

An Other Mormon History

Hispanics in the Mormon Zion, 1912-1999, by Jorge Iber (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), xvi + 196 pp.

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JORGE IBER'S DEBUT, *Hispanics in the Mormon Zion*, earned the impressive honor of the Mormon History Association's 2001 Best First Book Award. Iber brings the intellectual tools and fresh insight of ethnic studies into the field of Mormon history in an examination of the experiences of Spanish-speaking populations of northern Utah. Through the richness of oral histories combined with prodigious archival and demographic research, Iber tells the fascinating story of Utah's largest ethnic minority, people whom Mormons often identify with the Others from the Book of Mormon, the Lamanites.

While Hispanics in Utah reflect patterns of employment, class divisions, and ethnic tensions evident in other parts of the country, religious factors shape their experiences to a greater degree than elsewhere. His study examines the:

1) social, cultural, and economic diversity among Spanish speakers and changes in the colonia's structure over time; 2) differentiation of

assimilation and acculturation patterns among cluster members; and 3) the relationships of various Spanish-surnamed groups to each other and to the wider society (xiv).

"In the heart of the Mormon Zion," Iber observes, "religious faith and denominational affiliation have played a crucial role in the genesis, development, and expansion of this comunidad" (x). Iber contributes to the growing consensus in ethnic studies that the experiences of Spanish-surnamed people in the United States vary geographically, economically, culturally, and, increasingly, religiously.

Iber's study is deeply indebted to the scholarship of Vicente Mayer from the University of Utah and his graduate students in the 1970s. They wrote empirical studies of Hispanic experience in Utah and—most importantly—collected approximately a hundred oral histories. These oral histories provide the book with its rich detail and enliven shifting economic and demographic patterns drawn from census records. Iber also draws from newspapers, journals, and records of Salt Lake Catholic Diocese, the LDS church, American G.I. Forum, SOCIO (Spanish-Speaking Organization for Community, Integrity, and Opportunity), Centro de la Familia, State Office of Hispanic Affairs, and others. While Iber reported a paucity of primary materials from outside of Utah, he could

find much additional material for complementary and future research at the Museum of Mormon History in Mexico City. Iber's ability to weave qualitative personal narratives and archival research with quantitative social data will help his book appeal to readers in the social sciences as well as history.

Most Hispanics migrated to the Beehive State for the economic opportunities it provided. While they found work primarily in agricultural, transportation, mining, and later service and industry, they faced obstacles of discrimination that limited their opportunities for advancement, circumscribed the places they could live, and curtailed educational achievement. Between 1912 and 1925 the bulk of arrivals were single men from Mexico, New Mexico, and Colorado. The increased arrival of women and children in the 1920s led to the formation of social organizations and attempts to maintain cultural identity. The Great Depression would lead to a significant reduction in the population that had already become the largest minority in Utah. The ethnic and social organizations created in the post-war era provided the impetus for civil rights activism in the 1970s and 1980s. While national figures like Corky Gonzalez and Reies López visited Utah and "denounced the white majority for its racist and genocidal policies and institutions. . . this strident militancy was not the principal thrust of activism in this area" (135). SOCIO, the moderate but most successful activist organization, would find its social achievements eventually undermined by increased attention to the class, national, and religious divisions its own success had brought to light. "Since 1987," Iber reports, "the cross-class and panethnic ties that SOCIO forged (if only temporarily) have frayed and shattered,

and northern Utah's Hispanics have seldom acted as a unified community" (134).

Alliance with the dominant religious establishment in Utah has provided additional economic opportunities and social mobility for some Hispanics but has also provided fault lines for community divisions. Hispanics with ties to the LDS church through the Rama Mexicana (Mexican Branch) benefited from social networks and employment opportunities unavailable to others. These ties were especially significant during the mass exodus of Hispanics in the 1930s. "Rama Mexicana constituents, while not escaping unscathed, received food, employment, and spiritual and psychic solace from the LDS welfare system. . . . The stabilizing impact of church assistance helped some Rama Mexicana families to remain in the city and prosper during the following decades" (53). While the LDS church did not actively support greater civil rights for Hispanics, the lack of overt resistance helped sustain the achievements of SOCIO, especially under the leadership of Dr. Orlando Rivera, bishop of the LDS Lucero Ward. The arrival of Lamanite converts from Central and South America in the 1980s and 1990s, though, brought Hispanics who had not experienced the struggles of the Chicano movement to the state and helped reduce the cohesiveness of the community.

Iber's study and future work could benefit from greater attention to the evolution of Mormon conceptions of otherness. Spurred by historical and archaeological difficulties locating the events of the Book of Mormon in a hemispheric framework, LDS scholars have proposed radically new conceptions of Lamanite identity. Some favor a limited geography in Central Amer-