful scrutiny. Might not they actually reinscribe a more sophisticated form of marginalization upon Mormons in America? Other groups have found themselves damned by profuse praise. The pedestal restricted white women's social power, and Asian-American scholars argue that setting up Asian-Americans as an example of American success has deeply troubling implications both for Asian-Americans themselves and for other minorities. Thus in this essay we read articles on Mormons differently from the way they are usually read. Reading them through the model minority discourse provokes new and productive ways to think about Mormons' relations with American society, we believe.

MORMONS AS MODELS

Mormon Success

Few stories on Mormons or Mormonism fail to assert that the church has achieved remarkable "success." 1997's *Time* magazine article ("Kingdom Come"), for example,¹⁵ makes LDS success a central theme. Statements such as the following appear early and often: "The Mormon church is by far the most numerically successful creed born on American soil and one of the fastest growing anywhere."¹⁶ "The church's material triumphs rival even its evangelical advances."¹⁷ "There is no major church in the U.S. as active as the Latter-day Saints in economic life, nor, per capita, as successful at it."¹⁸ Throughout the piece the author quotes intellectuals and businessmen, produces charts and figures, and refers to

13. Stephen W. Stathis, "Mormonism and the Periodical Press: A Change is Underway," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 48-73.

14. Jan Shipp, "The Mormon Image since 1960," 6-24.

15. We make this article our most sustained example because it is a broad, recent, and high-quality article; other articles could have served equally well.

16. Biema, "Kingdom Come," 52.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, 53.

Mormon mores to support these claims. The story concludes by quoting President Hinckley and confirming that Mormons indeed know the secret of success.

"From that pioneer beginning, in this desert valley where a plow had never before broken the soil, to what you see today . . . this is a story of success." It would be unwise to bet against more of the same.¹⁹

Two types of success receive emphasis: numerical and financial. Mormons succeed in that others join them, become Mormons, and change their lives, and also by virtue of their money and resources. Group success implies personal success; individual Mormons follow LDS principles and they prosper; many are notably wealthy.

Other stories compound this emphasis on success. *U.S. News and World Report* calls the church "one of the world's richest and fastest-growing religious movements," poised, according to scholar Rodney Stark, to become the first major, international, religious faith since Islam.²⁰ *National Geographic* suggests that because seventy percent of the state is Mormon, Utah boasts unusually high literacy and life expectancy rates and a low unemployment rate.²¹ And a 1994 *Time* article notes the church's numerical, financial, and moral successes in a single breath:

The Mormon church is now the epitome of family values and commands an estimated \$8 billion in assets even as it accumulates the annual tithes from its millions of believers.²²

Suffice it to say, dozens of news stories in the past several decades make Mormon success a major theme. Journalists thus position Mormons beside other narratives of American success. Familiar narratives make stories easily understandable by virtue of their familiarity, but they also recall interpretations of unrelated events. In making stories both linguistically interpretable and meaningful as journalism, the media create and make use of values, conventions, and significance that are nowhere present in events themselves. They have to do so. Just as in any other text, reporters draw upon narrative strategies that create significance far beyond the sum total of individual sentences.²³

19. *Ibid.*, 57.

20. Jeffery L. Sheler and Betsy Wagner, "Latter-day Struggles," *U.S. News & World Report*, 28 September 1992, 73.

21. Donovan Webster, "Utah: Land of Promise, Kingdom of Stone," *National Geographic*, January 1996, 60.

22. Sophronia Scott Gregory, "Saints Preserve Us," *Time*, 13 June 1994, 65.

23. Asa A. Berger, *Narratives in Popular Culture, Media, and Everyday Life* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1997).

Mormon success thus calls upon positive social values. But media celebrations of Mormon success also call upon social fear. Veneration slips easily into concern.²⁴ The articles waver between regarding Mormon success as a source of American pride and viewing it as a threat to society's structure. In model minority discourse, success is profoundly ambiguous. Since success comes through seemingly exemplary actions; journalists imply Americans ought to admire and emulate Mormons. But because Mormons do not truly belong to mainstream society, according to this discourse, threatening signals of too much minority success appear in spite of a "positive" focus on LDS success.

In "Kingdom Come," seemingly innocuous characterizations of Mormon success ("family orientation, clean-cut optimism, honesty and pleasant aggressiveness") sit uneasily beside graphics implying a Mormon threat. The photograph leading into the article shows clean-cut and mostly white male Mormon missionaries seeming to cheer the growing power of the "Kingdom." Mormon conquest, not congeniality, comes to mind here. The multitude of national flags in the background more likely suggests the threat of Mormon power throughout the world than international acceptance of Mormons.²⁵ Graphics headlined "They're growing . . ." " . . . and they're rich," situated under a photograph representing the strong Mormon financial presence far from Utah, do not calm the reader's unease.²⁶ And the headlined prominence of such un-American words as "kingdom" and "empire" add to the effect.²⁷

The article itself, though much more subtle, also signals that Mormons might be a threat or, at least, that they bear watching. It repeatedly emphasizes church power (wielded overwhelmingly by males) when discussing Mormon success. It numbers Saints in the halls of Congress, mentions the appeal of Mormons to the FBI and CIA,²⁸ attempts to precisely calculate church assets and income, tells of the "hard-nosed," if unusually honest, businessmen who run the church, and suggests that few impediments can halt Mormon success in a country which values

24. Stories or discourses about minorities, more than most stories, convey a sense of unresolved threat toward the majority (Teun A. van Dijk, "Stories and Racism," in *Narrative and Social Control: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Dennis K. Mumby (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1993), 127-28).

25. Van Biema, "Kingdom Come," 49-50.

26. *Ibid.*, 54.

27. *Ibid.*, 49-50, 55. Referring to the Mormon project as an "empire" revives a practice more common to earlier decades. This is a somewhat surprising exception to the increasingly sophisticated and subtle analyses of Mormons and Mormonism over time. See "Change Comes to Zion's Empire," *Business Week*, 23 November 1957; Frances Lang, "The Mormon Empire," *Ramparts*, September 1971.

28. See also Robert Lindsey, "The Mormons: Growth, Prosperity and Controversy," *The New York Times Magazine*, 12 January 1986, 21.

material achievement. The article also uses the common device of comparing Mormon wealth to that of corporations.

If it were a corporation, its estimated \$5.9 billion in annual gross income would place it midway through the FORTUNE 500, a little below Union Carbide and the Paine Webber Group but bigger than Nike and the Gap.²⁹

The comparison shows readers just how successful the church is, but it also reminds readers (though perhaps not intentionally) that in America, non-corporate (especially ecclesiastical) wealth deserves immediate suspicion.³⁰

Other media articles imply a Mormon threat by suggesting that church success means dominance over a growing geographical area. *U.S. News and World Report* puts it this way: "And while it has long dominated Utah politics, its presence is increasingly felt in other Western states and in Washington, D.C."³¹ *The Nation* uses phrases like "an entrenched power in the Rocky Mountain West . . . seek[ing] a greater voice on the national scene," or "In Utah they are a state within a state."³² And the discourse seamlessly slides between nineteenth-century Mormon "theocratic communitarianism" and twentieth-century church leaders' ties to major resource-based corporations by invoking an image unpalatable to most Americans:

the church played a role in the economic growth of the areas under Mormon influence similar to a modern central government in an underdeveloped country.³³

In 1983, *U.S. News & World Report* implied more strongly that non-Mormons ought to, at least, carefully watch the church:

What happens with the church is of significance to outsiders because of the organization's immense political and social impact on Western states and its growing influence on the rest of this nation and others where it has missions.³⁴

29. Van Biema, "Kingdom Come," pp. 52, 54.

30. See also the "Mormons, Inc." headline on the magazine cover in which the "Kingdom Come" article is found. Other instances of the church being compared to a corporation include: Carl Carmer, "The 'Peculiar People' Prosper," *The New York Times Magazine*, 15 April 1962, 68; Sheler and Wagner, "Latter-day Struggles," 73; Bob Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, "Mormonism Inc.: The Saints Go Marchin' In," *The Nation*, 16 August, 1980, 150; Seymour Freedgood, "Mormonism: Rich, Vital, and Unique," *Fortune*, April 1964, 139; "LDS, Inc.," *Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 1991, 43.

31. Sheler and Wagner, "Latter-day Struggles," 73.

32. Gottlieb and Wiley, "Mormonism Inc.," 150.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Joseph L. Galloway, "The Mormon Church Faces a Fresh Challenge," *U.S. News & World Report*, 21 November 1983, 61.

To *The New York Times Magazine*, Mormonism's social and political influence reaches "far beyond its numbers" and is "increasing," with a "birth rate almost twice the national average."³⁵ This narration of a broad, deep, and spreading influence³⁶ sends the signal that Mormonism will soon influence the lives of all Americans.³⁷ Thus, deep ambiguity lurks in the theme that Mormons and Mormonism are rich, successful, powerful, and their influence is spreading.

Welfare and Church History

In addition to economic wealth and power, praise for Mormons points to welfare and church history. The claim that Mormons are self-reliant receives constant attention, as does the Americanization of the church and its members' assimilation into American culture. "Kingdom Come" explains the rudiments of the church's welfare system and marvels at how the "group takes care of its own so well."³⁸ Earlier in the story, the author contrasts Mormons' unwelcome American past to their venerated present:

For more than a century, the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints suffered because their vision of themselves and the universe was different from those of the people around them. Their tormentors portrayed them as a nation within a nation, radical communalists who threatened the economic order and polygamists out to destroy the American family.

This year their circumstances could not be more changed. The copious and burnished national media attention merely ratified a long-standing truth: that although the Mormon faith remains unique, the land in which it was born had come to accept—no, to lionize—its adherents as paragons of the national spirit.³⁹

These two themes (replete throughout model minority discourse) suggest that Mormons are paragons of American citizenship. But such

35. Lindsey, "The Mormons," 21, 22.

36. See also "A Church in the News," 90, 92; Hartzell Spence, "The Story of Religions in America: The Mormons," *Look*, 21 January 1958, 58; Thomas McGowan, "The Mormons: Builders of American Zion," *America*, 22 March 1975, 210.

37. Or even many of the world's inhabitants. See the quote predicting Mormonism as the "'next great global tribe'" (note again the un-American terminology) in "Kingdom Come," 57. Even light-hearted anecdotes can work to the same effect: "One Brazilian jovially complained to Elder [Joseph Fielding] Smith last week: 'The danger to the world today is not Communism, but Mormonism. You people work fast in our country with smiles and songs. Then you have lots of children, who study and get ahead of our kids. Then you get yourselves elected to government positions and boom! you pass a law banning coffee and Brazil falls flat on her face.'" See "The Senior Apostle," *Time*, 28 November 1960, 78.

38. Van Biema, "Kingdom Come," 57.

39. *Ibid.*, 52.

notions of ideal American citizenship have always been contested. In fact, journalists' rhetorical decisions are never socially neutral.⁴⁰ Their literary techniques inescapably carry political and ideological implications.⁴¹ Though journalists rely upon widely shared meanings, these community meanings do not reflect undifferentiated community interests (these rarely exist). Rather, each interpretation of the world serves some purposes more than it does others. Journalistic practices usually perpetuate dominant power relations and ideologies.⁴² Journalists affirm the existing social order through knowing how to write to their audience⁴³ and by "tacitly assuming that there is indeed a recognized set of values to which all members of a culture subscribe."⁴⁴ As a result, existing social structures come to be seen as "natural" and beyond question.⁴⁵ Mormons epitomize American success, the model minority discourse suggests; but this is a notion of success that operates in support of status quo power relations.

Mormon success depends on old-fashioned American hard work and self-sufficiency as *Time's* "Kingdom Come" emphasizes: "The church teaches that in hard times, a person's first duty is to solve his or her own problems and then ask for help from the extended family."⁴⁶ The piece carefully notes that the average stay on LDS welfare is only 10 to 12 weeks, and that LDS employment centers help people become independent.⁴⁷ Other articles explain the benefits of church welfare and its effectiveness more explicitly. According to *U.S. News & World Report*, Utah officials claim that Mormon self-reliance "saves the state untold millions of tax dollars." The story also emphasizes that welfare comes only as a

40. Dennis K. Mumby, "Introduction: Narrative and Social Control," in *Narrative and Social Control*.

41. Aníbal González, *Journalism and the Development of Spanish American Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

42. For example: Phyllis Frus, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative: The Timely and the Timeless* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988). We do not see the press as merely a passive reproducer of the dominant culture, however, though clearly it often reproduces such ideologies. Journalists can also question or reformulate dominant understandings, even though doing so is often difficult.

43. Michael Schudson, "The Sociology of News Production Revisited," in *Mass Media and Society*, 2nd ed., eds. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (London: Arnold, 1996), 152.

44. S. Elizabeth Bird and Robert W. Dardenne, "Myth, Chronicle and Story," in *Social Meanings of News: A Text-Reader*, ed. Dan Berkowitz (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1997), 344.

45. *Ibid.*, 346; Michael Schudson, "The Politics of Narrative Form: The Emergence of News Conventions in Print and Television," *Dædalus* 4 (1982).

46. Van Biema, "Kingdom Come," 57.

47. *Ibid.*

product of work; recipients work at whatever their bishops assign.⁴⁸ Only then can a person claim church welfare.

The model minority discourse finds Mormon welfare full of lessons for American welfare. *America* reproduces "the Mormon boast that no church member has ever found it necessary to apply for government welfare."⁴⁹ And *U.S. News & World Report* noted in 1966 that "while the national average of state and local spending on relief was rising by 40 per cent, Utah reduced such spending by 25 per cent."⁵⁰ Right-leaning periodicals, understandably, make the implications of Mormon welfare most explicit.

Among the Mormons it is an emphasis on self-reliance . . . Self-reliant people take care of themselves and their responsibilities. They are proud and independent, not weaklings and whiners.⁵¹

Celebrating Mormon ability to care for their own then becomes a secondary concern.

What some of our great leaders had better figure out, and in a hurry, is that we simply can't have forty percent of the population "eligible" for, much less receiving, all those handouts. We simply can't afford it, period. Somebody had better go about making people ineligible, pronto.⁵²

Similar points have been made more recently. *Policy Review* finds that the Mormon welfare system never allows idleness, that in Mormonism happiness depends on work, and that most of the unemployed lack a work ethic. LDS welfare recipients' quick independence reflects "the Mormon belief that accepting welfare might be a necessary evil, but it is always an evil." The article compares LDS efficiency to that of federal programs and insists that "Mormon welfare has . . . crucial themes to offer modern America." These include the notions that "success comes only incrementally and through sustained effort," and "the understanding that the needy can be taught to help themselves."⁵³ Mormon welfare, within model minority discourse, is used to imply that America should do less to ameliorate cap-

48. Galloway, "The Mormon Church Faces a Fresh Challenge," 62; see also Carmer, "The 'Peculiar People' Prosper," 68.

49. McGowan, "The Mormons," 210.

50. "A Church in the News," 92; these messages about how the church keeps its people off federal welfare, saves tax dollars, and preaches hard work, reached their zenith in the 1950s and 1960s, but, as is shown, implicit remnants remain.

51. Susan L. M. Huck, "Good Work: How Mormons Solve the Welfare Program," *American Opinion*, April 1975, 17.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

53. Tucker Carlson, "Holy Dolers: The Secular Lessons of Mormon Charity," *Policy Review* (Winter 1992): 31.

italist processes rather than more, and that employment problems reside more commonly within individuals than within the system.

In 1991 *Time* claimed that much of Utah's economic vibrancy results from Mormon values. It noted that Utah has one of the country's best-educated, most productive, and youngest work forces, adding that this work force has become a prime selling-point for global companies looking to expand.⁵⁴ Two quotes on Mormon cultural values help explain:

The church's strict morality . . . reinforces the hardworking nature of Utah's people. A Wall Street bond trader puts it succinctly: "All they do there is breed, pray and make money."⁵⁵

"Utah is a unique place, where you can actually get things done," says [Salt Lake City McDonnell Douglas General Manager Al] Egbert. The cultural norm is to work together and make a profit."⁵⁶

Thus even articles without an overt right-wing agenda justify the American system. The discourse suggests that a people with a productive economic attitude exists. America, therefore, needs fewer exorbitant welfare demands; it only needs more people willing to work.

The familiar recounting of Mormon history also defends American institutions. Born in trouble, and tempered by persecution, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has become America's largest and wealthiest home-grown religion by offering shelter in stormy times.⁵⁷

The effect of such statements is to minimize the import of persecution and discrimination. Persecution of minority groups does little permanent harm. In fact, it may help if members band together and rely on themselves while internalizing the attitudes of the dominant culture.

A century ago, the Mormon church was a small, persecuted religious cult whose leaders were being hunted down by Federal marshals as illegal polygamists. It is now the fastest-growing church among the major denominations in the United States and one of the richest. From a largely rural sect with roots in the American frontier, Mormonism has become a predominantly urban faith, controlled by an expanding bureaucracy in Salt Lake City.⁵⁸

54. See also Sally B. Donnelly, "The State of Many Tongues," *Time*, 13 April 1992, 51.

55. Though not as prominent as in stories about Asian-Americans (probably because racial difference cannot be appealed to), there is implicit in some pieces on Mormons a sense that they are able to work inordinately hard, that they do not need the rest and relaxation most others require. Readers might draw out the notion that fair economic competition against Mormons is difficult with their deep reservoirs of strength. See also John G. Hubbell, "Everybody Likes to Work for Bill Marriott," *The Reader's Digest*, January 1972, 96-97.

56. Sally B. Donnelly, "Mixing Business and Faith," *Time*, 29 July 1991, 22, 23.

57. Galloway, "Mormon Church Faces a Fresh Challenge," 61.

58. Lindsey, "The Mormons," 19-21.

What was the key to Mormons traveling “from poverty and persecution to prosperity and power?” *American Heritage’s* answer is conformance to national norms:

Having once resolved to surrender on the key issue of polygamy, the Mormon leadership decided further to reduce distrust and dislike by deliberately conforming to the rest of the United States in many other aspects of life.⁵⁹

Mormonism’s welfare system and historical progress, in model minority discourse, justify the American system—or more precisely, a particular notion of the American system. Mormons model an America in which little energy is spent worrying about who has been discriminated against, or about society’s structural obstacles—an America with minimalist government influence. In this America, independent, hard-working, self-reliant people invariably receive their due reward. *The Reader’s Digest* profile of J. Willard Marriott thus symbolizes both the church and typical Mormons by pointing to opportunities for American success:

Rarely has anyone started with less than Bill Marriott and, by dint of sheer, honest hard work, made more of the opportunity offered by the American system; and shared the resulting opportunities and abundance so generously with those who helped him succeed.⁶⁰

Mormons symbolize hard work. And Mormon hard work is invariably explained through reference to Mormon loyalty and obedience.

Loyalty and Obedience

A third way Mormons appear as “models” is through loyalty and patriotism—by generally embodying the virtues of ideal citizens. “Kingdom Come” mentions Mormon sociability and common purpose and suggests:

Perhaps in consequence, no other denomination can so consistently parade the social virtues most Americans have come around to saying they admire. The Rev. Jeffrey Silliman, of the same Presbyterian group that made [a] heresy charge, admits that Mormons “have a high moral standard on chastity, fidelity, honesty and hard work, and that’s appealing.”⁶¹

59. Rodman W. Paul, “The Mormons: From Poverty and Persecution to Prosperity and Power,” *American Heritage*, June 1977, 82. See also Gregory, “Saints Preserve Us,” 65; Hamilton, “Those Amazing Mormons,” 28.

60. Hubbell, “Everybody Likes to Work for Bill Marriott,” 94.

61. Van Biema, “Kingdom Come,” 55-60; see also Sheler and Wagner, “Latter-day Struggles,” 74; M. R. Werner, “Since Brigham Young,” *The Reader’s Digest*, May 1940, 188.

The *New Republic* makes virtually the same point in the 1980s, calling Mormons "thoroughgoing Americans." The LDS faith

upholds other values cherished by the vast majority of ordinary Americans, which they feel have been seriously threatened in recent years—not least the strength, stability, and attractive numerousness of the characteristic Mormon family.⁶²

In the 1970s, *American Heritage* noted that "it almost goes without saying that in the general drive to make peace with middle-class America, the old tendency toward Mormon separatism has been replaced by an earnest patriotism."⁶³ In the 1960s, *Time* argued, "In many ways, Mormons make almost ideal citizens. They are wholesome, industrious and thrifty, devoted to social welfare and higher education."⁶⁴

Most articles formulate some version of this general argument. Mormons are loyal citizens, possessing a host of virtues most ordinary Americans admire (or ought to admire). But two *New York Times Magazine* stories indicate that nostalgia, for what traditional American values are supposed to have been, produces this admiration.

The scholar who delves deeper than the tourist into contemporary Mormon living in, say, Salt Lake City will soon feel that he has miraculously entered a period similar in its moral and spiritual overtones to that of America as a whole in the nineteenth century. When to these are added such patriotic solemnities as Pioneers Day and Fourth of July celebrations, and an attitude of praise and admiration toward men in public service, it is not surprising that the historian comes away from Utah with the conclusion that the primary virtues which made the nation what it is are here more honored than in most regions of America.⁶⁵

And:

or if there is an America that embodies the vision that Ronald Reagan has for his country—a nation of pious, striving, self-reliant and politically conservative "traditional" families where men work hard at their jobs and women work hard in the home raising their children—it is in Mormon country.⁶⁶

Mormons represent an ahistorical ideal: Mormonism's "modelness" depends on its ability to exist outside of American historical change and to represent something that never actually existed historically.

62. H. F., "Salt Lake City Diarist: This is the Place," *The New Republic*, 2 March 1987, 42.

63. Paul, "The Mormons," 83.

64. "Mormons: The Negro Question," *Time*, 18 October 1963, 83.

65. Carmer, "The 'Peculiar People' Prosper," 64.

66. Lindsey, "The Mormons," 24.

Mormon loyalty and citizenship, like Mormon success, are a double-edged sword in model minority discourse. The discourse reminds readers that Mormons' virtuous American citizenship stems from (and thus might depend upon and be subordinate to) their loyalty to church principles. Characterizations of loyalty thus slide into more negative-toned characterizations of obedience, uniformity, and lack of critical thinking. Readers learn that Mormon prioritization of "traditional" American values and national loyalty is not necessarily permanent. "There are limits to Mormon sociability," *Time's* "Kingdom Come" claims.⁶⁷ When the church senses a loss of control or improperly prioritized loyalties, it has a tendency to close ranks and scrutinize members' obedience. "Kingdom Come" illustrates this tendency by referring to intellectuals and other "dissidents" excommunicated in 1993. It suggests that things could become worse if "as is likely, the church's hard-line No. 3 man, Boyd Packer, some day becomes president."⁶⁸

The discourse often emphasizes obedience, particularly unthinking obedience, as a central characteristic of Mormon culture. A *Boston Globe Magazine* portrayal of missionary life provides a prime example:

The presentation the missionaries made that day is the same one every Mormon missionary in the world makes upon getting a foot inside someone's door.⁶⁹

And:

They will read from the booklet when they give the presentation this afternoon. They will also occasionally depart from it, just as they are doing now, for the appearance of spontaneity—something the booklet also prescribes.⁷⁰

The story notes that all Mormon missionaries around the world follow the same rigorous schedule. And it suggests that preparing young men for church leadership is a key function of the missionary experience.⁷¹

67. Van Biema, "Kingdom Come," 57.

68. *Ibid.* The fear of conservative retrenchment lurks in the discourse, though the precise direction of such feared movement varies historically (and predictably). Often a single high-ranking member of the Twelve Apostles (close in line to become church president) embodies such retrenchment. Boyd K. Packer represents anti-intellectualism to '90s journalists; Ezra Taft Benson symbolized ultra-right-wing politics in the '70s and '80s, and Joseph Fielding Smith stood for scriptural literalism in the '60s (Gregory, "Saints Preserve Us," 66; Gottlieb and Wiley, "Mormonism Inc.," "The Mormon Church Faces a Fresh Challenge," 61; Lindsey, "The Mormons," 46; "The Senior Apostle," 78).

69. Dick Dahl, "Door-to-Door for the Lord," *The Boston Globe Magazine*, 18 January 1998, 24.

70. *Ibid.*, 25.

71. *Ibid.*

Mormon obedience implies that members will follow church leaders and curtail their own spontaneity and personal reservations. In spite of considerable member concern about an Ezra Taft Benson presidency in the 1980s, *U.S. News and World Report* asserted that

even Benson's critics concede that, in any church split, the vast majority of Mormons would follow him. Church leaders insist that they have no anxiety about Benson's becoming president and prophet of the church.⁷²

The New York Times Magazine puts it this way:

In return [for spiritual and social benefits], the church demands conformity and obedience. It is not a democracy. It expects members to have large families . . . Members may not smoke or drink . . . The church tells them how to dress, how they should cut their hair and what their sexual practices should be.⁷³

Mormons do not think for themselves, this discourse suggests.⁷⁴ "Unquestioning belief rather than critical self-examination has always been the Mormon style," *Time* maintains while featuring a few Mormons (the new *Dialogue* creators) embarking upon independent thought.⁷⁵ Instead, Mormons use their considerable education uncritically to help the church operate more efficiently. The "hard-nosed businessmen" who lead the church are prime examples.⁷⁶ According to the discourse, they are practically and managerially able, but theologically and socially unimaginative. These men "rule" the church with "absolute authority."⁷⁷ And even more disturbingly, they, along with church members generally, prize church loyalty more highly than civil community membership. *The Saturday Evening Post* tells of a Mormon senator who changed a vote at the last minute. As explanation he said, "My religion comes before my politics."⁷⁸ Thus it becomes difficult to read a quote like "The way the

72. Galloway, "Mormon Church Faces a Fresh Challenge," 61.

73. Lindsey, "The Mormons," 24.

74. This assertion excludes the business sphere where Mormons are portrayed as highly talented.

75. "Mormons: For Ruffled Believers," *Time*, 26 August 1966, 59. Perhaps the media's preoccupation with Mormon intellectuals' seeming alienation from LDS cultural norms discloses a desire to see a chink in the Mormon armor of obedience and organizational efficiency. See Gregory, "Saints Preserve Us," 66; Sheler and Wagner, "Latter-day Struggles," 77; "The Mormon Gender Gap," *U.S. News and World Report*, 14 May 1990, 14; Lindsey, "The Mormons," 38.

76. Van Biema, "Kingdom Come," 55. See also Sheler and Wagner, "Latter-day Struggles," 73; "Busy Like the Bees," *Forbes*, 1 February 1971.

77. Lindsey, "The Mormons," 19.

78. Robert Cahn, "The New Utah: Change Comes to Zion," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1 April 1961, 42.

church regularly flexes its organizational muscle is the envy of governments"⁷⁹ in a wholly positive light.

In any event, the model of Mormons as successful, self-reliant, and otherwise admirable American citizens is burdened with significant ambiguity. In addition to justifying current geographies of American power (especially conservative visions of such) and an ideal of American life that may have never been, the "positive" images easily turn into pictures of a powerful, insular, zealous, and ultimately self-loyal people. This people may retreat from normal American citizenship at any time. Sharpening this picture is the sense that no matter how much of an American model Mormons become, they still do not belong to the mainstream—they are after all an American minority.

MORMONS AS MINORITIES

Journalism is as important socially for the ways in which it constructs meaningful communities (and communities of meaning) as it is for its attempts to dispassionately inform us about events.⁸⁰ Despite the sense that Mormons represent a certain American ideal, model minority discourse abundantly indicates that Mormons remain a not-completely-assimilable minority. Journalists use a range of methods to signal continuing Mormon otherness. "Kingdom Come," for example, uses a number of techniques that by themselves have little effect, but employed together serve to distance Mormons from mainstream Americans. The story begins by telling of the church's Salt Lake City silo holding 19 million pounds of wheat. The reporter asks why it exists and how it will be used, as an LDS bishop tries to explain:

... the grain in the silo goes nowhere. The bishop . . . is trying to explain why. "It's a reserve," he is saying. "In case there is a time of need."

What sort of time of need?

"Oh, if things got bad enough so that the normal systems of distribution didn't work." Huh? "The point is, if those other systems broke down, the church would still be able to care for the poor and needy."

What he means, although he won't come out and say it, is that although the grain might be broken out in case of a truly bad recession, its root purpose is as a reserve to tide people over in the tough days just before the Second Coming.

"Of course," says the bishop, "we rotate it every once in a while."⁸¹

In spite of the last paragraph's humanizing touch, Mormons come across as

79. Galloway, "Mormon Church Faces a Fresh Challenge," 61.

80. Barbie Zelizer, "Has Communication Explained Journalism?" in *Social Meanings of News*.

81. Van Biema, "Kingdom Come," 51-52.

ultimately inscrutable. The implication is that Mormons realize they cannot explain themselves to other Americans. Even without any reference to the temple, they appear reluctant to reveal their secrets, almost willing to deny that such exist.⁸² The narration of how long it took to find the silo's "real" significance (and the intimation that the reporter had to draw the conclusion himself) suggests that Mormons almost speak another language, one that ordinary Americans need translation to understand.⁸³

The actions of ordinary Mormons, and often those of the church, are almost always explained through translation. This is one of few media articles that allows an ordinary Saint to explain Mormon action⁸⁴ (though whether readers interpret this "bishop" as ordinary is debatable). But the bishop's inability or unwillingness to fully communicate suggests a gap between ordinary Americans and ordinary Mormons that cannot be easily bridged; thus, the need for translators. To supplement its own translations, the piece draws upon the usual translation department: non-Mormon scholars, Mormon scholars, dissident Mormons, church leaders, and Mormons of special prominence. Non-Mormon scholars inhabit the world of Americanism, but are conversant with the language of Mormonism.⁸⁵ Mormon scholars have the converse characteristics and seem to be equally useful for translational purposes.⁸⁶ Mormon "dissidents," because they reside within the strange, liminal space between American culture and Mormonism, are also helpful translators.⁸⁷ Church leaders and Mormons of prominence can translate because of their extraordinary success in climbing American institutional ladders.⁸⁸

82. The fact that the summary of Mormon historical Americanization comes directly on this story's heels suggests that Mormons' reluctance derives from a desire to appear as much like ordinary Americans as possible.

83. The constant need to translate Mormon terms such as "ward" and "stake" has the same effect.

84. Interestingly, right-wing glorifications of Mormon welfare contain the main counter-examples. See Carlson, "Holy Dolers."

85. Van Biema, "Kingdom Come," 52, 55; Sheler and Wagner, "Latter-day Struggles," 73, 74, 76; Gregory, "Saints Preserve Us," 66; Lindsey, "The Mormons," 39.

86. "Kingdom Come" uses the late Leonard Arrington, p. 53. Also: Gregory, "Saints Preserve Us," 65; Webster, "Utah," 56-60; Kenneth L. Woodward, "The Mantle of Prophecy Comes only in Gray," *Newsweek*, 27 March 1995, 63.

87. Walter Kirn, "Walking a Mile in Their Shoes: A Lapsed Mormon Takes a Sentimental Journey to the Holy Sites," *Time*, 4 August 1997, 58-59; Sheler and Wagner, "Latter-day Struggles," 77. Mormon feminists serve especially well as representatives of both scholarship and dissidence. See "The Mormon Gender Gap" and Gregory, "Saints Preserve Us," 65-66; Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Mormonism And Feminism," *Wilson Quarterly* (Spring 1991), 30-31.

88. Van Biema, "Kingdom Come," 54, 55. Seemingly moderate and public relations-minded church leaders (such as President Hinckley and Neal A. Maxwell) receive the bulk of the column space.

Choosing these people to interpret Mormonism seems innocuous enough for individual stories, maybe even entirely appropriate, but viewed together, as part of a whole discourse, these types of voices drown out those of the rare ordinary Mormon.⁸⁹ Mormon women are particularly absent. Ordinary Mormons still appear strange and unknowable, represented more by their conformity, uniformity, zeal, tithe-paying, secret undergarments, secret temple rituals, and belief that they may become gods than for their opinions of the church's role in their lives or their relationships with other Americans.

Recitations of history also reinforce Mormons' minority status. By carefully noting early Mormonism's "un-American" features (not to mention its continuing "un-Christian" attributes), journalists chart out a space of otherness to which Mormons can easily return, and which, despite vaunted assimilation, they probably have never entirely vacated.⁹⁰ The discourse constantly reminds readers of how much separates Mormons from the rest of the country. *Time* finds it somewhat incredible that "the Latter-day Saints remain sensitive about their 'otherness'—more so, in fact, than most outsiders can imagine." It suggests, "Perhaps they should just learn to relax."⁹¹ It is ironic, if not entirely unwise, that *Time* offers this tip while simultaneously reinforcing the insider-outsider separation and subsequently carefully detailing LDS "divergences" and "distinctiveness."⁹² Polygamy still links Mormons to an unfathomable past.⁹³ In each of the past several decades, other issues have also put space between Mormons and Americans. 1960s and 1970s journalists wondered at how Mormons could anachronistically continue to withhold the priesthood from black males. In the 1980s it was opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. In the 1990s, the policing of feminists and church history exemplifies Mormon separation from American norms.⁹⁴ Authoritarianism has served a similar function throughout the decades.⁹⁵

All these points suggest that deep ambiguity besets the model minority image of Mormons. Mormons may be quintessentially American, but a vast gulf simultaneously separates them from the majority's culture. While the model minority image appears to display Mormons posi-

89. Sheler and Wagner, "Latter-day Struggles," 76.

90. *Ibid.*, 78; Paul, "The Mormons," 82; Cahn, "The New Utah," 32.

91. Van Biema, "Kingdom Come," 52-53.

92. *Ibid.*, 53-57.

93. See, for an example, the photographic lineup of Brigham Young's wives in *ibid.*, 52-53.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

95. For example, Gregory, "Saints Preserve Us," 66; Lindsey, "The Mormons," 23; Lang, "The Mormon Empire," 39-42; Gerald W. Johnson, "The Mormons," *The New Republic*, 7 January 1967, 40; Fawn M. Brodie, "'This Is the Place'—And It Became Utah," *The New York Times Magazine*, 1947, 14; Werner, "Since Brigham Young," 191.

tively, it can, with a slight shift in focus, promote fear.⁹⁶ Mormons often come across as a friendly, hard-working, patriotic, and civic-minded people. But they can just as easily appear as unknowable and homogeneous people who are almost unnaturally productive and accomplish great communal feats. They conform unthinkingly, with intense loyalty to the commands of wise-to-the-world leaders (with only a secondary, derivative, and perhaps temporary loyalty to the nation) who might unpredictably lead the church in obscure directions.⁹⁷ If a plausible picture, this constitutes classic American anxiety toward minorities. While most Americans do not consciously hate minorities, scholars point out that persistent, usually unacknowledged, fear of minorities exists.⁹⁸ Differences between people are not well understood, and lack of understanding leads more to mistrust than to celebration. People attribute greater homogeneity and cohesiveness to minorities than they, in fact, possess.

Together, mistrust of difference and a belief in minority cohesiveness result in fear of minority power. Majorities fear that minorities have the power to produce unwelcome change unless the majority maintains a constant vigil. Minorities might either pollute and undermine majority values, or simply impose their homogeneous will on society by virtue of their unnatural fitness to do so.⁹⁹ Bonnie Honig asserts that Americans hold profoundly ambiguous attitudes toward immigrants (and her argument might be applied to minorities more generally). On the one hand, Americans value the diversity and flavor different groups bring to society. But, on the other, minorities appear to threaten social stability.¹⁰⁰ The

96. And it sometimes does so explicitly. "Liberal" fear is explicitly appealed to in articles like Gottlieb and Wiley, "Mormonism Inc."; John Harrington, "The Freeman Institute: A Mormon PAC?" *The Nation*, 16-23, August 1980, 152-53; and Lang, "The Mormon Empire." The arguments on the two ideological "poles" explicate what is implicit in the more ideologically "neutral" articles. Most "objective" journalistic narratives are pregnant with meaning—that is, they contain words and phrases suggesting greater ideological significance to the reader than a literalistic reading uncovers (W. Lance Bennett and Murray Edelman, "Toward a New Political Narrative," *Journal of Communication* 35 (1985): 156-71).

97. Virtually every change in church president occasions speculation over where the church will go next.

98. Teun A. van Dijk, *News as Discourse* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1988); Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

99. Because the concept of race implies biological difference, American whites have a long history of ascribing "superhuman" and incomprehensible capacities to racial minorities. Mormons, of course, were racialized in the nineteenth century. But we submit that they have been assigned similar mysterious capabilities in the twentieth century through the (especially Evangelical) Christian discourse of cults and through more secular ascriptions of blind faith and unthinking obedience.

100. Bonnie Honig, "Ruth, the Model Emigrée: Mourning and the Symbolic Politics of Immigration," *Political Theory* 25 (1997): 112-35.

model minority discourse reproduces and sustains both the celebration and the concern. We believe that it is time to start imagining "minorities," including ourselves as Mormons, in new ways.

IMPLICATIONS

The Media and Mormon Society

Journalistic discourses do not exist in a vacuum. Although the mass media may be the most important institution through which Americans learn the model minority discourse, others perpetuate it as well. Scholars share complicity. It should not surprise anyone that media accounts of Mormons have changed in ways roughly parallel to "advances" in Mormon historiography (greater sophistication, a tendency to downplay truthful concerns, a focus on similar topics). While we do not suggest that Mormon intellectuals suppress their concerns about LDS culture and church policy, we urge more attention to the discourses and metadiscourses that are employed. We think the discourse of Americanization, for example, promotes a narrower view of both Mormons' relationships to American society and American society itself than is wise.¹⁰¹

Journalism's model minority discourse (at least the "positive" part of it) also bears close resemblance to church public relations images of Mormons. Surely, many Mormons would gladly be called model minorities. We do not suggest that Mormons should flee from the moniker under all circumstances. We could not do so, even if we wanted to, and even if we could, it would probably not be wise. The model minority image is very attractive to certain kinds of people. Even Mormon intellectuals have an interest in affirming the gospel among these people and in building communities with them. Since the model minority image helps toward this end, and because it captures much of what we strive for in our own lives, it has its place. Nevertheless, we think it is wise to consider those who are put off by the model minority image. We work within departments full of good people, most of whom find their predominant image of Mormons as politically conservative, anti-intellectual conformists to be overwhelmingly unattractive. We think that heterogenizing our image could bring unsuspected rewards.

101. We advocate a kind of restless stance toward discourse. Discourses formulated too often and for too long inevitably become forces of conservatism. Just as the Americanization discourse was useful historiographically in getting beyond Mormon exceptionalism, so the model minority discourse improved on earlier ways of viewing Mormonism by discovering the complexity and integrity of *the Mormon experience*. But this discourse has been around too long and retards understanding of *Mormon experiences*.

Mormons and American Citizenship

John Peters argues that the real political power of the media lies not so much in their ability to change people's opinions (an ability which is quite limited in many cases) but rather in their capacity to shape the space of public discussion.¹⁰² They profoundly affect what constitutes public life and how contributions are made to American democracy. The media help decide questions such as which people can contribute to public debates and how they might do so. Thus, legitimately, model minority discourse may be as important for the way it constructs Mormons' American citizenship as for its ability to persuade people to either like or dislike Mormons. This discourse opens up a strange space of American citizenship for Mormons. Although our supposed values seem exemplary in many ways, our methods of resolving disputes (communal agreement, conformity, and obedience) seem most un-American. Therefore, Mormon contributions to American political life may be easily discounted by the majority. This is the downside of the model minority discourse for Mormons' American citizenship. We hope, therefore, that the media will broaden the Mormon image to allow Mormons greater opportunities to help construct public life.

Meanwhile, our significant relationships are not confined only to the majority. We also have important, if not often productive, relationships with other minorities. We think that a type of model minority posture may actually benefit these latter relationships; but this means reconfiguring the present model minority image. One consequence of the model minority discourse is that minority groups are set against each other in a competition for success and acceptability. White Mormons, however, can work against this tendency if they wisely negotiate their strange position as both majority and minority. They ought to use their history as a persecuted people and their continuing (though partial) otherness within America to develop political solidarity with other minorities.

This does not imply strengthening the already overdeveloped sense of Mormon suffering and innocence. Nor does it mean suggesting that others follow our path to supposed success. It does mean recognizing that other groups face similar or worse discrimination from the majority, that, in fact, Mormons often belong to the persecuting majority, and that Mormons ought not to silently let others face abominations similar to those faced by Mormons in the past.¹⁰³ In particular, white Mormons

102. John Durham Peters, "Historical Tensions in the Concept of Public Opinion," in *Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent*, eds. Theodore L. Glasser and Charles T. Salmon (New York: Guilford, 1995), 3-32, esp. 24.

103. Group political power often depends on developing a persuasive image of group innocence. But we believe that Mormons over-cultivate an attitude of being oppressed and seriously under-cultivate their sense of solidarity with other oppressed peoples. An exam-

stand in a good position to seriously question the privileges of whiteness in America. Rather than feverishly working to prove what normal Americans they are, white Mormons should slow down and ponder what being a minority entails. They should not be patronizing, with a false empathy that suggests being Mormon is just like being Asian American, African American, or Native American. Mormons ought to respect real difference and understand their historical complicity with the oppressive majority. They should instead use their minority experiences to cultivate an America less hostile for all minorities. In the process, a vital contemporary Mormon conundrum—how to accommodate minorities within Mormonism—just might become less important, or even disappear. If they do so, perhaps Mormons will really become a model minority of a different, but more desirable sort.

ple of all-too-typical LDS attitudes occurred when we spent the summer of 1997 in Ogden, Utah. Two opinions reached the editorial page of the *Ogden Standard-Examiner* at nearly the same time. The first came from a young non-Mormon girl who complained about the difficulties of living in a predominantly Mormon community. A number of Mormons predictably responded that her complaint was an example of Mormons being persecuted and that she should leave the state. The second opinion was a racist diatribe suggesting that Mexican immigrants were responsible for many of the state's woes and should not be allowed to immigrate. Just as predictably, the lack of Mormon response to this opinion was deafening.