

# Reviews

*Edited by Edward Geary*

## REVIEW ESSAY

*Stanford Cazier*

Stanford Cazier, who received his graduate training at the University of Wisconsin, has taught modern American history for the past several years at Utah State University. Recently he was selected as an administrative intern and spent the year as assistant to the President of New York University.

Almost three years ago I agreed to review Perry Miller's posthumous publication, *The Life of the Mind in America, From the Revolution to the Civil War*, and Daniel J. Boorstin's *The Americans: The National Experience*, which also covers the period between the Revolution and the Civil War. While awaiting the arrival of a review copy of the Miller book, I tried to anticipate what America's most prodigious student of the Puritan Mind had construed the Mormon Mind to be. Shock was my initial reaction to the book, for it contained not one reference to Joseph Smith or the Mormons, and Brigham Young was dismissed with one sentence — a sentence shared with other "deviationists."

*The Americans: The National Experience* was more considerate of the efforts of the Latter-day Saints, but hardly generous. Quantitatively, they received the focus of less than one percent of the book's five hundred pages. My shock turned to embarrassment. I did not relish the burden of bearing the apparent tidings that Mormonism in the 19th century suffered from intellectual poverty, so I shelved the books without review. However, an experience during the past year has led me to a reconsideration of the suggestiveness of these two books for studying Mormon thought.

A colleague and friend phoned my office suggesting that we have lunch together — he wanted to talk. Previously, whenever we met on campus we fell into spontaneous discussion, but now curiosity and slight anxiety were whetted by an invitation to conversation in a more structured manner. After exchanging the usual amenities, he opened with a double-headed query: "Is Mormonism intellectually respectable, and does it make any difference if it isn't?" My friend's problem was somewhat rhetorical in that he had already

substantially resolved it and was merely seeking confirmation of cherished concepts. Yet, the query was also genuine. While he is a committed son of the Church, he is also a fine student of science and of the humanities. By disposition and by training his mind is open. His desire for confirmation did not carry with it the insistence that confirmation follow.

The question of Mormonism's intellectual respectability and the significance of the question are issues as old as Mormonism. Multifarious have been the resolutions, both within the Church and beyond its pale. Some have written that Mormonism does not command intellectual respect and they damn it for that reason. Others have said that there is considerable intellectual appeal in Mormonism but that this is not significant since the Church does not hang on the mandate of logic but on the needs of the spirit. There are still others who can answer both questions in the negative with apparent peace of mind and heart. Finally, there are those who produce affirmation at both levels of inquiry.

Humor and slight tragedy attend any survey of the feelings held by each of these groups respecting the others. Suspicion, contempt, tolerance, condescension, incredulity, and pity are among the attitudes entertained by the devotees of any one of the above perspectives as they view the propositions of the other schools. And because of this psychological distance, attempts at communication have often led to mutual alienation.

This problem is not unique to Mormonism, nor, for that matter, to the analysis of religion or theology. The intellectual difficulties pointed here are rather peculiar to those arenas of investigation where conclusions may not always allow for public verification.

In short, there appears to be a "hang up" on the assessment of Mormon thought. On review, the books by Miller and Boorstin are very suggestive as to why this is the case and how it might be resolved — at least for some. The key to this suggestiveness is the fact that these books represent polar extremes in their approaches to American culture, approaches that have been evolving and diverging for a quarter of a century.

Professor Merle Curti was probably the first student of American intellectual history to point the course of this divergence. In 1943 he wrote that his *Growth of American Thought* was a "social history of thought," a history looking to the social sources and the social impact of ideas.<sup>1</sup> Such a study could not ignore social structures, economic valences, the machinations of politics, and a host of other realities that help shape a person's perception of himself and his environment. Curti contrasted his study of ideas with that of Arthur O. Lovejoy, who, in the *Great Chain of Being*, was concerned with the "interior" of ideas, with their ideological roots and logical implications. While Curti sought to emphasize a "functional" approach to ideas, those of the interior school were more committed to outlining formal relationships among ideas.

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<sup>1</sup>Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York, 1943), ix.

Since World War II intellectual historians have generally aligned themselves with either the functional or the analytical study of American thought.<sup>2</sup> Miller and Boorstin are model contrasts in this alignment.

Miller is best known for his *New England Mind*, which is a bench mark for the study of early American thought. In this work, especially volume one, *The Seventeenth Century*, Miller was fascinated by the system and subtlety with which Puritan divines conceptualized. This is a formal study, inferring the implications of a cosmology, "treating the entire expression of the period as a single body of writing and paying little or no attention to modifications forced upon the mind by domestic events."<sup>3</sup> Even the section entitled "Sociology" is devoted exclusively to the elaboration of the covenant system, wherein the reader is treated to the fine differentiations among such concepts as "grace," "justifications," "regeneration," and "sanctification."

In contrast, Boorstin carries the functional approach to ideas almost to a non-rational conclusion. In 1953, he identified the genius of American politics to have been "the characteristic *lack* of political theory"<sup>4</sup> (italics added). This thesis was broadened in *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* to suggest that American thought is best understood if it is not examined in terms of philosophical systems:

For the most part, writers have assumed that the categories of European philosophy and literature, and the approach by way of "systems" ("Puritanism," "Rationalism," "Romanticism," "Transcendentalism," etc.) are adequate to the examination of American culture. . . . It is peculiarly inappropriate, and can even be misleading, to try to sum up American thinking — much less American culture — through great philosophic systems or the literary and philosophic works of great men.<sup>5</sup>

Not only did Americans dispense with systematic thought, but Boorstin implies, by thus being unencumbered they were free to create, to improvise, to adapt — to embrace a flexibility that was closed to the intellectual elite of Europe:

We have too long been told that a "unified" scheme of knowledge is required to give meaning and unity to society; that men have a greater sense of sharing values and of working to a common end if they are united by a grand overarching system of thought; that somehow an articulate and systematic philosophy is likely to provide

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<sup>2</sup>John Higham, of the University of Michigan, has been a most prolific interpreter of the developments and methodological problems in American intellectual history. See especially "The Rise of American Intellectual History," *The American Historical Review*, LVI (April, 1951), 453-471; "Intellectual History and Its Neighbors," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XV (June, 1954), 339-347; "American Intellectual History: A Critical Appraisal," *American Quarterly*, XIII (Summer Supplement, 1961), 219-233. For more recent trends see Rush Welter, "The History of Ideas in America: An Essay in Redefinition," *The Journal of American History*, LI (March, 1965), 599-614.

<sup>3</sup>Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, 1953), Foreword.

<sup>4</sup>Daniel J. Boorstin, *Genius of American Politics* (Chicago, 1953).

<sup>5</sup>Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York, 1958), 398.

such a system of shared meaning. The stock example is, of course, the Middle Ages, when such theologians as Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus constructed monuments of speculative philosophy. It has become an unexamined commonplace that a more unified philosophy will produce a more unified society, that ours would be a better and more meaningful work if we in America possessed such systematic and "unifying" thought.

But is this really true? It may have seemed so in earlier societies where the frame of meaning was supposed to be accessible only to a priestly or ruling class. Could it remain so in a modern literate society where most people would be expected to understand the purpose of the community? One cannot unify such a society by mere *concepts*, however refined and subtle, however vivid to a few philosophers and theologians. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Boorstin is thereby predictably suspicious of such unified statements of American thought as those found in the *New England Mind* and other works by Perry Miller:

The monumental studies by Perry Miller . . . have given the subtleties of Puritan theology a serious examination by a mind worthy of them for the first time since Jonathan Edwards. No one who works through Miller's volumes, following his reconstruction and dissection of the more sophisticated American Puritans, can fail to respect them and to see a human plausibility in their thinking. The main peril of Miller's approach is that he may sometimes take their distinctions more seriously and more precisely than 17th-century Puritans saw them to be. He is more interested in the intricacy of their philosophy than in the social consequences of their ways of thinking and he is not much concerned with the vagueness and fluidity which ideas seem to acquire when they touch the confusing world of action.<sup>7</sup>

In short, Miller sought the essence of American culture along the "inner" track by discussing ideas in terms of themselves. Boorstin finds that the study of the interrelationship of ideas is less than fruitful, that American thought is best understood in terms external to itself, in relation to a community of events or "the confusing world of action."

Miller and Boorstin carry these frames of reference into the books which are the ostensible subject of this review-essay. In *The Americans: The National Experience*, Boorstin again heralds the essentially non-ideological cast of the American Mind, its "fluidity," "ingenuity," "versatility." He finds the genius of the American factory system to have been the naïveté with which it was conceived:

The system, which later was to have the look of grand invention and bold discovery, began in the casual experiments of men unencumbered by century-accumulated skills and intricate social regulations. If the American Factory System was a triumph of organization and of cooperation, it was also a triumph of naïveté, for its essence was a

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<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 380.

loosening of habits and of ways of thinking. Ignorance and “backwardness” had kept Americans out of old grooves. Important innovations were made simply because Americans did not know any better.<sup>8</sup>

This naïveté also informed our quest for national symbols. Boorstin calls attention to the view that unlike European models, our heroes are also clowns. The comic dimension of David Crockett’s alleged prowess stems from “the *pervasive ambiguity* of American life, the *vagueness* which laid the continent open to adventure, which made the land a rich storehouse of the *unexpected*, which kept vocabulary ungoverned and the language *fluid* — this same vagueness suffused both the comic and the heroic”<sup>9</sup> (italics added).

But where Boorstin senses vagueness, incongruity, and ambiguity, Miller posits clarity, structure, and system. And while Boorstin hears vulgarity, Miller listens for nobility of expression. The cultural tragedy of Miller’s death is that *The Life of the Mind of America* was to have contained nine sections. As published, only two sections (The Evangelical Basis and The Legal Mentality) were completed, and a third section, Science — Theoretical and Applied, contains one finished chapter and six in scenario form.

In this, his last work, Miller followed the lead of the late Morris Cohen in treating the idea of law as appropriate subject matter for intellectual history. He gave one-half of the book to “Legal Mentality,” a section conceived with typically grand system.

Boorstin, on the other hand, is much more superficial in his treatment of the law. It is not that he is not qualified to comment in depth: He has been a barrister-at-large of the Inner Temple, London, and has taught law at Harvard and practiced it in Massachusetts. He is also the author of *The Mysterious Science of the Law*. The reason Boorstin gave but a scant and scattered thirty pages to the common law, vigilantism, claim clubs, etc., while Miller mustered one hundred and sixty-five pages, including a forty page chapter on “Intellectual Elegance,” is because he is not taken with the suggestion that the idea of law has been that systematic or that pervasive in giving form to the American mind.

The methodological predilections of Miller and Boorstin predictably inform their disposition of early 19th-century religious experience and thought. Miller is unimpressed with the quality of mind represented in the leaders of the revival movement, for they “provide little for the historian of ideas to work with. The powerful fact about these protagonists is that, in relation to the accumulated wisdom of Protestant theology, they held few ideas and were little capable of cerebration.”<sup>10</sup> Charles Grandison Finney is a marked exception to this judgment, and Miller credits him with having a “vigorous mind” and with producing “a major work in the history of the mind” (*Lectures on Revivals of Religion*). The reader is then treated to a lengthy exe-

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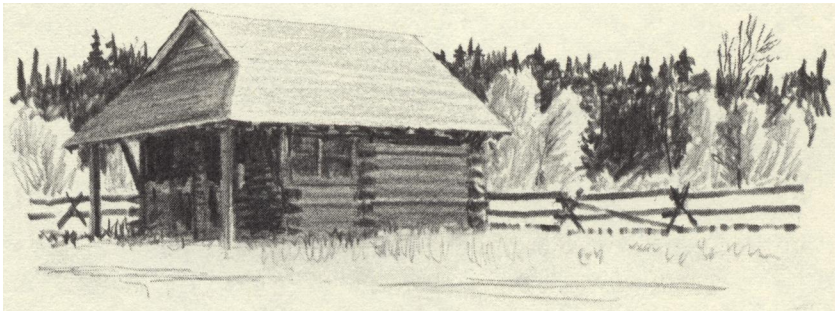
<sup>8</sup>Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York, 1965), 21.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>10</sup>Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York, 1965), 6.

genesis of Finney's thought. No reference is made to Joseph Smith, and as for Brigham Young, the following is recorded: "The deviationists who emerged out of the [Revival] — one thinks especially of Brigham Young — carried into their heresies the frenetic compulsiveness of the movement. But as compared with Finney, they all seem pallid."<sup>11</sup>

Boorstin's position is in striking polarity to that of Miller. While Miller devoted almost one hundred pages to evangelism, Boorstin gives revivalism short shift, two pages, with Finney's share cut to a brief paragraph. And appropriately the Mormons are excluded from the section on evangelism. Rather, they are cited, not for their "frenetic compulsiveness," but for their "organizing genius to elaborate novel elements in their theology, ritual, and institutions"<sup>12</sup> — a capacity which Miller may have considered too lowbrow for inclusion in a systematic study of early 19th-century thought. That Boorstin takes little space to illustrate the Mormon "genius" is not a token of depreciation but is consistent with his emphasis on multiplicity in American culture.



The suggestiveness of these two books for the study of Mormon thought is resident in the realization that there may be little in Mormon intellectual experience that is available for the kind of "interior" analysis so typical of the works of Miller. On the other hand, the bulk and possibly the best of Mormon intellection may be produced by "modifications forced upon the mind by domestic events," which demands a "functional" approach to ideas for assessment.

Sterling M. McMurrin gave apparent recognition to this thesis very early in his *Philosophical Foundations of Mormon Theology* when he wrote that whatever the metaphysical basis of Mormon thought, "Mormon theology developed for the most part within concrete historical contexts and was not derived from the metaphysics."<sup>13</sup> But this caveat proved to be rhetorical when he added that

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<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>12</sup>Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience*, 63.

<sup>13</sup>Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Philosophical Foundations of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City, 1959), 6.

although the theological doctrines are not necessarily deducible from the metaphysical principles, the metaphysics once defined sets the limits for and in a sense indicates the direction of theological development, for the strong intellectualistic tendencies of Mormonism guarantee a continuing effort to rationalize the theology on philosophical foundations.<sup>14</sup>

Further reading in this work and its sequel, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion*, produces the impression that in McMurrin one has found the Perry Miller of Mormonism, who, to paraphrase Boorstin, is more interested in fine discriminations in Mormon philosophy than he is in the "social consequences" of Mormon ways of thinking, and "he is not much concerned with the vagueness and fluidity which ideas seem to acquire when they touch the confusing world of action."<sup>15</sup> The following is certainly illustrative: "[Mormon] norms of value are absolutes established in the structure of reality independently of passing circumstances."<sup>16</sup>

In method, McMurrin claims to be "empirical rather than rationalistic,"<sup>17</sup> but the method he employs is demonstrably rationalistic. He insists that while Mormonism may display a syncretic character which may provide substance for intellectual history, it is of little moment to philosophy.<sup>18</sup> But methodological sophistication going beyond that usually displayed in either philosophy or intellectual history is required if the Boorstin paradigm is to be instructive in informing the intellectual character of Mormonism.

From its inception, Mormonism, as individual and group effort, may have been much more "capable of cerebration" than Miller is willing to grant, because his closed system of internal analysis does not allow for quantification. "Quantification" may appear to be an inappropriate term to describe the process of assessing the character of thought, but if that thought is conspicuously less than formal or unified, if it is responsive to changing circumstances, displayed in organizational innovation and in restructuring interpersonal relations, and functional to the point of dedication to the instrumentality of ideas, an assessment apparatus designed to elicit quantification may be called for. In short, a rigorous empiricism is needed in order to test the applicability of the Boorstin paradigm to an evaluation of Mormon thought. Historians, philosophers, and other humanists have traditionally played a dominant role in evaluations of this type, but behavioral and social scientists are probably much better equipped for the task. Whether they can be interested in the assignment is another question.

The point of this short essay is not that the contributions of Miller and his Mormon counterpart, McMurrin, are less than legitimate. On the contrary, their published works are of major importance to the understanding

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience*, 380.

<sup>16</sup>McMurrin, "Reply to Professor Madsen's Critique," *Brigham Young University Studies*, II (Spring-Summer, 1960), 265.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 262.

of Puritan and Mormon theology — and McMurrin posits considerable strength in logic of Mormon theology. The point is that however legitimate a preoccupation with the “interior” of ideas may be, to opt for this approach may be to miss a vitality, a breadth, and a variety of thought available to an “external” approach. In conclusion, the respectability of Mormon intellectuality may be a function of the paradigm selected to investigate the question. The significance of the answer is a function of something more personal.

## PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: GEORGE ROMNEY AND THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN OF 1968

*David K. Hart*

*Romney's Way: A Man and an Idea.* By T. George Harris. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967. Pp. 288. \$5.95.

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### *Reviewer's note:*

*At the beginning of the 1968 Presidential campaign the book review editor of DIALOGUE asked me to review a recently published biography of Governor George W. Romney, who was at the time a leading contender for the Republican presidential nomination. The review had just been completed when Governor Romney withdrew from the race, just before the New Hampshire Primary. As a result, the essay was returned with the request that it be revised to include some speculations as to why the Governor left the lists. The revisions were completed and the review mailed in, but before it could be published, the competition for the Republican nomination heated up again, with a faint possibility that the Convention might deadlock and turn to Romney as the compromise candidate. During that period, the review remained in limbo and then disappeared from sight during the campaign. Then, after the election, it was resurrected and returned again, prefaced by a request for some retrospective analysis. Since George Romney's appointment to the Cabinet, that biography has gained renewed significance, and after another rereading I find that it is every bit as useful as I had originally believed.*

One of the certain harbingers of a presidential election year is the spate of campaign biographies about the major combatants. In fact, the publication of such books seems to be the *sine qua non* of belligerent status for the candidates. Thus, the pre-convention publication of T. George Harris' biography, *Romney's Way*, confirmed the seriousness of the Governor's intentions, if any doubt had remained. For the first time in American history, a Latter-day Saint was not only a serious contender for the Presidency, he also had a reasonable chance of election if he managed to obtain the nomination. Therefore, that particular campaign biography had a more than usual historical significance.

Campaign biographies usually fall into one of three general categories. First, there are the “authorized” biographies which canonize the candidate for the faithful. Second, there are the “hatchet” biographies which are