

of Lee's wives.) However, in a telling moment, Rachel experiences an uncommon vulnerability when she realizes she's never been loved in the selfless way that Emma and Ann love each other, not even by her own sister Agatha, whom she's idealized and from whom she'd never received such affection. In the final section, which belongs to Rachel, Emma returns to Harmony after Lee's death to reclaim Ann's daughter, Belle, who's been "on loan" to Rachel. Emma, who had nursed Belle from the time she was born and whose intentions are to raise the girl as her mother would have wanted, is told she cannot have the girl. In a display of complex human emotion, Rachel justifies her actions by thanking the Lord above that "at least two of her (Ann's) children have been spared a life with such a creature for a mother. She is not only a fool but a liar and I expect she'll come to a bad end" (p. 319).

The central question of the text seems to be the culpability of John D. Lee in the Mountain Meadows Massacre and how that cancerous unknown affected these three women. Was Lee, whom his wives addressed as

"Father," a fine man, honorable at every stage of the game? Was he a complicated man who might use his power or position unethically? Was Lee (who in real life was posthumously restored to church membership in 1961) a scapegoat for the Brethren? Other questions spin out from there: were the wives treated fairly in this polygamous situation? Were the wives honored enough or was it more important for each of them to lay down her questioning and individual impulses in the service of God's Kingdom and the Principle? Can any human live the Principle in all fairness? What of the individual in the tide of the collective?

The finest offering of this novel is Freeman's compassion for each of these wives and her understanding of the complexities of human nature in the face of an absolute which does not prove to be an absolute after all. In this text, questions of the how and the why of the Massacre, the innocence or guilt of John D. Lee, remain open. But the feeling remains that there were many people caught in the web of their self-righteousness who could not allow for the truth of the matter to emerge.

A Positive View: Polygamy in Nineteenth-Century Manti

Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 307 pp.

Reviewed by Todd M. Compton, author of *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*.

This book has been published to significant acclaim, winning the Best

Book award from the Mormon History Association for 2001. I agree with much of this praise, but nevertheless have serious reservations about some aspects of the book.

First, it is a pleasure to point out the strengths of *More Wives Than One*. Daynes brings an impressive background in American family history to her research. This book focuses on polygamy in the town of Manti, which is both a limitation and a brilliant

expansion of previous research. Narrowing the focus makes it possible for Daynes to analyze one polygamous Mormon populace thoroughly, using census and other records to make an exhaustive statistical study of polygamy as practiced in Manti. There has been tension in American history between statistical and more “human-focused” approaches, but Daynes has accomplished a happy synthesis of the two here. Narrowing the focus to one town far from Salt Lake City also gives more insight into the lives of average rather than elite polygamists. Both this, and the statistical family history approach, qualify this book as revisionist, in that it looks at a standard subject or issue from a new point of view. My own book, *In Sacred Loneliness*, was revisionist in that it looked at polygamy from the woman’s point of view; however, its scope included only a small group of elite women. Surveys of Mormon polygamy, such as those by Foster and Van Wagoner, also have an understandable tendency to emphasize prominent church leaders and their wives. Daynes’s examination of non-elite polygamists is thus very welcome.

However, this book has other characteristics that are non-revisionist; for instance, it is solidly conservative in its tendency to view polygamy in an overall favorable light.

In addition to her focus on Manti, Daynes includes chapters on the history of polygamy, from its beginnings in Kirtland to its contemporary practice. These historical analyses are stimulating, sometimes opinionated road maps through controversial territory. Daynes’s treatment of marriage law in America and in typical LDS communities is also extremely valuable. She has written two excellent chapters on divorce in nineteenth-century Utah,

showing that plural wives were given great freedom to leave marriages that they felt were inadequate.

Despite these strengths, there is much in this book that is debatable. This is not surprising, considering that it deals with some of the most knotty problems in Mormon history. My disagreements with Daynes are often a matter of emphasis. For instance, her central thesis is that LDS polygamy in Utah was practiced with the primary intention of providing financial help for single women—often widowed, divorced, or immigrant—who had few other means of support in the nineteenth-century American west. While I agree that caring for single women was frequently a motivation for polygamy, I believe that religious motivations were far more important. Daynes views religious motivations as significant (pp. 72-75, 103), but she overwhelmingly emphasizes the sociological explanation of caring for single women: “Mormon women undoubtedly believed in the principle of plural marriage, but women who needed economic help disproportionately practiced it” (p. 125).

By emphasizing this motivation, Daynes tends to oversimplify the question of marital choice in general (see p. 28). In Mormon polygamy, marriage choices included many factors: first religious; then practical, perhaps; then the complex phenomenon of spiritual and physical attraction. Though Daynes rightly emphasizes the puritan or Victorian aspects of Mormon polygamous culture and rightly states that attraction was usually not the prime motivation, I believe that it often played an important part in selecting plural mates, for both men and women. Part of the religious reason for plural marriage was offspring (see p. 33), so “attractive” compatibility

would reasonably be a factor in the marriage choice for that reason (see pp. 46, 122).

Given her argument about significant economic motivations for entering polygamy, Daynes's study would have been improved by a fuller look at what plural marriage was like for women *after* marriage. Some polygamous unions were undoubtedly successful. Nevertheless, plural marriage often led to tragedy. One pattern that appears repeatedly in the history of polygamy is that the woman feels that her relationship with her children is close while her relationship with her husband is distant.¹ Another is that hopes for economic and practical support remain unrealized. Daynes writes, "Patty Sessions's diary entry on the day she married John Parry illustrates the perceived need for men's help: 'I feel to thank the Lord that I have some one to cut my wood for me.'" (p. 119). Yet if Daynes had extended her focus to include Patty's daily experience of that marriage, she would have found that Parry was not very supportive to Patty, either financially or with his time.²

A natural question is, why did women continue with non-ideal plural marriages if they were freely allowed divorces? In fact, there were factors in Mormon culture that would make di-

vorce—difficult under the best of circumstances—even more difficult. First, polygamy was viewed as the celestial form of marriage, so women would have felt religious pressures to stay with the marriage. Second, children would have been a factor. A descendant of Anson Call recently told me that when one of Call's plural wives divorced him, he farmed out her children to his other plural wives. This would be consistent with the nineteenth-century legal position that generally gave the father custody of children in a divorce. The possibility of losing her children would certainly give a plural wife pause if she wanted to divorce her husband.

In her chapters that give historical overviews of Mormon polygamy, though Daynes sometimes refers briefly to problems in the Mormon marriage practice, she often does not really come to grips with them. For instance, in her first chapter, Daynes suggests that a number of Joseph Smith's marriages had no sexual dimension (pp. 29, 31). Yet in Utah polygamy, it was widely accepted that all plural marriages (except to older women) had a sexual dimension, given the need to "multiply and replenish" the earth. There is no positive evidence that Smith's marriages lacked this normal element of marriage.

1. Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 212.

2. Audrey M. Godfrey gives other examples of lack of economic support in plural marriage in her wonderful article "Colonizing the Muddy River Valley: A New Perspective," *Journal of Mormon History* 22 (Fall 1996): 120-42. She describes the experience of Jane Simons, who was left in a primitive shanty in the difficult Muddy Mission in Nevada while her husband returned to his other wife and his farm in the comparative luxury of Payson, Utah. Godfrey gives other examples of husbands sent on difficult missions who left less favored plural wives to represent them and returned to comfortable dwelling places and more favored wives. Obviously, plural marriage made it possible for such abusive situations to take place.

Later, Daynes cites Carmon Hardy's work showing that men were viewed as superior to women in Mormon polygamous culture. Daynes then responds to Hardy with the assertion that "with plural marriage creating a scarcity of women, the position of women was raised simply by their being in so much demand" (p. 115). But often they did not seem to be valued for themselves, but as a religious means to an end. Daynes has not substantively dealt with Hardy's evidence here. In the same way, I find statements such as "plural marriage promoted equality among women" (p. 133) problematic. Such passages might be improved in future editions of this book by fuller argumentation, definition, and explanation.

In her last chapter, Daynes argues against the interpretation of Eugene and Bruce Campbell that there was "anomie," "normlessness," and a "lack of regulation" in plural marriage (p. 189). Instead, she portrays Utah polygamy as carefully regulated by societal norms. While I agree up to a point, Daynes once again tends to smooth over complexities. For instance, the Campbells state that the ideal that the first wife should freely give permission for the husband to take a plural wife "was not carefully followed." Daynes contradicts this, stating that the rule was "generally followed" and that Kimball Young "gives

only two examples" to the contrary (p. 191). But there are many others. For example, we have unusually explicit evidence that Joseph Smith married Emily and Eliza Partridge without the knowledge of his first wife, Emma. When Smith instructed Heber C. Kimball to marry a plural wife, he also instructed him not to tell his first wife, Vilate. Kimball later stated that he had taken many of his 45 plural wives without Vilate's knowledge.³ Sometimes first wives gave their consent, but only with great reluctance, under pressure.

Daynes, discussing polyandry, describes the marriages of Zina Huntington, Henry Jacobs, and Brigham Young in 1845. However, she goes too far when she states that "there were no more such marriages" (p. 204). Young also married Hannah King in 1872 while she was married to non-member William King.⁴ Daynes herself gives another fascinating example of polyandry (pp. 80-81).

Daynes states that plural wives in Utah were fully recognized, that the public announcement of plural marriage in 1852 "ended what vestiges of secrecy still remained" (p. 205). Once again, this overstates the case, as she does not take into consideration the phenomenon D. Michael Quinn describes as "lesser-known wives."⁵ Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, in Minersville, was known as the wife of

3. Wilford Woodruff journal, Oct. 26, 1868; Francis M. Lyman, Diary, Sept. 7, 1892. Thomas Alexander, "Federal Authority versus Polygamic Theocracy . . .," *Dialogue* 1 (1966): 85, 92, writes that the LDS church never "bothered to define any legal status for plural wives"; it imposed only moral and religious sanctions to protect them, "and anyone who chose to disregard them could do so with legal, and sometimes even religious, impunity."

4. Jeffrey Johnson, "Determining and Defining 'Wife': the Brigham Young Households," *Dialogue* 20 (Fall 1987), 57-70.

5. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1997), 184-86.