

volume, for the two books were written with totally different purposes in mind. *A New Look at Old Sites* is a limited monograph on site issues bearing upon the carnage while *Blood of the Prophets* is intended as a broad, sweeping coverage of the event.

Unfortunately, Shirts's passing some years before this monograph appeared and the publication dates of the two books (both 2002) rendered it

impossible for the monograph to incorporate any insights from Bagley's work. Still, it should not be discounted as extraneous by students of the atrocity. Helpful, though limited, insights can be gained from *A New Look at Old Sites*. It does adequately meet its purpose of examining the site issues of the massacre. But this reviewer sees only a limited audience for the monograph.

Charismatic Leader and Organizing Genius

Joseph Smith, by Robert V. Remini (New York: Viking Books, 2002), 190 pages.

Reviewed by Paul Guajardo, Associate Professor of English, University of Houston.

In this biography of Joseph Smith by a non-Mormon historian, we have a short, readable, mostly chronological narrative that presents Joseph Smith and Mormonism as the products of a particular historical period. A professor emeritus from the University of Illinois, Robert Vincent Remini has written extensively about Andrew Jackson and what he calls "The Second Great Awakening." In this new book, he brings this perspective to bear on the life of Joseph Smith. Remini views or interprets most early nineteenth century events through this lens—a practice that is often enlightening, sometimes limiting. Certainly, the ethos of the times influenced Joseph Smith, but perhaps not as much as Remini thinks. He is sometimes guilty of *post hoc*,

ergo propter hoc (Y follows X, therefore X caused Y) reasoning. For example, in discussing the Word of Wisdom, Remini comments, "Joseph was obviously influenced by the rising activities of the Temperance Union, whose membership . . . agitated for total abstinence from all alcoholic beverages" (pp. 103-4). Maybe, maybe not. Remini's hypothesis does not account for the Word of Wisdom's injunction against tobacco, nor for its vegetarian bent, decidedly not popular at the time:

"And it is pleasing unto me that they [flesh of beasts and of fowls] should not be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine" (D&C 89: 12-13).

Remini also attributes the law of consecration to the spirit of the age:

"Communitarianism was rampant in antebellum America. A number of experiments in communal living emerged. . . ." (p. 97).

This approach discounts revela-

tion, and or even the possibility of coincidence since for Remini Mormonism is largely the result of *zeitgeist* and the LDS church thrived "because so much of what [Smith] believed and taught resulted from the social, political, and intellectual dynamism of the Jacksonian age" (p. x). According to Remini the "United States changed more profoundly in the thirty years from 1790 to 1820 than during any other period" (p. 2). At this time, "The old Puritan belief in a stern deity poised to punish sin-prone man slowly yielded to the notion that humans were created in the image of God and therefore possessed the touch of divinity that elevated them above the rest of creation. . . . The idea of an elect chosen by God no longer had the same force it enjoyed in the colonial era" (p. 5). This was an era when "countless sects and other permutations of Christian belief suddenly appeared" (p. 7).

This careful and conscientious biography takes pains to be objective and balanced—and it is no easy task to avoid displaying one's personal disbelief or bias. Remini's sympathy for Mormons seems especially evident in the preface and in passages like this: "Lord knows, the Mormons needed a place of rest, away from those who would kill and rob them. They had been harried from state to state, suffering physical and mental torment. But they believed they were called by God through revelation to a higher destiny. . . ." (p. 141). While the book has merit for general readers, such readers might be rare. This volume will certainly appeal to Mormons and perhaps to critics, but neither will be fully satisfied with Remini's endeavor

to be objective. Joseph Smith was either a prophet of God who restored the true church of Jesus Christ or he was an utter charlatan. Discussions of whether he was an organizing genius or a charismatic leader are of secondary or tertiary concern. Thus, Mormons will tire of Remini necessarily qualifying so many of his statements: "Mormons will most likely believe every word of it; non-Mormons will be understandably skeptical" (p. 23); "it claims to recount God's interaction" (p. 68); "the revelations Joseph allegedly received" (p. 107); "a decent man who claimed to be a prophet" (p. 181), and so forth. As a historian writing objectively, Remini has no other course. Nevertheless, Latter-day Saints will find this method a bit tedious while critics might feel Remini is too open-minded.

The value of this scholarly biography lies in the historical context Remini provides. He portrays a time of romanticism, utopian dreams, transcendental philosophies, socialism, spiritualism, divination, folk magic, sectarianism, and general religious fervor. "Into this maelstrom of economic, political, intellectual, and religious turbulence Joseph Smith Jr., the Prophet, was born. Religious excitement was part of the very air he breathed" (p. 8). In regard to the First Vision, Remini shows that such manifestations were not unheard of: "During the Second Great Awakening many men and women—particularly adolescents—claimed to have seen and talked with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ" (p. 10). He notes that the Book of Mormon "has a distinctly American character. . . . It is a story that people of

the Jacksonian era could easily relate to and understand because it is part of a very American tradition. . . .[I]t radiates revivalist passion, frontier culture and folklore, popular concepts about Indians, and the democratic impulses and political movements of its time" (p. 72).

While certainly not hagiography, this biography is positive and sympathetic, and the praise it bestows on Joseph will be well-received by church members, as was Harold Bloom's *The American Religion*, which proclaimed Joseph Smith a religious genius. Remini writes that "The founder of this Church. . . is unquestionably the most important reformer and innovator in American religious history" (p. ix) and that "Joseph Smith is the religious figure in United States history who has had the largest following" (p. x). In addition to his role as prophet, Joseph Smith was "Nauvoo's mayor, chief justice, lieutenant general, trustee of the university, real estate agent, publisher of a monthly newspaper, proprietor of a store, part owner of a Mississippi steamboat, a subscriber to the Nauvoo Agricultural and Manufacturing Association, and a member of the newly

formed Masonic lodge" (p. 163). Remini labels him " [a] charismatic leader and an organizing genius. . . of little formal education but of striking intellectual power, [who] produced a vast amount of religious writing that has influenced millions of people around the world" (p. 180). "He was obviously a remarkable man who accomplished something truly exceptional" (181).

Aside from being situated within the useful historical context of "The Second Great Awakening," this biography adds no new material. LDS readers might take some exception to Remini's occasional regurgitation of some unsubstantiated biographical speculations, allegations, and hearsay concerning Joseph's many wives (e.g., he quotes Fawn Brodie but not the more thorough *In Sacred Loneliness* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997] by Todd Compton). Nevertheless, the book provides a good balanced introduction for general readers. Perhaps this biography will be responsible for increased interest in our faith, for ultimately Robert Remini effects a positive service to Joseph Smith and to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A Frank Analysis of a Troubling Legacy

All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage, by Armand L. Mauss (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 343 pp.

Reviewed by Thomas W. Murphy, Chair, Anthropology Department, Edmonds Community College, Lynnwood, Washington.

Armand Mauss, professor emeritus of Sociology and Religious Studies at Washington State University, has produced the authoritative and definitive study of the evolution of Mormon conceptions of race and lineage. As a practicing Latter-day Saint, former editor of *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, and former president of the Mormon History Association,