

Mormon-Gentile Conflict in Illinois Reconsidered?

Mormonism in Conflict: The Nauvoo Years by Annette P. Hampshire, Studies in Religion and Society, Volume 11 (New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 343 pp.

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ANNETTE HAMPSHIRE'S *Mormonism in Conflict: The Nauvoo Years* is simultaneously refreshing and exasperating. To her credit, Hampshire strives for a degree of methodological and theoretical rigor that has been sadly absent in most Mormon historiography. This effort is highly laudable, but the result is less so.

Hampshire states the goal of her study is to utilize "sociology in an effort to write better history. . . . to use sociological concepts to help unpick the situation; to ask more searching questions of the primary source material, to move more effectively away from the citation of causes towards the explanation of process" (pp. 8-9).

Hampshire assigns herself a difficult and in some ways contradictory task: she resolves to be both a historian describing the particulars of Mormon-Gentile conflict in 1840s Illinois and a social scientist seeking to generalize in the interest of furthering sociological theory. Alas, Hampshire does not fully succeed in this balancing act nor, more importantly, in formulating a significantly new perspective of her topic. The end result of *Mormonism in Conflict's* "explanation of process" differs little from the "citation of causes" which it seeks to supplant.

Hampshire sets the stage by asserting that non-Mormons in Illinois, before the mass arrival of the Latter-day Saints, exhibited uncertain feelings about the Mormons. These equivocal opinions turned to sympathy as the Mormon refugees arrived from Missouri in a pitiable condition. Enthusiasm for the Saints' presence grew as the Gentile residents of Illinois recognized they represented a poten-

tial economic godsend to the state's depressed economy in the aftermath of the Panic of 1837. In addition, "The people of Illinois now had the opportunity to demonstrate their superiority over slaveholding Missouri in terms of Illinois' higher capacity for tolerance and benevolence" (p. 29). Hampshire plays down the effect of the Mormon swing vote in either state or county politics, as a factor in the initial good feelings.

She contends that Mormon-Gentile conflict in Illinois developed in four distinct phases or "thresholds." First, certain old residents came to realize the Latter-day Saints deviated from and could potentially disrupt the established social order. The Mormons did not integrate into the existing Hancock County citizenry but established a separate community (Nauvoo) within it, while simultaneously seeking to utilize the region's political, economic, and religious institutions for their own ends.

Second, non-Mormons discovered that they could not control Mormon deviance through existing legal means. Lawful methods failed both to repeal the Nauvoo Charter and to extradite Joseph Smith to Missouri. Hampshire believes these critical events contributed to an unevenly growing but serious frustration with the Latter-day Saints after 1841.

Third, as both Mormons and Gentiles came to believe they could not obtain impartial justice, and the Gentiles perceived they had no legal means to control Mormon deviance, extralegal violence in the name of the law became acceptable. Hampshire wisely adds that rioting was not inevitable until a loose anti-Mormon coalition mobilized after the *Expositor* incident, and after a disbanded, anti-Mormon Nauvoo-bound militia was transformed into a lynch mob that successfully assassinated Joseph and Hyrum Smith, who were being held at the Carthage Jail.

Finally, violence persisted after the Smiths' murders, not only because Mor-