

Mormon Women in the History of Second-Wave Feminism

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As a historian of early America, I seldom pay much attention to the history of the twentieth century. I have often joked that, since I lived through most of it, it seems too much like autobiography. That sensation was even more pronounced in the summer of 2004 when I confronted a stack of books on the emergence of second-wave feminism. I relived my own life as I read accounts of feminist awakenings in Chapel Hill, Seattle, or Chicago and learned about the struggles of Jewish, African American, and Chicana women caught between feminism and loyalty to their people.

Unlike textbook histories of second-wave feminism which typically focus on visible public events like the founding of the National Organization of Women in 1966 or the picketing of the Miss American pageant in 1968, newer scholarship focuses on grass-roots organizing and on the personal stories of leaders at various levels.¹ Reading these books in relation to my own life taught me something I should already have known. Mormon women weren't passive recipients of the new feminism. We helped to create it.

Constructing a timeline of key events reinforced the point. In 1972, the year Rosemary Radford Ruether introduced feminist theology at the Harvard Divinity School, Mormon feminists were teaching women's history at the LDS Institute of Religion in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1974, the year more than a thousand women attended the Berkshire Conference on Women's History at Radcliffe, those same Mormon feminists launched *Exponent II*. Similar things were happening elsewhere. At the time Black Feminists were organizing in New York, Carol Lynn Pearson was pub-

Table
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- 1963 Betty Friedan publishes *The Feminine Mystique*.
- 1963 Esther Peterson promotes State Commissions on the Status of Women.
- 1966 The National Organization of Women is founded.
- 1966 Boston-area Mormon women publish *A Beginner's Boston*.
- 1968 New York Radical Women demonstrate at the Miss America pageant.
- 1970 The *Utah Historical Quarterly* publishes a special issue on women.
- 1970 Boston feminists publish the pamphlet that becomes *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.
- 1971 Boston-area Mormon women edit a women's issue of *Dialogue*.
- 1972 *Ms* magazine is founded.
- 1972 Mormon feminists teach women's history at the LDS Institute of Religion in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- 1972 Rosemary Ruether teaches feminist theology at Harvard Divinity School.
- 1973 Carol Lynn Pearson publishes *Daughters of Light*.
- 1973 National Black Feminists organize.
- 1974 *Exponent II* begins publication.
- 1974 The Berkshire Conference on Women's History is held at Radcliffe.
- 1975 Elouise Bell delivers a forum address at Brigham Young University on feminism.
- 1975 Catholic women hold the first Women's Ordination Conference in Detroit.
- 1976 Boston women publish *Mormon Sisters*, edited by Claudia L. Bushman.
- 1976 Maxine Hong Kingston publishes *The Woman Warrior*.
- 1977 Sonia Johnson leads Mormons for ERA.
- 1977 The National Women's Studies Association is formed.
- 1977 Utah holds its state International Women's Year conference in Salt Lake City.
- 1977 In Houston, Bella Abzug presides over the First National Women's Conference.

Table (cont.)**Mormon Women in the History of Second-Wave Feminism**

- 1978 The Alice Louise Reynolds Club is organized in Provo, Utah.
- 1978 100,000 demonstrators march in Washington, D.C., to support the Equal Rights Amendment.
- 1978 Marilyn Warenski publishes *Patriarchs and Politics*.
- 1980 Evangelical feminists publish *Daughters of Sarah*.
- 1980 Peggy Fletcher becomes editor of *Sunstone*.
- 1981 Jewish feminists found B'not Esh.
- 1981 Sonia Johnson publishes her autobiography, *From Housewife to Heretic*.
- 1982 The ERA fails of ratification.
- 1982 Mormon women make a "Pilgrimage" to Nauvoo, Illinois.
- 1982 Alice Walker publishes *The Color Purple*.
- 1982 Mary Lythgoe Bradford publishes *Mormon Women Speak*.
- 1983 Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza publishes *In Memory of Her*.
- 1984 Margaret Merrill Toscano speaks on women's priesthood at the Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium.
- 1984 Emily's List is founded to encourage women political candidates.
- 1984 Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery publish *Mormon Enigma*, the biography of Emma Hale Smith.
- 1985 14,000 women attend the Third International Conference held in Kenya.
- 1985 The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Days Saints (now Community of Christ) ordains women.
- 1985 Wilma Mankiller becomes the head of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma.
- 1986 Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson publish *Sisters in Spirit*.
- 1987 Congress declares March National Women's History month.
- 1988 The Mormon Women's Forum is founded.
- 1988 Barbara Harris becomes the first female bishop in the Episcopal Church.

lishing *Daughters of Light* (Provo, Utah: Trilogy Arts, 1973). While Catholic women were gathering for their first conference on ordination in 1975, Elouise Bell, a professor of English at Brigham Young University, was lecturing on the implications of the new feminism. On different streets and within radically different traditions, women were exploring the implications of the new movement. It may seem merely a curiosity that Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* appeared the same year (1976) as Claudia Bushman's edited collection on Mormon pioneer women, but in both cases women steeped in the folklore of their people were rewriting history.

Histories of second-wave feminism sometimes tell the story of Sonia Johnson, a Mormon housewife from Virginia, who stood up to Orrin Hatch, a powerful senator from Utah, during hearings on the ERA in 1977, but they do not situate Sonia's story within the larger history of Mormon feminism. The reasons are not hard to find. As Ann Braude has observed:

On both the right and the left, pundits portray religion and feminism as inherently incompatible, as opposing forces in American culture. On one hand, some feminists assume that religious women are brainwashed apologists for patriarchy suffering from false consciousness. They believe allegiance to religious communities or organizations renders women incapable of authentic advocacy on women's behalf. On the other hand, religious hierarchies often discourage or prohibit women's public leadership. Some leaders assume that those who work to enhance women's status lack authentic faith. Many accounts of second-wave feminism reinforce these views by mentioning religion only when it is a source of opposition.²

This essay is an effort to connect selected themes in the history of second-wave feminism with what I know of Mormon feminism. In that sense, it is both autobiography and history. I will emphasize three areas where I found significant convergence—in accounts about the emergence of grass-roots organizing, in narratives about the discovery of women's history, and in explorations of the double-bind of identity politics. Mormon women have a place in the history of second-wave feminism, though we have not yet claimed it.

The Emergence of Feminist Groups

Histories of second-wave feminism often begin in 1963, the

year Betty Friedan diagnosed the mysterious angst of suburban housewives who seemingly had it all, yet felt empty and unfulfilled. Grateful readers turned *The Feminine Mystique* into a best seller and its title into a household word. “My secret scream as I stir the oatmeal, iron the blue jeans, and sell pop at the Little League baseball games is ‘Stop the World, I want to get on before it’s too late!’ a thirty-seven-year-old Wyoming mother wrote.³ Friedan’s influence was not confined to the suburbs. In Canada, Lois Miriam Wilson, ministerial candidate and mother of four, devoured the book. Her oldest daughter, who was thirteen at the time, remembers that as her mother read, she would periodically cry out, “That’s right!”⁴ In Manhattan, Susan Brownmiller, single and a freelance writer, found herself on every page. “*The Feminine Mystique* changed my life,” she recalls.⁵

I heard about the book from the organist in my LDS ward in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and it changed my life, too. Like others, I was moved by Friedan’s insistence that women should not have to choose between motherhood and meaningful work, though at the time the best I could do was dedicate my children’s nap times to serious reading. Significantly, my first real opportunity to claim a life as a writer came from a Church calling. When the elders’ quorum presidency panned a fund-raising idea suggested by the ward bishop, the Relief Society took it up. My work editing *A Beginner’s Boston* (Cambridge, Mass.: Privately published, 1966), taught me that I could use small bits of time to accomplish something useful. It also taught the women of Cambridge Ward that we could do more than sell crafts at our annual bazaar. The step from conventional fund-raising to writing and publishing was a big one.

In June of 1970, flush with the success of a second edition of *A Beginner’s Boston*, a group of us began meeting to talk about the new feminism. By the end of summer, we had volunteered to produce a special issue of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Our “Ladies Home Dialogue,” as we jokingly called it, appeared in the summer of 1971 with a bright pink cover that we thought must have been a sardonic joke by our male publishers. In the introduction, Claudia Bushman described our group as a dozen or so women in their thirties who gathered frequently to talk about their lives. “We have no officers, no rules and no set meeting time,” she explained, adding, “Although we sometimes refer to

ourselves as the L.D.S. cell of Women's Lib, we claim no affiliation with any of those militant bodies and some of us are so straight as to be shocked by their antics." But she admitted that we "read their literature with interest."⁶

So we did. Judy Dushku, then a graduate student at Tufts University, had been invited to join a consciousness-raising group based in Cambridge. With them, she was the token conservative. With us, she was the resident radical. We argued over the implications of the mimeographed manifestoes she brought to our meetings. Spunky illustrations by local artist Carolyn Durham Peters (later Carolyn Person) captured our wrenching discussions better than any of the essays in the volume. On one page, under the banner "The Women's Movement: Liberation or Deception?" Carolyn drew a blonde Eve standing beside the tree of knowledge in an imagined Eden. Instead of a fig leaf, Carolyn's blonde Eve covered her nakedness with a giant disc labeled "All American Womanhood: Mormon Division." To her left hung an apple, unpicked and unbitten. Beyond that a sign marked the exit into a "lone and dreary world" promising independence, power, identity, autonomy, self-esteem, career, and freedom. Eve, like us, had not yet made her decision. In the context of Mormon theology, this little allegory was filled with irony. Unlike mainstream Christians, Mormons revere "Mother Eve" who chose the hard path of mortality over the security of Eden. Still, general conference talks at the time reinforced the division of labor established in Eden.⁷

In the most confident essay in the volume, Christine Meaders Durham (now chief justice of the Utah Supreme Court and a nationally known jurist) explained how she and her husband were sharing the care of their two (eventually four) young children while she finished law school and he medical school. Why were women's ambitions less worthy than men's? she asked. Why shouldn't fathers as well as mothers experience the joy of parenting?⁸ I was the only one willing to take on the then-controversial topic of birth control. I handled it, obliquely, through satire. The last page of my essay featured Carolyn's drawing of a raised fist above a defiant "SISTERS UNITE."⁹ I remember being wary of the drawing when I first saw it; but in the end, I relished its double meaning. Within the Mormon community, "brother" and "sister" were conventional forms of address. Our group knew the power

of sisterhood firsthand through multiple service and fund-raising projects. We were confident in our ability to shape the new feminism to our own needs.

We were not alone in that confidence. Brushfires of feminism were erupting all over the United States. Two anecdotes from other grass-roots feminists illustrate the spirit of the times. Bev Mitchell, an early leader in Iowa, recalls that she was spending a weekend in Chicago when she stumbled onto a women's liberation rally in Grant Park. "It was just about the most exciting thing I had ever been to," she recalls. Back home in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, she rallied women to lobby for changes in the state's civil rights code. She jokes that the group included "scary, hippie women . . . dripping with beads" as well as the wife of a major industrialist. The men on the Civil Rights Commission "were scared to death that between their wives, who were capable of incredible fury, and these hippies, God knows what would happen. So protection for women was put in the code." The women celebrated at a summer encampment for women and children. Every morning they "raised a bra on an improvised flagpole while a member . . . played 'God Bless America' on her kazoo."¹⁰

Mormon feminists will recognize the iconoclastic humor in Mitchell's account as well as her celebration of diversity. They will also recognize the spiritual awakening experienced by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, a Cuban refugee who had served as a Catholic missionary in Peru. She was working in a Sears store in Rochester, New York, when a friend invited her to attend a conference on women's ordination. When a speaker at one of the meetings invited those who felt called to ordination to stand, she turned to a Dominican friend next to her and said, "Mary, I do not want to stand. I am tired of battles." But she found herself on her feet, sustained by the "cloud of witnesses" around her. When she sat down, she thought, "I have been born, baptized, and confirmed in this new life all at once!"¹¹

The new feminism was nourished by meetings, rallies, and retreats, and by accidental encounters that spread the enthusiasm from one community to another. Thirty years later, feminists everywhere look back on those years with nostalgia. In the words of New York activist Rosalyn Baxandall: "What I'd like to convey—what I think has been neglected in the books and articles

about the women's liberation movement—is the joy we felt. We were, we believed, poised on the trembling edge of a transformation.”¹² That description isn't much different from Claudia Bushman's recollections of those early gatherings of Mormon women in Boston: “Here we all were, working together, engaged in frontline enterprises, researching, thinking and writing for ourselves. We were publishing to an audience interested in reading what we had to say. We were making public presentations to people who came to hear us. This was more empowering than any successful woman today will ever be able to imagine. We felt invincible.”¹³

Like Eve, we reached out to grasp the fruit, little knowing what lay ahead.

The Discovery of History

Returning from the first meeting of the National Black Feminist Organization held in New York in 1973, a young novelist named Alice Walker stood staring at a picture of Frederick Douglass hanging on her wall. She asked herself why she didn't also have a picture of Harriet Tubman or Sojourner Truth on that wall. Reporting on this experience in a letter to *Ms* magazine, she wrote, “And I thought that if black women would only start asking questions like that, they'd soon—all of them—have to begin reclaiming their mothers and grandmothers—and what an enrichment that would be!” Walker's now famous essay “In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens” epitomizes a cultural and intellectual movement launched by the new feminism.¹⁴ Those of us educated in the 1950s were happy to have escaped our mothers' gardens (and the weeding, flower-arranging, and home canning that went with them). For us, education meant mastery of Great Works produced by men who were too elevated to be imagined as our grandfathers.

Even in the 1960s, women's stories were virtually absent from formal history as it was taught in the United States. Female historians were largely absent as well. The few who wrote about women were outside the academy; those who had managed to land positions in colleges or universities knew better than to write about anything related to women. Jo Freeman, who entered Berkeley in 1961 as a precocious fifteen-year-old, looks back in astonishment

at the male-centered education she received: “During my four years in one of the largest institutions of higher education in the world—and one with a progressive reputation—I not only never had a woman professor, I never even saw one. Worse yet, I didn’t notice.”¹⁵

The “didn’t notice” part rings true to me. When I was a senior at the University of Utah in 1960, an assistant dean named Shauna Adix invited a group of student leaders to lunch. She and another female administrator lightly raised some questions about discrimination against women. I didn’t know what she was talking about. Ignorance of women’s issues was not confined to the early sixties or to state universities. Sara Evans remembers only one class at Duke “in which women were acknowledged to have some historical agency.” The professor was Anne Firor Scott, who “drew on her research on southern white women to tell us about the importance of women in Progressive Era politics.”¹⁶ But Evans, preoccupied with other issues, was unprepared to listen. A brief encounter with a women’s liberation group in Chicago in 1968 changed her mind. When she entered graduate school at the University of North Carolina in 1969, she was hungry for more. Since there were no courses in women’s history at UNC, she and other women students had to teach themselves. “Little did we know that we were part of a cohort of several thousand across the country, collectively inventing women’s history as a major field of historical inquiry and women’s studies as a discipline.”¹⁷

Gerda Lerner believes that, in 1970, there were only five specialists in U.S. history who identified themselves primarily as historians of women. Lerner, a refugee from Nazi-controlled Austria, came to academics after raising a family and working with women in left-wing political groups and in the PTA in her New York neighborhood. “I knew in my bones that women build communities,” she recalls. “My commitment to women’s history came out of my life, not out of my head.”¹⁸ Together, she and others began to transform the historical profession in the United States.

Looking back, women who lived through those years describe their own amazement at discovering that women, including minority women, had a history. Beverly Guy-Sheftall had read plenty of black literature, but she was unprepared for the discovery she made in the Emory University library one day when she stumbled

on Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South*. "I was literally awestruck when I read Cooper's insightful and original pronouncement, which she wrote in 1892 long before there was any mention of Black feminism: 'The colored woman of to-day occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country. . . . She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both.'" For Guy-Sheftall, that passage shifted the earth in a new direction.¹⁹

For Mormon feminists, the earth shifted again and again. For Boston-area women, the transformation began in 1970 when we were scrambling to find material to fill that pink issue of *Dialogue*. Sometime that fall or early winter, I walked in late to a meeting just in time to hear Claudia Bushman read from an essay submitted by Leonard J. Arrington, one of the "founding fathers" of professional Mormon history. His essay included long excerpts from the diary of Ellis Reynolds Shipp, a polygamist mother who, in response to concern about the high mortality rates for childbearing women in early Utah, went to Philadelphia in the 1870s to study obstetrics, leaving her young children behind in the care of a sister-wife. When Shipp returned to Utah for the summer and became pregnant, her husband reluctantly gave her permission to return to medical school. But on the morning she was to leave, he changed his mind. As her diary described it: "Suddenly, he grasped my hands and said, 'I cannot give my sanction to such a momentous thing—under such circumstances to undertake what really is impossible, the unwise thing to do.' At once I jumped to my feet and spoke to my husband as I ne'er had spoken to him before! 'yesterday you said that I should go. I am going, going now!'"²⁰ When Claudia finished reading Shipp's words, the whole room erupted in cheers. Although most of us had been Mormons all our lives, we had never heard such a story. Our encounter with the little-known history of nineteenth-century Mormon feminism led to the series of lectures on women's history which we taught at the LDS Institute of Religion in 1972 and eventually to the discovery in the stacks of Harvard's Widener Library of a nineteenth-century feminist periodical called the *Woman's Exponent* published in Utah from 1872 to 1912. Its forthright feminism gave us confidence in our own. In 1974, we launched *Exponent II* on the "twin

platforms of feminism and Mormonism.” That was, of course, the year that an overflow crowd at the Second Berkshire Conference on Women’s History prompted a male reporter for the *New York Times* to exclaim that women’s history was “exploding in the academic skies like a supernova.”²¹

The light from that supernova had already been seen in Utah. In fact, some date the beginnings of second-wave Mormon history to 1970, when the *Utah Historical Quarterly* published a special issue on women. Fledgling historians were fortunate to have a champion in Leonard Arrington, the founding father of the New Mormon History. (Arrington published an economic history of Mormon women in *Western Humanities Review* in 1955, even before completing his pathbreaking *Great Basin Kingdom*.²²) In 1972, he left an academic position at Utah State University to become LDS Church Historian. From the first, he included women as part of the research staff, nurturing the careers of Jill Mulvay Derr, Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, Carol Cornwall Madsen, and Susan Staker and reaching out beyond his staff to encourage other founding mothers of Mormon feminism. Throughout the 1970s and early ’80s, amateurs and academics in and out of the Church searched the rich sources of nineteenth-century Mormon history for new insights into the women’s suffrage movement, polygamy, pioneer midwifery, and the structure of early women’s organizations. Some of this work was published in Church periodicals, others in independent journals like *Dialogue* or *Sunstone*. Very little of it, unfortunately, appeared in mainstream historical publications. In part that was because there was such a thriving internal market for Mormon history.²³

In Mormonism, history merges into theology. Joseph Smith’s story, narratives about the gathering of Zion in Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and Utah, and explorations into the long struggle between the Latter-day Saints and the federal government frame our scriptures as well as our self-images as Latter-day Saints. It is hardly surprising, then, that Mormon feminists would face spiritual as well as intellectual issues as they came face to face with the past. To their astonishment, researchers uncovered references to Eliza R. Snow, the second president of the women’s Relief Society, as a “priestess” and “prophetess.” They found references to women healing the sick and exercising other gifts, and they found in the

holograph minutes of the first Relief Society statements by Joseph Smith that appeared to promise women the priesthood. The first public exposure of the claim to women's priesthood may have been Margaret Merrill Toscano's speech at the 1984 Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City: "The Missing Rib: The Forgotten Place of Queens and Priestesses in the Establishment of Zion." By this time, however, much of the story was familiar to historians. The first minutes of the Relief Society were very much a topic of discussion when feminists met at Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1982. For many that "Pilgrimage" was a healing journey. Sharing a moment of revelation on the banks of the Mississippi, we felt the tensions between our faith and our feminism dissolve.²⁴

The Double-Bind of Identity Politics

Stories like these make it all sound easy. In fact, feminists everywhere were often stigmatized as "man-haters" or "crazies." For minority feminists, there was often intense, often wounding, opposition. African American and Asian activists pilloried Maxine Hong Kingston or Alice Walker for identifying with white feminism. Little-known activists faced similar problems. At Long Beach State University in California in 1969, Ana Nieto-Gómez and her friends named their consciousness-raising group *Las Hija de Cuauhtémoc* after an early women's organization that operated on both sides of the Mexican-U.S. border in the early twentieth century. They were inspired by the feistiness of older women they knew. "In my mind, I was acting like my mom, like my aunts, like the Chicanas from San Bernadino," Nieto-Gómez remembers. But when she won an election for president, male leaders who were threatened by her victory hanged her in effigy, then staged a mock mass and burial.²⁵ After Irene Blea organized a conference on Chicana feminism at the University of Colorado in 1977, name-calling escalated into vandalism. "There's nothing worse in a Colorado winter than having somebody egg your car and then 't.p.' it and then have it freeze," she remembers.²⁶

Like members of other minority groups, Mormon feminists were sometimes caught in the double-bind of identity politics, finding themselves stigmatized within their own group when they advocated for change and dismissed by other feminists when they defended their heritage. Many will identify with the experience of

former black nationalist and feminist activist Barbara Omolade: “Sometimes I have felt like an envoy and ambassador shuttling between two alien nations. Sometimes as avenging warrior, I have defended each one’s causes to the other. At other times I have sought refuge in one side, after being disgruntled and fed up with the failures and weaknesses of the other.”²⁷

For Latter-day Saints, the most wounding battles were fought in public over the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Although the ERA passed Congress in 1971 with little discussion and virtually no opposition, by 1977 it was the target of conservative leaders like Phyllis Schlafley, whose flagship organization, Stop ERA, had forged a powerful alliance of women, clergy, and politicians. The conflict intensified when President Jimmy Carter appointed Bella Abzug to head the commission charged with planning the International Women’s Year conference to be held in Houston, Texas, in November 1977. Since delegates were to be chosen by conferences held in each of the fifty states, pro-ERA and anti-ERA groups attempted to dominate the conventions. In Utah, conservatives outmaneuvered moderates who hoped for a respectful and open dialogue on the issues. Rallying Latter-day Saint women through their local Relief Societies, right-wing leaders dominated the convention.²⁸

Later that summer, Eleanor Ricks Colton, president of the Washington DC Stake Relief Society, got a call from her former stake president suggesting she attend a meeting designed to bring conservative groups together with feminist organizers of the IWY. He suggested that, “if given the opportunity, I should explain the Church’s stand against the ERA. ‘Brother Ladd,’ I said. ‘I am not sure I understand that myself.’ He chuckled in his good-natured way. ‘Well, you have three days to find out.’” Colton called friends in Utah, rallied her best friend, and sat up long hours reading everything she could find. By 11:00 P.M. the night before the meeting, she was exhausted, wondering whether she had anything to contribute. When the phone rang, she heard the voice of her daughter, a student at BYU. As they talked, her daughter urged her to read Doctrine and Covenants 100:5: “Therefore, verily I say unto you, lift up your voices unto this people; speak the thoughts that I shall put into your hearts, and you shall not be confounded before men.” She went to sleep ready for whatever would

come. But when she arrived at the meeting the next day she found that the leaders had cancelled it “on the grounds that it would be ‘counterproductive’ to meet with us and other anti-ERA groups.” She was astonished. The IWY was tax-supported. Surely, the organizers ought to be willing to listen to everyone.²⁹

As Congress debated extending the ratification deadline for the ERA, Colton decided to attend the hearings. Someone told her she should wear a button indicating her stand. “Pro ERA people wore green buttons; those opposed to the extension wore red buttons. I felt somewhat shy about this because of my natural repugnance to the steam-roller tactics employed by leaders of both groups. To assert my independence I made my own button from a red paper plate with the carefully printed words, ‘Stop ERA Extension.’ When I timidly stepped on the elevator to the House Chambers, I was taken aback to hear a woman say to a group of green button wearers, ‘We don’t need to ride with her,’ and they stepped aside to wait for the next elevator.”

This was the beginning of her education in polarized politics. As the debate heated up, supporters of the ERA took to wearing white to make them more easily visible to members of Congress:

On voting day a friend and I stood in a crowded lobby by one of the doors to the Senate chambers when a huffy woman behind me said, “If these two Judases in front would move over, there would be room for more of us!” I turned, and said as kindly as I could, “Remember that in a political contest all wisdom and good motives [of] all good people are seldom found on only one side. If we’re going to have to stand here all morning, let’s at least be kind to each other.” A man dressed in white who stood beside her seemed relieved as he struck up a conversation with me.³⁰

Sonia Johnson’s story has been used by historians to exemplify the opposition of Mormonism to feminism. Colton’s story helps us to see the hostility of feminism to Mormonism.

Colton admits that she was dismayed to hear “a wholesome-looking, tart-tongued Mormon woman [Johnson] belittling the leaders of her church,” but she was also disturbed by the Church’s reaction. The excommunication of Sonia Johnson “poured gasoline on the fires of misunderstanding.” News of the excommunication hit the media the weekend before Colton was scheduled to chair a preparatory meeting in her county for a White House Con-

ference on Families. “I have never before or since witnessed such rude behavior among women,” she recalled. “It was apparent from the beginning that I had been branded a red-eyed Mormon, unfit to represent liberal Montgomery County.”³¹

When Sonia Johnson criticized Church authorities in her testimony before Congress, she exposed the raw edges of a culture that simultaneously encouraged female autonomy and allowed patriarchal dominion. She didn’t rise to national prominence because she was an oppressed housewife, but because she was a feisty Mormon with speaking and organizational skills nourished through long Church service. Because she, like Colton, believed in personal revelation, she wasn’t afraid to stand up to power. Sadly, the community that nourished her also dismissed her. She had committed the cardinal sin—creating adverse publicity for a Church that had worked hard to overcome its nineteenth-century reputation as one of the “twin relics of barbarism.” In Mormon terms, she had betrayed her people.

News of Church involvement in national politics appalled Latter-day Saints who supported the ERA. Hoping to assert their right to disagree, a group of women in Provo, Utah, organized the Alice Louise Reynolds Club as a forum for discussing social issues. It met in the library of Brigham Young University, in a room named for Reynolds, which they themselves had funded and furnished, from 1978 to 1981 when university officials forced them to move.³² The 1980s brought new organizational efforts (such as the founding of the Mormon Women’s Forum in 1988) and new forms of opposition. But that story belongs in another article.

Mormon women did not become feminists because they read *The Feminine Mystique* or subscribed to *Ms* magazine. They became feminists as new ideas, filtered through a wide range of personal associations, helped them make sense of their lives. Discovering history, they also discovered themselves. But like members of other minority groups, they were sometimes caught in the double-bind of identity politics, finding themselves stigmatized within their own group when they touched tender issues and dismissed by other feminists when they defended their heritage. Their story reminds us that second-wave feminism was not one thing but many. It was not a self-consistent ideology but a *move-*

ment—a tremor in the earth, a lift in the wind, a swelling tide. Although there were many groups, there was no unified platform, no single set of texts. Instead there was an exhilarating sense of discovery, a utopian hope that women might change the world.

For some of us, that hope remains today.

Notes

1. Stephanie Gilmore, “The Dynamics of Second-Wave Feminist Activism in Memphis, 1971–1982: Rethinking the Liberal/Radical Divide,” *NWSA Journal* 15 (2003): 94–117 is an example of how a focus on local groups can complicate categories. Ann Braude, ed., *Transforming the Faiths of Our Fathers: Women Who Changed American Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) was especially important for this paper. It includes personal narratives from sixteen women who participated in a conference on feminism and religion held at Harvard Divinity School November 1–3, 2002. Margaret Toscano, co-founder of the Mormon Women’s Forum, was the only Mormon speaker.

2. Braude, “Introduction,” *Transforming the Faith of Our Fathers*, 2.

3. Quoted in Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 6–7; Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 2–5. For excellent historical treatments, see Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women’s Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002); and Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000).

4. “Lois Miriam Wilson,” in Braude, *Transforming the Faiths of Our Fathers*, 13–14.

5. Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Delta, 1999), 3.

6. Claudia Lauper Bushman, “Women in *Dialogue*: An Introduction,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6 (Summer 1971): 5. Claudia and I were co-editors of the issue. I reflected on its creation in “The Pink Dialogue and Beyond,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 28–39.

7. Carolyn Person, “The Women’s Movement: Liberation or Deception?” (illustration), *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 4, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 4. On Latter-day Saint ideas about Eve, see Jolene Edmunds Rockwood, “The Redemption of Eve,” in *Sisters in Spirit: Mor-*

mon *Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, edited by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 3–36.

8. Christine Meaders Durham, “Having One’s Cake and Eating it Too,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 38.

9. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “And Woe Unto Them That Are with Child in Those Days,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 45. For a retrospective account of this period, see Ulrich “The Pink Dialogue and Beyond,” 28–39.

10. Bev Mitchell, quoted in Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 42–43. For other personal accounts, see Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Mary King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* (New York: William Morrow, 1987).

11. “Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz,” in Braude, *Transforming the Faith of Our Fathers*, 87.

12. Rosalyn Fraad Baxandall, “Catching the Fire,” in *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women’s Liberation*, edited by Rachel Blau DePlessis and Ann Snitow (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 210.

13. Claudia L. Bushman, “My Short Happy Life with *Exponent II*,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 186.

14. “A Letter to the Editor of *Ms*” and “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” in Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (San Diego, Calif.: 1983), 273–75, 231–43. On the Organization of Black Feminists, see Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 77–78.

15. Jo Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” in *Feminist Memoir Project*, 170–71.

16. See Ann Firor Scott, “The Southern Lady Revisited,” Afterword to *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830–1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995).

17. Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 14.

18. Gerda Lerner, “Women among the Professors of History: The Story of a Process of Transformation,” in *Voices of Women Historians: The Personal, the Political, the Professional*, edited by Eileen Boris and Nupur Chaudhuri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1. Gerda Lerner has also written about her life in *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); *Why History Matters: Life and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and *Fireweed: A Political Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

19. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "Sisters in Struggle: A Belated Response," in *Feminist Memoir Project*, 487.

20. Ellis Reynolds Shipp, quoted in Leonard J. Arrington, "Blessed Damozels: Women in Mormon History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6, no. 2 (1971): 27–30.

21. Alden Whitman, "The Woman in History Becomes Explosive Issue in the Present," *New York Times*, November 2, 1974, 34.

22. Leonard J. Arrington, "The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women," *Western Humanities Review* 9 (1955): 145–64; and his pathbreaking *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958).

23. Carol Cornwall Madsen and Jill Mulvay Derr, "A Historiographical Approach to Mormon Women's History, 1960–2000." I thank Carol and Jill for providing a copy of this unpublished essay, which traces the evolution of Mormon women's history to the present.

24. In a recent account of her own spiritual journey, Margaret Toscano says that, while she was reading deeply in Mormon history in the 1970s, she had little connection with organized feminism until 1988 when she helped to found the Mormon Women's Forum. See her essay in Braude, *Transforming the Faith of Our Fathers*, 157–72. Discussions at Pilgrimage previewed some of the material later published in Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe, 1804–1879* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), and Beecher and Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit*.

25. Ana Nieto-Gómez, quoted in Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 165, 139–41, 152–53.

26. Irene Blea, quoted in *ibid.*, 158.

27. Barbara Omolade, "Sisterhood in Black and White," in *The Feminist Memoir Project*, 377.

28. For an overview of the International Women's Year, see Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 139–42. For an account of the Utah conference, see Martha Sonntag Bradley, "The Mormon Relief Society and the International Women's Year," *Journal of Mormon History* 21 (1995): 105–67 and her *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books/Smith-Pettit Foundation); and D. Michael Quinn, "The LDS Church's Campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment," *Journal of Mormon History* 20, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 85–155.

29. Eleanor Ricks Colton, "My Personal Rubicon," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 4 (Fall 1981): 10–12.

30. *Ibid.*, 103.

31. Ibid., 104–5.

32. Amy L. Bentley, “Comforting the Motherless Children: The Alice Louise Reynolds Women’s Forum,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 39–61. Also see Lavina Fielding Anderson, “A Strenuous Business: The Achievement of Helen Candland Stark,” in the same issue of *Dialogue*, 12–33.