

The “New Social History” and the “New Mormon History”: Reflections on Recent Trends

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MUCH HAS BEEN MADE RECENTLY OF THE APPARENT deceleration of historical inquiry into Mormonism. When I first became interested in Mormon studies nearly twenty years ago I was an undergraduate at Graceland College. Encouragement and an inescapable excitement pervaded the domain, and new windows of discovery seemed to be opening everywhere. Almost certainly my own lack of knowledge contributed to that sense of discovery, but the decade of the 1970s was without question a heady time for Mormon historical studies. Leonard J. Arrington, the LDS Church Historian, was modernizing LDS archives and sponsoring varied and far-reaching research. Richard P. Howard, as RLDS Church Historian, was doing the same for the Reorganized church.¹ An impressive level of historical output, both in terms of numbers and quality, was appearing every year.² The 1973 publication of the cooperative book *The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History*, with six RLDS and seven

1. On these efforts, see Leonard J. Arrington, “Historian as Entrepreneur: A Personal Essay,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 17 (Winter 1977): 193-209; F. Henry Edwards, “Historians and the Department of History of the Reorganization,” *Saints’ Herald* 120 (Aug. 1973): 19-21, 120 (Sept. 1973): 24-25, 37; W. B. Spillman, “The Historian Looks at Church History,” *Saints’ Herald* 112 (15 Aug. 1967): 546-50; Richard P. Howard, “Philosophy, Problems, and Opportunities in Church History,” *Saints’ Herald* 117 (Feb. 1970): 31, 32, 117 (Mar. 1970): 22-24; W. Grant McMurray, “‘As Historians and Not as Partisans’: The Writing of Official History in the RLDS Church,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 6 (1986): 43-52; Paul M. Edwards, “The New Mormon History,” *Saints’ Herald* 133 (Nov. 1986): 13.

2. As an example, see “History Division Publications,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 (Fall 1983): 20-33.

LDS essayists, was without question a watershed event.³ So was the trade—nothing like it will come close to happening again in this century—of historic documents on microfilm between the two largest Mormon churches in 1974.⁴ There was also an important and refreshing *esprit de corps* and common purpose forged at gatherings of organizations oriented toward Mormon history. Davis Bitton, one of Arrington's associates in the LDS historical department, designated the decade between 1972 and 1982 a golden age, "a brief period of excitement and optimism—that someone has likened to Camelot."⁵

Those heady days are gone, and while we might mourn their loss we are constrained to carry on. Some blame short-sighted and anti-intellectual church officials who have neither the forbearance nor the vision to understand the historical quest. Some condemn restrictive archival practices, while others charge that the aging of professionals working in the field is detrimental to the study. Some bemoan other factors that have adversely affected aspects of historical inquiry. Any or all of these issues are legitimate contributors to the apparent malaise currently present in the field.

My own analysis of the state of Mormon history suggests that the field, while other factors have also been at work, suffers from some of the exclusiveness and intellectual imperialism that were nurtured during the glory days of the "New Mormon History" in the 1970s. In a recent essay Charles S. Peterson described what he called the exceptionalist nature of the "New Mormon History" and its isolating effect on intellectual inquiry. He charted the course of Mormon historiography from the 1958 publication of Leonard Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom*, arguing that it rapidly evolved into an "isolating interest in what might be referred to as [the] 'cult of the Prophet,' and in Church beginnings, persecutions, and conflicts both internal and external." Questions, issues, and perspectives were sometimes narrowly defined without incorporating larger contexts that informed contemporary developments in other historical disciplines. Mormon historians found themselves talking and writing for each other and for a small community of people who were mostly interested in the subject because

3. F. Mark McKiernan, Alma R. Blair, and Paul M. Edwards, eds., *The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1973); Richard P. Howard, "A New Landmark in Latter Day Saints Historiography," *Saints' Herald* 120 (Sept. 1973): 55, 58.

4. Richard P. Howard, "Churches Exchange Copies of Historic Documents," *Saints' Herald* 122 (Feb. 1975): 22-23.

5. Davis Bitton, "Ten Years in Camelot: A Personal Memoir," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 (Autumn 1983): 9-20, quote from p. 9. A good overview and sampling of historical efforts emanating from the "New Mormon History" can be found in D. Michael Quinn, ed., *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

they shared some aspect of Mormonism's religious heritage. While more Mormon historical articles were being produced, few outside the immediate sphere of Mormonism took much notice of them.⁶

This is not unlike what happened in the study of western American history during the recent past. I was trained as a frontier historian in graduate school because it seemed to fit best with my interests in Mormonism, but at that time the American West was considered a backwater of historical study. No one seemed to care much about cowboys and native Americans, and by the late 1970s the Turnerian construct of the "Frontier Thesis," itself an exceptionalist perspective on the past, had been demolished by later historians. The community hashed and rehashed the minutiae of the battle of the Little Bighorn, or debated the location of the ford where Jedediah Smith crossed the Colorado River on his 1826 expedition, or any of several other abstract and antiquarian concerns.⁷ I soon realized the irrelevancy of much of what was taking place in the name of western American history. Indicative of this, in the 1970s few history departments at colleges and universities throughout the nation replaced western historians when they retired.

Western history began to climb back out of the doldrums in the late 1970s, and the field has now reemerged as a central part of scholarly inquiry led by what has been popularly nicknamed the "gang of four"—Patricia Nelson Limerick, Donald Worster, William Cronon, and Richard White.⁸

6. Charles S. Peterson, "Beyond the Problems of Exceptionalist History," in Thomas G. Alexander, ed., *Great Basin Kingdom Revisited: Contemporary Perspectives* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1991), 133-51, quote from p. 146.

7. The literature, and the debate, over Custer is brutal. See Robert M. Utley, *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); Brian W. Dippie, *Custer's Last Stand: The Anatomy of an American Myth* (Missoula: University of Montana Publications in History, 1976); Paul A. Hutton, "From Little Bighorn to Little Big Man: The Changing Image of a Western Hero in Popular Culture," *Western Historical Quarterly* 7 (Jan. 1976): 19-45; Brian W. Dippie, "Of Bullets, Blunders, and Custer Buffs," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 41 (Winter 1991): 77-80. On Smith, see Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953); John G. Neihardt, *The Splendid Wayfaring: The Exploits and Adventures of Jedediah Smith and the Ashley-Henry Men* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1920); Alson J. Smith, *Men Against the Mountains: Jedediah Smith and the South West Expedition of 1826-1829* (New York: John Day Co., 1965); Maurice L. Sullivan, *Jedediah Smith: Trader and Trail Breaker* (New York: Press of the Pioneers, 1936).

8. Each of these individuals has contributed exciting interpretive studies of the American West that did much to rescue it from irrelevance. See Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1987); Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); William Cronon et al., eds., *Under the Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1992); Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American*

The reasons for this change are complex. First, the “New Western History,” as it is being called, has finally thrown off the yoke of Frederick Jackson Turner and moved beyond the exclusivistic questions he posed.⁹ Second, it has embraced the idea of regionalism and no longer defines the West and the frontier as one and the same. Third, those involved in reinterpreting the West have benefited from the infusion of new methodologies and especially new questions borrowed from the “new social history.” Those new questions, taken from the larger concerns present in this multi-cultural American society in which we participate, have yielded truly exciting results. They all revolve largely around issues of power and influence and how they are played out in the themes of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. A sense of anticipation presently permeates Western history as its practitioners use these four building blocks to construct a largely new perspective on the development of the region.

Contrast those activities with that of the Mormon historical community, which seems to be in more of a holding pattern than in the past. In spite of the amount of historical research and writing being done, and there remains a prodigious output in the 1990s, there seems to be little new in “New Mormon History.” To further understanding I suggest it is time to abandon the simple, celebratory, non-analytical narrative that has characterized too much writing on the subject and form a new research agenda. In so doing, historians might be able to overcome the inherent progressivism in the “New Mormon History,” arguing as it does that God’s word is spreading to the world and that this is a positive development, when there are other appropriate ways to view the church’s past. Historians must be prepared to stand at the edge of forever and peer into the abyss, reorienting perspectives and recasting ideals and constraints beyond anything imagined before. It is a risk, for it may lead to a grimmer, harsher perspective on the Mormon past rather than to a kinder, gentler history, but it is time to move beyond the present plateau of historical inquiry.

One of the central perspectives that must be reconsidered in this process is the preoccupation with *a priori* assumptions about what is good and bad in Mormon history—that have been so carefully defined—and to jettison the interpretive framework prearranged to lean in specific pro-institutional directions. While there has, of course, been some room for permutations of interpretation, the Mormon churches have essentially

West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

9. Turner’s approach toward the frontier has been summarized in Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1920), which collects many of his essays. There are numerous recent articles in the *Organization of American Historians’ Newsletter* and the *American Historical Association’s Perspectives* that demonstrate the emerging importance of the West as a theme in American history.

drawn a line in the sand about what may and may not be considered as an interpretive framework and most historians have accepted it (or perhaps have never even considered going beyond it because of their religious convictions). As an example of this, despite its other qualities, the recent book *Zion in the Courts* assumed without serious discussion the viability and justification of a Mormon theocracy, i.e., Zion. The authors asserted that the zionic goal inevitably led to persecution endured by an innocent church through both legal and extralegal means. They wrote: "The story of the persecution Mormons suffered through the institutions of the legal system, and of their efforts to establish their own legal system—one appropriate to Zion . . . illustrates democracy's potential to oppress an insular, minority community; . . ." ¹⁰

The authors apparently believed that theocracy is both possible and desirable, but it seems to me that such a quest for empire would always run against the grain of the American mainstream and that legal institutions by definition would oppose it. Far from democracy's "oppression" of a minority, I surmise, the nation's legal system would assert itself to defend the cherished principles of the Constitution against a perceived threat to liberty from a theocracy bent on taking control. Debate over whether liberty was really threatened by Mormon theocracy is moot, but certainly non-Mormons considered the church's secular power a threat to the Constitution. The authors failed to appreciate the inherent tension between democracy and theocracy. They also seemed not to appreciate that there might be other equally valid approaches toward Mormonism's zionic quest. For some it represented a spiritual condition where righteousness and justness were partners with goodwill and charity, a position that eschewed the secular, theocratic aspects that always created ill-will between Mormons and other Americans. Unfortunately, the authors of *Zion in the Courts* did not consider criticisms of Mormonism's quest for empire: criticisms that were coherent, internally consistent, and deserving of serious consideration. They accepted at face value the Mormon dialectic. As a result, *Zion in the Courts* represented both the worst and the best of the recent writing on the Mormon past. ¹¹

What has resulted because of this type of historical writing, as well as other problems not mentioned here, is a ghettoization process that has

10. Edwin Brown Firmage and Richard Collin Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), xiv-xv.

11. This is an unfortunate occurrence because Firmage is a thoughtful, liberal Mormon who has challenged the Latter-day Saint status quo on more than one occasion, standing up for minority and women's rights, speaking out against war and the excesses of patriotism, and generally appreciating the pluralism of American culture.

isolated Mormon history from broader questions that should be informing it. Like a nautilus shell, or the Reorganized church's new temple in Independence, Missouri, Mormon historical studies have spiraled inward farther and farther away from relevance to anything beyond themselves. Fortunately, if historians can spiral inward we can also spiral back outward. Although we have treated it as such, Mormon history is not a discipline separate from broader historical study; it is at best only a specialty describing a minuscule part of the overall human experience. Our treating it otherwise is a form of Mormon imperialism, and it is time to move forward into the mainstream of historical studies.

Many "New Mormon Historians" have for too long approached their studies backwards. The focus has too often been on how the religious institution has affected society—positive affects, of course—when it seems more appropriate that it should be on how society has affected Mormonism. This would allow a break from the vertical study of Mormon history emphasizing hierarchical, institutional studies and toward more horizontal studies that are much broader in form and content. There are, of course, notable exceptions to this preoccupation with the organizational setting, but they largely prove the validity of the overall observation.¹² Indicative of this historiographical problem, in 1982 W. Grant McMurray delivered a presidential address to the John Whitmer Historical Association that called for a turn "to the social and cultural life of the saints." He said that "Our historiography has for too long illustrated the sectarian exclusiveness that has frequently characterized the church."¹³ I suggest that his call is still clearly resonating in the discipline and few, not even McMurray, have heeded the summons.

To broaden the horizons of Mormon history, some of the questions prompted by the modern American multi-cultural civilization being asked elsewhere are also appropriate for this field. In this essay I want to consider, perhaps in some cases to reconsider, some of the themes and ideas that I believe are important in our quixotic quest for understanding. I hope that others will investigate these themes in a more authoritative manner. In my opinion, we can expand our perspectives by investigating the really interesting questions of power: who holds it, why, and how do they use it? To

12. For example, Ron Roberts, "A Waystation from Babylon: Nineteenth-Century Saints in Lucas, Iowa," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1991): 60-70, and Thomas J. Morain, "Mormons and Nineteenth-Century Iowa Historians," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 1 (1981): 34-42, have raised fundamental questions beyond the confines of the institutional church and offered some interesting observations on the effect larger issues in society held.

13. W. Grant McMurray, "The Reorganization in Nineteenth-Century America: Identity Crisis or Historiographical Problem," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 2 (1982): 3-11, quote from p. 9.

examine these issues in the context of Mormonism I recommend borrowing from the social constructionism taking place in other historical specialties, especially the work being done on race, ethnicity, class, and gender.¹⁴ An interest in these subjects would involve, of course, a commitment to the broad scholarly understanding of the nature and meaning of oppression and the inequalities of power as manifested in relation to these four axes.¹⁵

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Some of the most significant questions about Mormonism's past revolve around the issues of race and ethnicity. Consideration of these themes in Mormon history has important ramifications for an understanding of group identity and development. Broad questions of assimilation and cultural pluralism could offer intriguing possibilities for students; as could studies of what groups assimilated to, to what degree there has been homogeneity in the institutions of Mormonism, and the nature and extent of differences sustained or synthesized. These questions are all linked with change, organizational boundaries, and group relationships, and make such studies rewarding in expanding an understanding of how Mormonism reached its present form.

Mormon historians have pursued some of these questions, but only in the case of black Americans have they approached the level of investigation required to bring significant illumination. Most of the time, furthermore, what has been produced has been oriented toward explaining the development of institutional policy. For all of the important insights acquired in this manner, this has not gotten at the larger racial and ethnic issues that would open new worlds of inquiry. I will use my own work as an example. When I wrote *Invisible Saints*, a study of African-Americans in the RLDS church, I focused on questions of institutional policy and not so much on larger questions about the creation and preservation of specific cultures and their interface with the larger body of church members.¹⁶ Those issues

14. On social constructionism, see John E. Toews, "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," *American Historical Review* 92 (Oct. 1987): 879-907; David A. Hollinger, *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

15. Joan Kelly, *Women, History, and Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 51-64, esp. 61.

16. See Roger D. Launius, *Invisible Saints: A History of Black Americans in the Reorganized Church* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1988). I have tried to broaden my horizons in "A Black Woman in a White Man's Church: The Odyssey of Amy E. Robbins in the Reorganization." In it I grapple with the issue of race and gender and

await future investigation. Similarly, hardly anyone looking at blacks in the Latter-day Saint church have gone far beyond the issue of priesthood denial, which is a policy issue. While these considerations are important, additional work must be undertaken.¹⁷

There are many other racial and ethnic groups that require concerted study in Mormon history. One of the most important of these has been Mormon relations with native Americans. While there have been many articles published on this subject, almost all of them are policy studies on Mormon/Indian relations in the Great Basin during the nineteenth century. There is a real need for research and writing exploring attitudes toward and relations with native Americans in either the early church or in the various Mormon movements that emerged from it.¹⁸ There are a multitude of questions that need to be considered in any worthwhile study of relations with native Americans, not the least of which is an honest attempt to understand attitudes and actions on the part of people belonging to each ethnic heritage and how they related.

Mormonism was largely on the frontier in the nineteenth century and had ample contact with aboriginal peoples. It also had a special connection

how they affected and were affected by the church at the local level.

17. Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Lester E. Bush and Armand L. Mauss, eds., *Neither White Nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church* (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1984); Stephen G. Taggart, *Mormonism's Negro Policy: Social and Historical Origins* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1970). Jessie L. Embry has completed a manuscript, "Black Saints in a White Church," that asks some of the questions about blacks in the LDS movement that are critical to the development of a fully-rounded interpretation of the subject.

18. On early Mormons and Indians, see Ronald W. Walker, "Seeking the 'Remnant': The Native American During the Joseph Smith Period," *Journal of Mormon History* 19 (Spring 1993): 1-33; G. St. John Stott, "New Jerusalem Abandoned: The Failure to Carry Mormonism to the Delaware," *Journal of American Studies* 21 (Apr. 1987): 79-82; Keith Parry, "Joseph Smith and the Clash of Sacred Cultures," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Winter 1985): 65-80; Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 145-60; Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 115-21, 133-39, 168-75; Floyd A. O'Neil, "The Mormons, the Indians, and George Washington Bean," in Clyde A. Milner II and Floyd A. O'Neil, eds., *Churchmen and Western Indians, 1820-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 77-107; Warren A. Jennings, "The First Mormon Mission to the Indians," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 31 (Autumn 1971): 288-99. For example, I found Aleah G. Koury, "The Church and the American Indian," *Saints' Herald* 123 (Apr. 1976): 212-16, 241; and Rebecca E. Haering, "A Prophecy: Revealed and Fulfilled," *Restoration Trail Forum* 4 (Feb. 1979): 1, 5, the only historical publications on the Reorganization experience with native Americans. On this whole question, see David J. Whittaker, "Mormons and Native Americans: A Historical and Bibliographical Introduction," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Winter 1985): 33-64.

because of its peculiar scriptural record. Why, then, was there not more emphasis on mutually beneficial relations with American Indians over the history of the movement? Equally important, in what manner have native ideals and conceptions become a part of the movement? How have these peoples been accepted into the power centers of the various Mormon churches? Most important, David Whittaker has called for "more anthropologically sensitive studies on the cultures that predate Mormon contact, and we need to follow these up with continuing analysis of changing cultures once contact was made."¹⁹ His suggestion is just as valid today as when first made in 1985.

The influences and acculturation process, if it exists, would be especially useful in other aspects of ethnic groups in Mormon history.²⁰ Are their specific congregations which run along ethnic lines? For example, there are in the RLDS some largely Hispanic branches in the Southwest that use Spanish as their language of worship, but beyond their existence we know little about them. When were they created, how have they evolved over the years, and what interactions with the larger church membership have taken place over time? Additionally, perhaps the definition of ethnicity should be broadened to look at regional differences between Americans and to trace how these differences have been played out in the various ecclesiastical systems.

There is also an exciting prospect awaiting students interested in ethnicity and foreign missions, both relative to congregations established overseas and to foreigners who immigrated to the United States and began worshipping in American congregations.²¹ As one example, Dean Louder's

19. Whittaker, "Mormons and Native Americans," 46.

20. This question has been explored in three brief, suggestive essays: Jessie L. Embry, "Ethnic Groups and the LDS Church," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 25 (Winter 1992): 81-97; Jessie L. Embry, "'Separate but Equal': American Ethnic Groups in the RLDS and LDS Churches, A Comparison," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 12 (1992): 83-100; and Robert Ben Madison, "'Heirs According to the Promise': Observations of Ethnicity, Race and Identity in Two Factions of Nineteenth Century Mormonism," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 12 (1992): 66-82.

21. There has been some work done on this subject concerning the LDS church, although much remains to be done. See Marjorie Newton, "'Almost Like Us': The American Socialization of Australian Converts," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24 (Fall 1991): 9-20; Jessie L. Embry, "Little Berlin: Swiss Saints in the Logan Tenth Ward," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 56 (Summer 1988): 222-35; Douglas D. Alder, "The Mormon Ward: Congregation or Community?" *Journal of Mormon History* 5 (1978): 61-78; Ronald W. Walker, "'Going to Meeting' in Salt Lake City's Thirteenth Ward, 1849-1881: A Microanalysis," in Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, eds., *New Views of Mormon History: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 138-61; Richard L. Jensen, "Mother Tongue: Use of Non-English Languages in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the United

challenging study of Anglo/French ethnic relations affecting the LDS church in Canada has no parallel for the Reorganization, although it is needed. Using sociological tools and a perspective sharpened by personal as well as scholarly experience, Louder analyzed the church's relations with French Canadians, criticizing the institution for its neglect and overarching emphasis on the Anglo-American aspects of its religious culture. He concluded that "the official church and, by extension, its membership deny the cultural specificity of Canada and the existence of an international church within that country."²² Indeed, this type of effort for the RLDS has not progressed beyond a cursory examination provided by Maurice L. Draper in his sociological analysis of foreign missions, the goal of which was much different from that of ethnic history.²³

There are also interesting questions about ethnicity and the smaller Mormon factions. Certain churches of the dispersion, or so it seems without concentrated research either to confirm or to deny, were magnets for specific ethnic groups. The Church of Jesus Christ that Sidney Rigdon founded in Pennsylvania and that was continued by William Bickerton had remarkable success among Italian immigrants of Philadelphia. At least by the 1870s this group had made many converts among the Italian ethnic population of Pennsylvania, and it has remained an important element of the institution to the present. Early in its history, for instance, Bickerton's followers translated the Book of Mormon into Italian to share it with friends and relatives. What made the church attractive to Italians, and how has it developed over the years within this segment of the population? This and other questions would prove fruitful for historians of Mormonism.²⁴

CLASS

One of the most significant areas affecting the reinterpretation of American history in the last generation has been the defining, interaction,

States, 1850-1983," in Bitton and Beecher, eds., *New Views of Mormon History*, 273-303; Dian Saderup and William Cottam, "Living Histories: Selected Biographies from the Manhattan First Ward," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 25 (Winter 1992): 58-79.

22. Dean R. Louder, "Canadian Mormon Identity and the French Fact," in Brigham Y. Card et al., eds., *The Mormon Presence in Canada* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1990), 302-27, quote from p. 322. This article, fittingly, received the Mormon History Association's Best Interdisciplinary Article Award in 1991.

23. Maurice L. Draper, *Isles and Continents* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1982).

24. Steven L. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration* (Bountiful, UT: Restoration Research, 1982), 89-98; William H. Cadman, *A History of the Church of Jesus Christ Organized at Green Oak, Pennsylvania, in 1862* (Monagahela, PA: n.p., 1945).

and conflict of various classes in the nation.²⁵ There should be no question, furthermore, that social, economic, educational, institutional, and other types of classes have always existed in Mormonism just as they do in the larger world. Mormon historians have mostly failed to identify and explore this concept in the church.²⁶ I think it probably has something to do with our longstanding fascination with individuals and elite—that is, priesthood—groups. Howard Zinn's statement is also appropriate for Mormon history: "There is an underside to every Age about which history does not often speak, because history is written from records left by the privileged. We learn about politics from the political leaders, about economics from the entrepreneurs, about slavery from the plantation owners, about the thinking of an age from its intellectual elite."²⁷

While it is a labor intensive exercise, demographic research would be vital in learning more about class structure and its role in the development of every level of church organization from local congregation to general conference. It would also be helpful in understanding the priesthood structure of the institution, for many questions about how the church has operated would be illuminated by a reasonable exploration of the class dynamic. While the LDS movement is better off in this regard—historians Dean May, Ben Bennion, Larry Logue, and a few others have been involved

25. There is a massive historiography associated with this study in American history. See, as only a few examples, Barton J. Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York: Random House, 1967); Mario S. DePillis, "Trends in American Social History and the Possibilities of Behavioral Approaches," *Journal of Social History* 1 (Fall 1967): 38-60; Stuart Blumin, "The Historical Study of Vertical Mobility," *Historical Methods Newsletter* 1 (Sept. 1968): 1-13; Stephen Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Stephen Thernstrom and Richard Sennett, eds., *Nineteenth Century Cities: Essays in the New Urban History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969); Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970); Karen Haltunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); Michael Kamman, ed., *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980); David Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism* (New York: Academic Press, 1977); Bernard and Lillian Johnpoll, *The Impossible Dream: The Rise and Demise of the American Left* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1972).

26. Exceptions to this statement include D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy, 1832-1932: An American Elite," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1976; Frederick S. Buchanan, *A Good Time Coming: Mormon Letters to Scotland* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988). The Quinn study, especially, explores most of the themes discussed in this arena.

27. Howard Zinn, *The Politics of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1970), 102.

in demographic studies for years—there are for the RLDS virtually no demographic portraits of its members and therefore it is difficult to generalize about class structures in the organization. There is not even a demographic portrait of Lamoni, Iowa, the only town founded by the RLDS, and such work is critical to this issue.²⁸

There are many other exciting questions relating to class in Mormonism. In addition to the common economic class problems that are so much a part of American history but which have been largely ignored, one revolves around what I like to call the royal family and the court aristocracy of families of longstanding church leadership. How did members of these elite families obtain and sustain high offices in the various factions of Mormonism? How have individual members of these families fared in their ecclesiastical systems? How did other families once with members in positions of power fall from grace? What have been the interrelations of this aristocracy and how have they been played out in the history of the church? Moreover, what are its relationships *vis à vis* other leaders and the rank and file? In an article I wrote many years ago on the RLDS church's ambitious R. C. Evans—who achieved power and high church office solely on the basis of merit since he was so personally obnoxious—I argued that he was frozen out of the positions he really coveted and blamed the RLDS aristocracy.²⁹ Have there been other instances of this type of class conflict?

Also, I would like to see an investigation of the class of bureaucrats in the history of the church. What defines that status in the LDS, the RLDS, how did its members enter into it, and why have they been able to maintain that special role in the movement? Are these people essentially in agreement on most issues and engage in "groupthink" or is conflict an important part of the decision-making process?³⁰ What does the group mean to the culture of the churches they serve? How have these groups interacted with the membership and each other over the years? How have all these groups evolved? An interesting question concerning the RLDS bureaucracy, for instance, is how changes in the church bureaucratic structure, and especially the standards and expectations of those in it, changed after World War II. It seems that a rising middle class of church bureaucrats emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s, middle-level managers who had advanced

28. A premier example of LDS historical demographic research is Dean L. May, "A Demographical Portrait of the Mormons, 1830-1980," in Thomas G. Alexander and Jessie L. Embry, eds., *After 150 Years: The Latter-day Saints in Historical Perspective* (Provo, UT: Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, 1983), 40-57.

29. Roger D. Launius, "R. C. Evans: Boy Orator of the Reorganization," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 3 (1983): 40-50.

30. On groupthink, see Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983).

education and some economic power, to reorient the movement along more liberal lines.³¹ I suspect there was a similar development in the bureaucracy of the Latter-day Saints but it seemed to have an opposite outcome.

G. Edward White has described the formation of an eastern establishment in the late nineteenth century as a male order in which the progression from brahmin stock, to prep school, to Ivy League college, to men's clubs played a central role in defining an elite core of American leaders.³² Similar LDS and RLDS elites might have been formed in the twentieth century with a progression from strong ancestry in the church, to education at the church schools, to perhaps some exposure to graduate school, to full-time church employment in some capacity as a member of the priesthood. This elite structure needs sharp and incisive historical investigation and would go far toward helping to explain the role of class in the development of the various organizations.

Finally, Paul M. Edwards recently made an intriguing point about Mormonism's middle class that deserves further study:

This class is not so much economic or family-oriented (even though in both the Reorganization and LDS organizations these are important). Rather it consists of persons who are tasting both power and influence—as well as professional acceptance and understanding—outside the church. And thus, who are increasingly aware of their own authority by virtue of knowledge and ability. At the same time more aware of their lack of power within the institution. This group includes the intellectuals, and closet skeptics, as well as those faithful to the tradition but not necessarily the doctrine. It also includes persons who have come to believe their opinions reflect an honest minority. These persons considered themselves challenged—and usually blocked—by those who control the majority and who are conservatives (prescriptivists) of the Edmund Burke variety. They feel excluded from power because they are neither rich enough (in terms of holding authority) nor poor enough (willing to trade obedience for protection).³³

31. I take a stab at this subject in an article, "Coming of Age? The Reorganized Church in the 1960s," forthcoming in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, but my comments are exploratory and need much refinement.

32. G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 11-30.

33. Paul M. Edwards, "Ethics and Dissent in Mormonism: A Personal Essay," in Roger D. Launius and W. B. Spillman, eds., *Let Contention Cease: The Dynamics of Dissent in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, MO: Graceland/Park Press, 1991), 249-50.

A similar development has probably been the case for the Latter-day Saints and comparison of the two offers intriguing possibilities for historians interested in class structures.

GENDER

Finally, there can be no question that gender is a significant area requiring concentrated historical effort. One of the early emphases of the "New Mormon History" has been women's history. Many articles about Mormon women both individually and collectively have appeared over the years, but few get at the kinds of questions that hit the mark in the larger context of gender history.³⁴ They are usually more celebratory than should be the case, focusing on elites, the benevolent nature and work of the Relief Society, or the faith and perseverance of individual women. This area of study has not sparked the interesting explorations that could be undertaken by those working in the field.³⁵ More illuminating than most of what has been done are the questions of gender: how and why the two sexes have interacted together on a broad front beyond normal bounds. Joan N. Scott recently noted that historians have been slow to ask questions of gender in many areas, thinking that they bear little relationship to "war, diplomacy, and high politics." Scott challenged historians to move beyond the connotation of linking gender to women's history and to expand the investigation to broader concerns.³⁶

Scott's plea has exciting possibilities for Mormon historians. All the elements of Mormon historical inquiry could be illuminated by a sophisticated use of gender-related questions and themes. Historians of nineteenth-century America have developed three general themes concerning gender roles, all of which could be applied in Mormon studies. First, the doctrine of separate spheres for men and women suggested that women should work in and exercise control over the home while men should have dominion over the world outside.³⁷ Second, justifying this division of

34. For a discussion of the development of women's history, see Carol Cornwall Madsen and David J. Whittaker, "History's Sequel: A Source Essay on Women in Mormon History," *Journal of Mormon History* 6 (1979): 123-45; Patricia Lyn Scott and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "Mormon Women: A Bibliography in Progress, 1977-1985," *Journal of Mormon History* 12 (1985): 113-28.

35. An exception to this has been Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds., *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), and a few other studies.

36. Joan N. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91 (Dec. 1986): 1053-75, quote from p. 1073.

37. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29; Nancy

spheres was the cult of true womanhood—an idealized image of women as pious, pure, domestic, and submissive.³⁸ Finally, there has developed the idea of the predatory male, a thesis that demands that middle-class men exhibit traits of self-control, economic aggressiveness, Christian kindness, worldly authority, and emotional attachments to family.³⁹

Each of these themes suggests enticing prospects for historians of Mormonism. Take as one example the development of temple rituals incorporated into the church in the 1830s and 1840s. How many of the theological conceptions that emerged in Mormonism's temple ceremonies resulted from efforts to secure traditional gender roles in a society in flux in Jacksonian America? Was the all-male priesthood headed by Joseph Smith instituting these ceremonies because of status anxiety?⁴⁰ During the era, owing to the accelerated change resulting from the Industrial Revolution, virtually all cherished ideals about life and home and family were altered in some way.⁴¹ Mark C. Carnes has argued that the popularity of fraternal lodges in the Victorian era was motivated at a rudimentary level by the desire to restore order and to resecure patriarchal authority lost in

F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). This approach's dualism has been challenged. See Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 9-39; Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

38. Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151-74; Charles Rosenberg, "Sexuality, Class, and Role in 19th-Century America," *American Quarterly* 25 (May 1973): 131-53.

39. Anthony E. Rotundo, "Body and Soul: Changing Ideals of American Middle-Class Manhood, 1770-1920," *Journal of Social History* 16 (Summer 1983): 23-38; Rupert Wilkinson, *American Tough: The Tough-Guy Tradition and American Character* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984); G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

40. This theme has been explored in Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963); Rowland Berthoff, *An Unsettled People: Social Order and Disorder in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

41. This is a theme of longstanding development. See the classic statements of Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950); Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944); Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984 ed.); C. S. Griffin, *The Ferment of Reform, 1830-1860* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967); Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Experience in Lynn* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

the Industrial Revolution and its attendant social upheavals. He commented that the centrality of women in the home, and their encroachment into a variety of male social and political concerns, prompted the creation of lodges as a haven from women. "Fraternal members built temples from which women were excluded," Carnes wrote, "devised myriad secrets and threatened members with fearful punishments if they should 'tell their wife the concerns of the order,' and created rituals which reclaimed for themselves the religious authority that formerly reposed in the hands of Biblical patriarchs."⁴²

The Mormon temple concept as it emerged in Kirtland and Nauvoo seems to have possessed many of the ingredients that Carnes identified with lodges. The priesthood, of course, was an all-male club from the founding of the church, but beginning with temple rites initiated in Kirtland it took on special connotations. The secrecy, the ritualistic washings and anointings, the incantations, and the all-night vigils in the Kirtland temple's upper rooms bear a striking resemblance to the lodge experiences Carnes analyzed.⁴³ These commonalities were even more apparent in Nauvoo. The rituals became more complex; the emphasis on secrecy; the preoccupation with Old Testament images, especially those associated with biblical patriarchs; and the elaborate rites all share linkages to the religion of lodges so prominent in larger American society.⁴⁴ Could similar concerns for status and security have prompted the development of temple rituals?

One fundamental difference between the lodges and Mormon temple rites bears directly on the study of gender in Mormon history: Joseph Smith admitted women into the temple. His was a selective admittance, however, and came only after sixteen months of all-male activity. Entrance to the temple was expanded after his death, but it might have not gone so far had he lived. After all, there is good reason to believe that Smith always thought in terms of setting up hierarchies where he was

42. Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 79.

43. Roger D. Launius, *The Kirtland Temple: A Historical Narrative* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1986), 63-65.

44. The explicit connection between the Mormon temple ceremonies and lodges, especially Masonry, has been made in numerous publications. See David John Buerger, "The Development of the Mormon Temple Endowment Ceremony," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20 (Winter 1987): 33-76; Reed C. Durham, Jr., "'Is There No Help for the Widow's Son?'" presidential address to the Mormon History Association, 20 Apr. 1974, Nauvoo, IL; Mervin B. Hogan, *Mormonism and Freemasonry: The Illinois Episode* (Salt Lake City: Campus Graphics, 1980); Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*, 6-7; Roger D. Launius and F. Mark McKiernan, *Joseph Smith, Jr.'s, Red Brick Store* (Macomb: Western Illinois University Monograph Series, 1985), 28-32.

supreme, with a select few disciples placed just beneath him. He was never interested in equality, regardless of gender.⁴⁵ Indeed, the idea of eternal exaltation where faithful Mormons would "inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths" implies that others must be subservient (D&C 132:20).⁴⁶ Temple rituals, I would argue, always mandated a second-class position for women beneath their priesthood-holding husbands. The mother in heaven concept and the assertion that Mormon women would be queens and priestesses to their husbands that was explicit in Nauvoo temple ceremonies might well have been attempts to secure a patriarchal hegemony *vis à vis* female Mormons. Temple ceremonies of sealing, secret names, and entrance into celestial glory *only* if the husband calls were an effort to reenforce traditional gender roles and to ensure the place of the male as the dominant member of society.

Even in instances where practitioners have tried to demonstrate the equality of both sexes in the temple, the argument is unconvincing. LDS apostle Franklin D. Richards made a convoluted attempt to show that men and women were equal before the Mormon God in 1888. He said:

I ask any and everybody present who have received their endowments, whether he be a brother Apostle, Bishop, High Priest, Elder, or whatever office he may hold in the Church, What blessings did you receive, what ordinance, what power, intelligence, sanctification or grace did you receive that your wife did not partake of with you? . . . I hold that a faithful wife has certain gifts and blessings and promises with her husband, which she cannot be deprived of except by transgression of the holy order of God.⁴⁷

The important aspect of this is the necessary linkage of women to men. A faithful wife had gifts and promises and blessing *with her husband*, not in her own right, and this helped ensure her subservience. Although most Mormon women were pleased with this position—after all it placed them in a much higher position than non-Mormons—there is little question that

45. Ronald E. Romig has demonstrated this in relation to the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. See Ronald E. Romig, "David Whitmer: Faithful Dissenter, Witness Apart," in Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, eds., *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming), chap. 1. See how this has been played out in the larger scheme of American religion in J. Milton Yinger, *Religion in the Struggle for Power: A Study in the Sociology of Religion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1946).

46. Verse 19 is explicit: "Then shall they be gods, . . . then shall they be above all, because all things are subject to them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them."

47. *Woman's Exponent* 6 (1 Sept. 1888): 54.

the sexes were not equal.⁴⁸ Melodie Moench Charles concluded that Mormon theology allowed women "no authority nor power; she gets no acknowledgment for her distinctive contributions, whatever they are. She has no self apart from her husband."⁴⁹ Did this position emerge ambivalently over time or was it deliberately fostered by status anxiety or other more subtle factors? Future research should look into these questions and be willing to put forth new interpretations.

The gender issue relates to a wide body of other subjects in Mormon history. For instance, how would questions of gender relate to the development of plural marriage in the 1840s? Can polygamy be explained as a collective mid-life crisis of Mormon officials in the 1840s? Could the religious connotations associated with it have been a way to legitimize lascivious behavior? "Perhaps polygamy," Newell G. Bringhurst speculated, "was the product of a so-called 'middle-age crisis' that Smith, along with other Mormon leaders, experience by the late 1830s and early 1840s. The taking of plural wives, particularly young, attractive ones, represented an effort to recapture youthful vigor and vitality."⁵⁰ Of course, such a suggestion requires considerably more research before being raised as a legitimate theory, but it is certainly something worth exploring. Also, what about the priesthood as an all-male club, a fraternity as in college or more appropriately in men's clubs of elites, and what did this mean for the various Mormon institutions? What was maleness all about in the nineteenth century and how was that translated into Mormonism? The same question could be asked of maleness in the twentieth century. Or even of heterosexuality and homosexuality. What male rituals have been part of the all-male Joint Council of the RLDS or Quorum of the Twelve meetings of the LDS? Why are they present and how would they have to be changed if women were admitted into those meetings? I contend that gender, as opposed to women's, history is an important area of consideration in Mormon history.

CONCLUSION

These are some of the possibilities that are present for students of Mormon history in the 1990s and beyond. This is not a complete list, but it

48. The celebration of this position has been expressed in Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Mormon Women and the Temple: Toward a New Interpretation," in Beecher and Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit*, 80-110.

49. Melodie Moench Charles, "The Need for a New Mormon Heaven," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21 (Fall 1988): 73-87, quote from pp. 84-85.

50. Newell G. Bringhurst, *Brigham Young and the Expanding American Frontier* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), 54.

is a starting point. Themes of race, ethnicity, class, and gender hold promise for historians of the movement, and many can be undertaken using sources that are not restricted since they do not depend on the papers of high church officials. Their study could restructure our understanding of the church and its evolution. While new perspectives might shake up the discipline and offer different conclusions from those presently accepted, they should also instill a wider appreciation of the diversity and complexity of the religious movement we seek to understand. I appreciate that too few people, myself included, ask hard epistemological questions. This is the beginning of an attempt to frame some new ones. Of course I realize that simply asking questions is not sufficient. What is required is sustained questioning by those with differing viewpoints and a willingness to move beyond the boundaries of convention. Twenty-five years ago Mormon writer Sam Taylor described characteristics required of those who would produce great literature. With apologies and allowances for the male chauvinism in his characterization, I suggest the same attributes are required of historians who seek to explain Mormonism of all varieties. That person

is someone ridden and driven by a consuming passion that has been called the divine discontent. He is not a reporter but an interpreter; he is eternally a crusader; he is a non-conformist and a dissenter who cries out the faults of his world in his attempt to make a better one. His integrity demands that he search his environment honestly, whether he writes of the contemporary scene or of an historical setting. His drive compels him to present the essence of things as they are and were and not as positive-thinking apologists have decided they should be. He is abrasive to the organization man because no organization is perfect; most good and great creative writing is basically the literature of protest.⁵¹

Our present effort should be one that builds on the "New Mormon History"; it must move beyond it into new interpretive frameworks and totally different structural ideas. New questions, new conceptualizations, and new priorities reflecting the multi-culturalism of the United States offer a unique potential.

51. Samuel W. Taylor, "Peculiar People, Positive Thinkers, and the Prospect of Mormon Literature," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2 (Summer 1967): 17-31, quote from p. 19.