
ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

A Retrospective on the Scholarship of Richard Bushman

*Grant Underwood, Harry S. Stout, Gordon S. Wood,
Catherine Kelly, and Laurie Maffly-Kipp,*

with a response by Richard Lyman Bushman

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS BY GRANT UNDERWOOD

Among Latter-day Saint academics, few have achieved the professional stature or exerted the intellectual influence of Richard Lyman Bushman. Gordon Wood, a member of the blue-ribbon panel featured here and a scholar with few peers in the historical discipline, calls Bushman “one of our most distinguished American historians.” Generous and dignified as well, Richard Bushman is the proverbial “gentleman and a scholar.” His words and deeds have touched many lives across the span of his more than fifty-year academic career. To commemorate that career on the eve of his eightieth birthday, it seemed fitting to honor him among his professional colleagues and friends at the January 2011 annual meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA).

Richard’s years in the Boston area as both student and professor, his scholarly attention to New England, and the 2011 conference theme “History, Society, and the Sacred” combined to make the 2011 AHA meeting in Boston an ideal venue for a session titled “A Retrospective on the Scholarship of Richard Bushman.” The American Society of Church History and the Mormon History Association were both anxious to co-sponsor the session with

the AHA. Not surprisingly, when it came time to start, virtually every chair was filled. It is common in academic conferences for people to come and go, listening to a speaker in one session and then darting off to another concurrent session to catch a different presentation. In this case, however, few left. Those who trickled in ended up on the floor but, like the rest, remained for the duration of a most engaging session. To enable the many well-wishers afterward to pay their respects to Richard and Claudia Bushman, a lovely reception was held that was ably organized by Sheree Underwood and generously underwritten by the Mormon History Association, the BYU History Department, and the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A native son of the West, born in Salt Lake City and raised in Portland, Oregon, Richard Bushman headed east for his college education. A decade later, he had served a mission, married Claudia Lauper, begun his family of eventually six children, and earned all three of his degrees from Harvard University. He received his Ph.D. in 1961 from Harvard's pioneering, multidisciplinary program: The History of American Civilization. His *Doktorvater* was the renowned Harvard historian Oscar Handlin, for whom Bushman later edited *Uprooted Americans: Essays to Honor Oscar Handlin* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979). When Bushman was ABD (all-but-done) in his Harvard program, he accepted a position at Brigham Young University and taught there for a half dozen years in the 1960s. That period was interrupted by a two-year stint at Brown University as an interdisciplinary fellow in history and psychology.

In 1968 the Bushmans left Utah for good, returning to Boston where Richard accepted a position at Boston University. His award-winning book *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967) had been published the year before and had garnered both the year's Phi Alpha Theta Prize (Phi Alpha Theta is a national history honor society) and the coveted Bancroft Prize in American History. In his mid-thirties, Bushman was already a rising star. During his nine years at Boston University, Richard wrapped up work on the Great Awakening, publishing a volume of documents on the subject that is still in print (*Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740–1745* [New

York: Atheneum, Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1970; rpt., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1989]), and then turned his research interests to Massachusetts during the Revolutionary period, launching a study that culminated some years later in *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985; rpt., 1992).

In addition to his academic endeavors, Richard managed to squeeze in time to help Claudia rear their growing family and to serve as bishop and then stake president.

The Bushmans left Boston in 1977 and took up residence in Newark, Delaware, less than an hour down the interstate from Philadelphia. Richard taught at the University of Delaware for the next twelve years. While there, he published the first installment of what would eventually become his definitive biography of Joseph Smith: *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). The book was an immediate success, chosen as a History Book Club featured selection and as recipient of the lucrative David Woolley Evans and Beatrice Cannon Evans Biography Award in 1985. Appreciative scholars and eager generalists would have to wait another two decades for Bushman's full biography of Joseph Smith because Richard was always a historian of America first and a student of Mormon history second. As the decade of the 1980s progressed, so did Richard's work on what would become another History Book Club and Book-of-the-Month selection, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992). This volume detailed the quest for gentility, for "taste and manners," in early American history. Its impact was such that, within a year, it was issued as a Vintage paperback.

Just before *Refinement of America* hit the national market, Bushman reached the pinnacle of his academic career and was appointed Gouverneur Morris Professor of History at Columbia University. This endowed chair at Columbia placed Bushman among a rarefied group of America's finest historians. No other historian who is also a Latter-day Saint, aside from the Bushmans' close friend and colleague Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, has achieved such high academic distinction. Richard's recognition is all the

more impressive because he did not shy away from publishing in Mormon history while establishing his reputation as an American historian. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that Bushman's careful scholarship on Mormonism over the years has helped Mormon studies gain an accepted place at the academic table.

As Bushman approached retirement from Columbia in 2001, he found himself contemplating the completion of his biography of Joseph Smith. With encouragement and support from the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at BYU, Bushman began a series of summer seminars in Provo, drawing together promising young students of Mormon history and setting them to work on topics related to his culminating work on Joseph Smith. In addition, his labors were enriched for several years immediately preceding the completion of the biography by his involvement as an executive editor of the new Joseph Smith Papers project. Few volumes have been more anxiously awaited than *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005). Arguably Bushman's magnum opus, *Rough Stone Rolling* has sold more than 100,000 copies and garnered a number of awards, including the Evans Biography Award and the Best Book Award from the Mormon History Association. The saga of its reception and Bushman's response to that reception in the year surrounding its publication is engagingly told in *On the Road with Joseph Smith: An Author's Diary* (New York: Mormon Artists Group Press, 2006; rpt. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007).

Most recently, Richard has held the inaugural Howard W. Hunter Chair in Mormon Studies at the School of Religion in the Claremont Graduate University. This is the first endowed chair in Mormon studies outside Utah.

This brief overview of Richard's long and illustrious career has focused on the major publishing milestones in his life. Given their significance, it is not surprising that Bushman has received a number of prestigious research fellowships along the way. The list of sponsoring institutions reads like a who's who of America's academic elite: Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Smithsonian, and the Huntington Library. Nor should it surprise

that, in addition to his major books, Bushman has published many important articles in scholarly journals.

On this occasion, however, we focus on the four major works previously mentioned. That we have been able to secure the participation of the four eminent historians who make up this panel speaks emphatically to the esteem in which Richard is held throughout the discipline. That each of these exceptionally busy scholars expressed enthusiasm about the prospect of participation testifies to their personal regard for a dear friend. Each will focus on the particular volume that intersects with the area of his or her special expertise and will discuss the impact of Richard's scholarship on the relevant historiography. Harry Stout will discuss *From Puritan to Yankee*. Gordon Wood will probe *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts*. Catherine Kelly will engage *The Refinement of America*. And Laurie Maffly-Kipp will assess the contribution of *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*. While some element of celebration will be both inevitable and appropriate, the primary purpose of the session is to provide a serious exploration of Bushman's scholarship. Bushman himself will be the commentator and will respond to what this blue-ribbon panel says about his work. His remarks on *King and People*, abbreviated for lack of time in the oral presentation, are here restored. He will also offer his own retrospective ruminations about his scholarship. I shall introduce each of our distinguished panelists immediately preceding his or her presentation.

As a minor aside for readers of *Dialogue*, Richard Bushman wrote the very first "Letter to the Editor" to appear in the journal and served as the journal's first book review editor.

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INTRODUCTION TO HARRY S. STOUT

HARRY S. STOUT is professor of history, religious studies, and American studies, and Jonathan Edwards Professor of American Christianity at Yale Divinity School. He has published *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* with Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B.

Eerdmans, 1991), and *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the American Civil War* (New York: Viking Press, 2006), and several edited books, including *New Directions in American Religious History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) with Darryl G. Hart, and *Religion in American History: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) with Jon Butler. He is the general editor of the *Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953–) and co-director with Jon Butler of the Center for Religion and American Society at Yale University.

HARRY S. STOUT

I am delighted to offer some thoughts on the legacy of Richard Bushman's *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765*. On a personal note, I can begin by admitting that this book influenced me more than any other single book I read during graduate school. On rereading it for this session and looking at my marginal notes, I realized anew that it literally set the categories for the first two scholarly articles I wrote. Before Bushman, Puritan scholarship was almost exclusively theological and categorized as "intellectual history." But change was in the air. The field of American history was undergoing a generational transformation that would culminate in the rise of the "New Social History." Suddenly it was no longer enough to study the treatises of a small army of Puritan preachers for their intellectual content. Questions of economic and demographic change, political power, and social conflict assumed a new primacy and *From Puritan to Yankee* was in the thick of it. In the remarks to follow, I would like to summarize some of the major arguments in *From Puritan to Yankee* that helped to redefine the field of colonial New England studies, and then move on to a critical appreciation.

The main contours of Bushman's argument follow along economic, religious, and political lines. Briefly stated, the book offers a social and cultural analysis of colonial New England that tells the familiar story of "declension" but in a strikingly original way. In looking at the eighteenth century, Bushman portrays the devolution of the Puritan consensual community (nicely summarized by Kenneth Lockridge as a "closed, corporate, Christian, Utopian Community"),¹ to a more recognizably democratic culture. According to Bushman, the primary triggers for this devolu-

tion were the combined forces of relentless economic expansion and religious contention. These destructive forces released a degree of individualism and generated frankly factional politics based on private rather than public interest. These continual challenges to authority altered the conception of the nature of the state and of the proper relationship between the governors and the governed in ever more democratic ways. This transformation, in turn, paved the way both for revolutionary resistance in the late eighteenth century and for the Yankee individualism that came to triumph in the nineteenth century.

Bushman's method reminds me ever so much of Perry Miller's sense of colonial New England as a laboratory or "test tube" to describe the evolutionary process of Americanization, from its European origins in the seventeenth century to the Revolution and a new republic in the nineteenth century. Though disdainful of social history, Miller astutely recognized that colonial New England had no significant immigration after 1640. Nor were any books with dangerous ideas allowed into the colony. This meant that New England's cultural and intellectual evolution was entirely internal—the product of successive generations of insulated New Englanders confronted with the new realities of their New World environment. With few outside influences to contaminate the test tube, it would be possible to observe the interactions of ideas, individuals, and the environment, and trace change in motion as it evolved over generations. Miller believed that he could trace this transformation through elite intellectual sources alone, that supposedly marched lock-step into the future as a monolithic "New England Mind."

One great contribution of *From Puritan to Yankee* was to prove Miller's test-tube methodology astute but his conclusions wrong. By broadening his search beyond clerical voices to political and economic elites, Bushman unveiled the profound transformations in eighteenth-century New England that had, as their greatest cultural convulsion, the Great Awakening. In fact, there was no monolithic mind by 1690, nor could printed sermons alone reveal what was happening on the ground, as Puritans became Yankees.

The research invested in *From Colony to Province* is far ranging and imaginative. In particular, Bushman thoroughly mined the

fantastic manuscript archives at the Connecticut State Library in Hartford. Included in these records are land records, as well as deeds, mortgages, and exchanges. Bushman also combed local town records for town meeting minutes, proprietor records, and the papers of ecclesiastical societies. Information on individuals was available to Bushman through probate records, also housed at the Connecticut State Library. Finally Bushman accessed Connecticut sermons, especially in the awakening era.

Bushman sets the stage for his laboratory with a backward look at seventeenth-century Puritan origins. (See Chapters 1–2.) In this traditional, and quasi-theocratic society, the Congregational Church and the vernacular Word of God reigned supreme. The church, in submission to scripture, and not the individual, was the lowest common denominator of a good and godly social order. Every institution from marriage and the family to the state and the economy was designed with a view toward upholding the integrity of church and Word. Personal “liberties” and “freedoms” went no further than the freedom to honor God’s laws and ministers—a lesson painfully learned by, among others, Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams. Culture and education did not exist for their own sake, but to train citizens in literacy for membership in a Bible Commonwealth.

From seventeenth-century origins, Bushman shifts to his primary focus on the eighteenth century, describing the forces that would destroy the original Puritan utopian vision. These included land, commerce, religion, and politics.

Economics, even more than religion, would prove especially transformative in Bushman’s analysis. During the Stuart Restoration, property titles were threatened; and in 1685, the Connecticut General Assembly permanently altered the social organization of the towns by transferring the control of land from all town inhabitants to individual proprietors. An exclusive proprietary group now exercised privileges formerly held by all, and the line thus drawn between proprietors and inhabitants destroyed the homogeneity of the community and created a group of “outcasts” at variance with the leadership. The result was social erosion that “debilitated the old order” (37). As early as 1690, agriculture was no longer about self-sufficiency and communal barter, but about emerging markets in timber, fish, and surplus produce, all mak-

ing their way to urban and coastal markets through a network of navigable rivers and, increasingly, roads. (See Chapters 3–6.)

Accompanying the economic transformation was a relentless population growth that demographic historians working in the 1970s likened to the population explosions of emerging nations today. In the original founding towns, grandchildren and great-grandchildren discovered that land was no longer available for them to inherit. Caught in what demographers label a “demographic transition,” those populations gradually dispersed to land located farther from the village centers and away from old institutional controls inherent in church and state. The creation of separate parishes, a frequent occurrence after 1700, inevitably spurred contention between the “core” and the “periphery” over myriad issues including schools, meetinghouses, roads, militia duty, and town taxes, all of which destroyed the original town harmony. That an individual’s interests were no longer coextensive with the town but divided between town and parish ultimately diminished his or her attachment to both, a process that, Bushman argues, further promoted the growth of individual freedom from social, religious, and political constraints. (See Chapters 10–14.)

As if new parishes were not enough, Bushman traces the emergence of entirely new towns after 1690, especially in eastern Connecticut. These towns were organized differently from the original towns. Proprietors bought tracts of land and engaged in speculation. The new basis for town citizenship was no longer moral probity, a shared theology, or community approval, but cash. Land speculation induced geographic mobility, which, in turn, created unprecedented social instability. Private citizens invariably had less commitment to the town as community, especially if they were nonresident proprietors or tenants. Because towns as institutions became less effective in maintaining social control and in furthering the interests of their inhabitants, individuals began to look beyond them to the provincial government to fulfill their private ambitions and to resolve disputes. (See Chapter 6.)

But this provincial recentering, Bushman shows, was no more successful in promoting unity and cohesion than were the local towns. The long and remarkable contention between James Fitch, Native American Indians, and the Winthrop family over titles to

vast tracts of land in eastern Connecticut embroiled previously apolitical individuals in provincial politics because their property rights were directly affected by one faction or the other. This division within the colony's leadership diminished the sanctity and authority of government and allowed ordinary men—and women (though their voices are largely mute in Bushman's account)—to voice their desires and complaints, which they expressed not only in votes but also in mob action. While the conservative upper house decried the loss of law and order, the more popular lower house proclaimed its duty to represent the will of the people. By looking simultaneously at economic and political change, Bushman is able to show how, subtly, government's role was coming to be seen more as the promoter of the people's desires and less as the authoritative governor over their passions. (See Chapters 15–16.)

The same process occurred in religion. Clerical elites found themselves increasingly on the defensive before an assertive laity and experienced a sharp decline in status. Even as they claimed the exclusive right to speak for God in public assembly and use the pulpit to decry declension in popular piety, resentful parishioners could fight back by withholding or reducing clerical salaries, a punishment made sharper because inflation, fueled by paper currency, steadily eroded the value of those salaries. Instead of presenting a collective front before the people as in the past, the clergy, too, disassembled into contending factions distinguished by rival emphases on the “head” or the “heart.” These divisions would presage the divisions wrought by the Great Awakening. Here Bushman recognizes a divisive contestation of “piety” versus “order.” Head-centered ministers stressed the importance of a well-regulated intelligence that would rationally balance all the centrifugal forces in society and bend them to a consensus. Heart-centered ministers emphasized the “New Birth” and the attendant responsibilities of ministers to transcend questions of social and ecclesiastical order and touch the souls of their congregations. This division, in turn, presupposed that the ministers themselves had experienced vital grace and a personal relationship with Christ. (See Chapter 12.)

In this divisive and guilt-ridden society, a “great awakening” found fertile ground in Connecticut. Bushman describes the

awakening as a “psychological earthquake” that created new men and women with new social, as well as religious, attitudes. When discussing the Great Awakening, Bushman augments his economic analysis with a foray into psychology and traces the shifting psyches of Connecticut Puritans. With the commercial revolution in place and newfound fortunes throughout the land, many inhabitants experienced guilt over their commercial gains. These feelings were reinforced by accusations from the clergy that they had declined in piety and were in danger of hell’s damnation unless they returned to a well-ordered past with proper deference to godly magistrates and ministers. In traditional Puritan teaching, these clergymen were God’s representatives, and as a result, their words and their laws were, in essence, God’s words and God’s laws. Traditional Puritans, Bushman recognized, “did not separate earthly clashes with authority from sins against God, for they believed the rulers and laws derived their power from the heavens” (187). To rebel against the leaders was to rebel against God. Unwilling to change their economically driven ways, yet unable to shake their guilt before accusing ministers and magistrates, the people lived on a razor’s edge of economic success and psycho-spiritual remorse.

The Great Awakening resolved this tension by calling into question the equality of ministers and magistrates with the very word of God. It told them, in effect, that they could challenge their leaders’ authority without mortally endangering their souls, because those authorities were merely men—in many cases, men lacking in experiential grace. By extension, it told them that resistance to authority was not a sin against God. All they needed to do was to acknowledge their personal guilt before God and find personal salvation. With this acknowledgment, God’s unconditional grace suddenly loomed larger in their psyches than sin and condemnation. (See Chapter 13.)

I have gone on at some length in summarizing the argument of this book in order to highlight the brilliance of the argument when it first appeared in 1967. When read in the context of scholarship written since 1967, I can imagine certain differences in emphasis, without affecting the central argument, which stands as strong today as it did then. All of these additional emphases would be informed by the now decades-old “New Social History.”

First, if he were writing today, Bushman would certainly be aware of the recentring of colonial religious and cultural history from New England to the Middle Colonies and South in what historian Charles Cohen terms a “post-Puritan paradigm.”² This development would lead Bushman to certain constraints in making clear that his Yankees are not stand-ins for American Yankees but, on a more limited scale, New England Yankees. This adjustment, however, does not challenge Bushman’s argument, only its scope.

Second, I imagine that if *From Puritan to Yankee* were written today, Indians would play a more central role in the narrative. As it stands, they are generally backgrounded in disputes over white men’s lands and wars. If written today, their agency would be more acknowledged as central to the evolving Anglo-American drama, and indeed, as critical to that evolution. They would stand as irreducibly important “others,” in ways that would decisively interact with the laboratory mix.

Third, and relatedly, if the book were written today, women would play a more active role as agents and enablers. Three decades of scholarship on what Nancy Cott termed the “bonds of womanhood” would shift the argument from what is essentially an all-male analysis, especially of the Great Awakening, to a more nuanced approach that highlighted how women’s voices and presences helped to shape the lived experience of colonial inhabitants. I think the work of Cott herself would be influential on Bushman, alongside that of such scholars as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Amanda Porterfield, Sandra Gustafson, Cornelia Dayton, or Catherine Brekus.

Finally, I close with a brief meditation. When the book first came out I was so enamored of the title that I never really paid attention to the subtitle, until preparing for this meeting: “Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765.” When placing “Puritan” and “Yankee” alongside character, some difficult questions emerge. Puritan culture and “puritanical” are notably negative terms today associated with strict moral legislation and the persecution of witches or Quakers; “Yankees,” on the other hand, are generally heroic and quintessential Americans of the finest sort (at least in New England, if not the Confederacy!). But the Yankees who emerge in this study are not the estimable heroes of American democracy. I doubt many Americans would regret

the transition from quasi-theocracy to republic. But what about character? Yankee culture emerges in these pages as oddly degenerate: conflicted, greedy, increasingly violent and war prone, and terribly exploitive.

No one can read Bushman's economic characterization of Yankee culture today without being uneasily aware of the resonances with our present: reckless speculation and people "living beyond their means," shopkeepers and merchants who "extended credit ever more liberally," creating a downward spiral where "indebtedness embittered relations all across the complex web of credit" (136). When reading this book, one can more easily understand the resistance of pastors like Jonathan Edwards to Yankee manners and pre-capitalistic free markets. As summed up by Bushman: "Besides a passionate independence, the familiar avarice and shrewdness also characterized the [Yankee's] temperament. . . . By 1765 the door was open for a release of the cupidity that was in time to bring him such notoriety" (287). On the level of character, one can more readily understand the concluding two sentences of *Puritan to Yankee*: "In the century after the Revolution Yankee society produced a flowering of individualism, a magnificent display of economic and artistic virtuosity. Yankees also learned the sorrows of rootlessness—fear, guilt, and loneliness. The light and the dark both were fruits of the liberty wrested in the eighteenth century from the Puritan social order" (288).

This is a sobering book that deserves ongoing appreciation. It has more than stood up to the test of time and will continue to inform colonial historiography in decades to come. Speaking personally, and for the larger audience before me, I thank you for this gift of scholarship, along with other works yet to be discussed.

Notes

1. Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years. Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636–1736* (New York: Norton, 1970).
2. Charles L. Cohen, "The Post-Puritan Paradigm of Early American Religious History," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54 (1997): 695–722.

INTRODUCTION TO GORDON S. WOOD

GORDON S. WOOD is Alva O. Way University Professor Emeritus at Brown University. He received his B.A. degree from Tufts University and his Ph.D. from Harvard University. He taught at Harvard University and the University of Michigan before joining the faculty at Brown in 1969. He is the author of many works, including *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), which won the Bancroft Prize and the John H. Dunning Prize in 1970, and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), which won the Pulitzer Prize for History and the Ralph Waldo Emerson Prize in 1993. *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 2004) was awarded the Julia Ward Howe Prize by the Boston Authors Club in 2005. His book *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different* (New York: Penguin) was published in 2006 and *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History* (New York: Penguin) in 2008. In October 2009 he published a volume in the OXFORD HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES series titled *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815* (New York: Oxford University Press). *Empire of Liberty* was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, the winner of the New-York Historical Society American History Book Prize, and a *New York Times* bestseller. In 2011 he was awarded a National Humanities Medal by President Barack Obama and the Churchill Bell by Colonial Williamsburg. Professor Wood is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society.

GORDON S. WOOD

Since Dick Bushman is one of our most distinguished American historians, it is a great honor and privilege to participate in the commemoration of his eightieth birthday. All of his major works are imaginative and path-breaking, but I have a special affection for *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (1985; rpt. ed., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), the work that I was asked to comment on.

Sometime around 1980 at some meeting or another, I got to talking with Dick about interesting books that we had recently read. One I mentioned was Harold Perkin's *The Origins of Modern*

English Society, 1780–1880 (London: Routledge, 1969) which had been published in 1969. I had owned the book for a decade but had not gotten around to reading it until the early '80s. I was especially taken with Perkin's early chapters, where he outlines the characteristics of what he called the "Old Society."

To my surprise and delight, Dick said that he had been reading the same book and was impressed with the same opening chapters. For both of us—trained as we were in colonial history and politics—Perkin's chapters were a flash of light that helped clarify for both of us what had hitherto been inchoate and undeveloped ideas about the nature of eighteenth-century colonial society. Reading Perkin, one had the feeling that what one was instinctively groping to say could now be said with some assurance. It was not that Perkin created out of whole cloth our understanding of colonial society, but he sparked our imagination and allowed what we knew about colonial monarchical society to fall into place.

At this time, Dick was completing the manuscript for his book *King and People* published in 1985, and I was preparing the three Phelps Lectures that I would present at New York University in February 1986. These lectures would eventually be expanded and published as *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. Anyone familiar with the first section of that book will realize how similar it is to Dick's *King and People*. We are both indebted to Harold Perkin. In *King and People*, Dick actually quotes a crucial paragraph from Perkin's book, having to do with the importance of dependency and patronage in the Old Society:

In the mesh of continuing loyalties of which appointments were the outward sign, patronage brings us very close to the inner structures of the old society. Hierarchy inhered not so much in the fortuitous juxtaposition of degree above degree, rank upon rank, status over status, as in the permanent vertical links which, rather than the horizontal solidarities of class, bound society together. "Vertical friendship," a durable two-way relationship between patrons and clients permeating the whole of society, was a social nexus peculiar to the old society, less formal and inescapable than feudal homage, more personal and comprehensive than the contractual, employment relationships of capitalist "Cash Payment." For those who lived within its embrace, it was so much an integral part of the texture of

life that they had no name for it save “friendship.” (Perkin, quoted in *King and People*, 58–59)

What Dick was describing, in effect, was a social world very different from what came after. Dick’s book was, in fact, crucial in explaining the nature of that society. I don’t believe many people fully understand the significance of Dick’s book in explaining the nature of the Revolution that followed. His book lays out, not just a political system, but an entire society.

No one before him had described that monarchical world of the colonies as fully and as accurately as he. To be sure, we had many works describing the conflicts between king and people, between the royal governors and the colonial assemblies—over fees, over salaries, over all the little things that led to squabbles in the separate colonies. But all these works, dozens of them written over the century of academic history writing from the 1880s to the 1980s, conceived of these political controversies more or less in modern terms, as similar to the contests that might take place between governors and their legislatures today if each were in the hands of opposing political parties.

Bernard Bailyn’s little book *Origins of American Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968) was an exception, and both Dick and I, as Bailyn’s students, were familiar with it. Bailyn was the first historian to claim that the colonial political system was fundamentally different from what followed, which, despite his misleading title, he himself conceded. The colonists’ political system in the mid-eighteenth century, he wrote, had “no climax in the state and national party politics of later periods of American history. . . . The story of politics in the colonial period is not that of a distinct evolution toward the modern world: the evidence of growing modernity are delusive.”¹ Thus, instead of describing the roots of modern American democratic politics where organized political parties compete for votes among a large and relatively egalitarian electorate, Bailyn’s book recreated a peculiar political world of grinding factional conflict in which narrow and shifting oligarchies tied together by family or patronage struggled for power in a variety of political arenas. It describes a political system that resembled the one that had existed in England but which was sufficiently different from England’s as to create an underly-

ing instability in the colonies that made the colonists receptive to much radical Whig thinking that was only marginally important in the mother country. This phenomenon led Bailyn to be confirmed, as he put it, in his “rather old-fashioned view that the Revolution was above all else an ideological, constitutional, political struggle and not primarily a controversy between social groups undertaken to force changes in the organization of society or the economy.”²

Well, we know the American Revolution was not like the French or Russian revolutions in this respect. But I don't think Bailyn realized the extent to which the political world which he described was essentially a social world. Making that connection was left to Dick's book *King and People*. Although Dick says that “Massachusetts society was not monarchical,” and that the colony “partook of monarchical culture, but lacked a monarchical society” (238), we know what he means. The society was too flat, he says, too many independent yeomen, too lacking in patronage, its chains of dependency too weak to sustain a proper monarchical society. In other words, the society was latently republican.

Still, until the moment of revolution, it saw itself as a monarchical society, a provincial outpost of the same kind of society that existed in the mother country. It was the contradiction between what it claimed to be and what it was in fact that created the instability and the confusion of politics. When the people of Massachusetts realized that they were going to throw off monarchy and become republican, they knew that they were involved in a social transformation. As Dick put it, they “soon came to understand that republican government had social implications” (235).

I think it is impossible in light of Dick's book to claim that the American Revolution was not a social revolution. So, when Bailyn argued in 1967 that the leaders of the American Revolutionary movement were concerned “not with the need to recast the social order . . . but with the need to purify a corrupt constitution and fight off the apparent growth of prerogative power,” he hadn't yet read Dick's book.³ If he had, he would have realized that Dick's *King and People*, for all its emphasis on patronage and monarchical political power, was in effect describing a society, a social order, the old king-subject society that was destroyed by the Revolution.

In his new preface in the reissue of a paperback edition in

1992, Dick realized that politics in the eighteenth century had a different meaning from what it does for us. “Now,” he wrote in that preface, “we see politics as an overlay on a social structure of class relationships and on an economic system of production and trade. Eighteenth-century people saw politics as much more fundamental.” I think that what he was saying in effect in that new preface was that politics back then encompassed society. The relationship between king and people was a social bond grounded in protection and allegiance. “Social relationships throughout society,” said Dick in 1992, “paralleled this primary bond between king and people, creating elaborate chains of patrons and their dependents everywhere” (ix, viii).

When that political world of monarchy was repudiated and republicanism was put in its place, the society was effectively transformed. Realizing that he had written exclusively about the political culture of Massachusetts, Dick nonetheless sensed that he had written about social forces as well, though they were “social forces as the participants understood them.” He was groping to see the social meaning in the political culture he was describing. He realized that throwing off monarchy constituted “more of a change than we might think, looking back.” By seeing the Revolution as essentially “a struggle over dependence,” Dick captured the social meaning of the Revolution (246, 249, 247). That is why I think he is correct in saying that his book, with its description of the monarchical culture of the old society, makes possible an understanding of the republican culture and the republican society that succeeded that monarchical political world.

The reason republicanism emphasized personal independence so much was because its social opposite, monarchy, emphasized personal dependency. Republics promised a new world, one without dissembling monarchical courtiers and possessing only independent free-holding farmer-patriots. It is only in the context of the monarchical culture which Dick described so brilliantly that we can come to appreciate the significance of the republican government that replaced it.

What has happened to our understanding of the American Revolution over the past half century gives me confidence that history is actually a progressive and a more or less scientific discipline—that is, that we now have a fuller and deeper understanding

of the Revolution than we had fifty years ago. We now know that all those monographs we historians write don't go to waste and fall into black holes, that they actually are building blocks that, when put together, create something new that we did not have before.

Right now most historians working on the Revolution are not much interested in the issues that Dick and I were interested in. But when the profession once again turns to the question of the transition from monarchy to republicanism, they will necessarily have to go back to Dick's path-breaking study of *King and People* to get their start. It is clearly one of the most important works of early American history written over the past half-century.

Notes

1. Bernard Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), ix.
2. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967; enlarged ed., 1992), x.
3. *Ibid.*, 283.

INTRODUCTION TO CATHERINE E. KELLY

CATHERINE E. KELLY earned her Ph.D. from the University of Rochester in 1992. In the early 1990s, she taught at Case Western Reserve University, and since 1999 she has been at the University of Oklahoma. Her first book, *In the New England Fashion: Reshaping Women's Lives in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999) was awarded the James J. Broussard First Book Prize by the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic. She is the co-editor with Heidi Brayman Hackel of *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture, in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009) and is currently completing a book on visual culture in the Early Republic. Since 2009, she has edited *Common-place*, an online journal of early American history and culture. She is also the winner of numerous awards and fellowships, including grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the

American Antiquarian Society, and the Library Company of Philadelphia.

CATHERINE E. KELLY

Reflecting on the significance of Richard L. Bushman's *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), for the joint session of the Mormon History Association and the American Historical Association should have been a piece of cake. After all, I was charged with talking about a book that I have assigned to graduate students and undergraduates and have mined for any number of lectures. I would be speaking about a book that I continue to consult regularly for my own scholarship, a book that by now is battered, dog-eared, filled with fading marginalia and festooned with grimy post-its. I would be assessing a book that has been by my side for the whole of my career as an academic. Coming to terms with *The Refinement of America* should have been easy.

Except that it wasn't. It was, in fact, remarkably difficult. I chewed on the book, and chewed on why I couldn't figure out how to talk about the book, for a long time. Eventually, I realized that for me—and for countless other social and cultural historians, material culture scholars, art historians, and curators—*Refinement of America* has become a sort of mental furniture. By likening the book to mental furniture, I do not mean to suggest that it is static—that it is fixed in place and time. I do not mean to suggest that it is stuffed, much less stuffy. I certainly do not mean to imply that it is wooden. Instead, I mean that the book has become so deeply imbricated in how we see the relation between things and culture in early America that it is difficult to imagine that relationship without it. For that reason, it is very difficult to see the book clearly, to see it fresh, nearly twenty years after it first appeared.

Yet there are good reasons to reexamine the book now, reasons that go well beyond the opportunity to celebrate Richard Bushman's remarkable career. In the last twenty years, Americanists of all stripes—historians, art historians, and literary scholars—have been increasingly preoccupied with visual and material culture. Scholars now routinely invoke “the material turn” and “the visual turn.” They refer to “thing theory” and proclaim the utility of “style as evidence.”¹ A growing number of cultural and

literary historians have come to focus their studies on objects and images rather than adding them as afterthoughts—as illustrations for arguments derived solely from written documents. And while art historians and curators have always attended to visual and material sources, many of them are increasingly attuned to the cultural and political work performed by images and objects. This is a wide-ranging, protean literature; it developed from multiple (and often conflicting) fields of inquiry and cannot be categorized as the direct descendent of *Refinement of America*.

That said, the “persons, houses, and cities” that stand at the center of Bushman’s landmark study have a purchase now that they did not have when the book was published. Given the attention that has accrued to the kinds of questions Bushman posed in *Refinement of America* and the evidence he mined to answer them, it makes sense to take another look at the book. Rereading *The Refinement of America* in 2011 affords a sharp sense of Bushman’s remarkable achievement. But fresh readings raise fresh questions. And twenty years down the line, *Refinement of America* poses questions every bit as important as the ones it answers.

The first thing that stands out is the book’s scope and range. Bushman covers a very long swath of time. To tell the story of refinement, he begins with courtesy books published in the mid-sixteenth century, hits his stride with the eighteenth century, and marches boldly through almost the whole of the nineteenth century. Although the book concludes with the Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls in 1848, the last chapter reaches as far as the 1870s for evidence. That is an impressive accomplishment by any measure. More impressive than the book’s temporal scope is its topical range. The book’s chronology is enabled by a larger literature (literatures, really) about republicanism, capitalism, and the transformation of personal relations and social identities. Taken together, those literatures generate a meta-narrative that provides the book with its deep structure. Richard Bushman maps a narrative about refinement onto a series of other, well-established if not uncontested historical narratives about politics, economics, class, and culture.

The book’s topical range is another matter altogether. The subtitle gestures modestly to “persons, houses, cities.” It suggests a straightforward trajectory from the individual to ever-larger col-

lectivities. Yet unlike the historiography that generates the book's deep structure, the scholarly literatures that provided Bushman with insight into his "persons, houses, and cities" constitute disparate fields with no obvious connection to one another. *The Refinement of America* rests on a mastery of a secondary literature that is dizzying both in its breadth and in its remove from the kinds of sources that are the meat and potatoes of the historical profession. It depends on Marley R. Brown's "Ceramics from Plymouth, 1621–1800: The Documentary Records"; Katherine Gee Hornbeak's *The Complete Letter Writer in English, 1568–1800*; Daniel D. Reiff's *Small Georgian Houses in England and Virginia: Origins and Development through the 1750s*; Harold Wickliffe Rose's *The Colonial Houses of Worship in America Built in the Colonies before the Republic and Still Standing*; Roger Moss's *Century of Color: Exterior Decoration for American Buildings, 1820–1920*; and Ellen and Bert Denker's *The Rocking Chair Book*.²

This is an extraordinarily technical literature, aimed at providing very precise information to curators, collectors, archaeologists, preservationists, and connoisseurs. To extract the relevant technical data from those sources and weave it into a story it was never intended to tell takes determination and imagination in equal measures. I confess that I had not really appreciated that part of Bushman's achievement until I started writing a book on visual and material culture. Make no mistake: It takes energy and a certain amount of courage for a traditionally trained historian to wade into and through those literatures. And it is surely no accident that so many studies published in the wake of *Refinement of America* focus only on persons, say, or cities. From a research perspective, there is nothing straightforward about telling the story of persons *and* houses *and* cities.

The second thing that strikes me about the book in 2011 is its prescience. I was fascinated by the book's 1992 reviews. Although they were generally positive, a couple of them excoriated Bushman for writing what one historian termed a "magnificent throwback." Critics who worried that the book was somehow backward-looking pointed to its geographic focus on New England and the Mid-Atlantic as opposed to the Deep South and the West; its subjects, who were overwhelmingly white and propertied if not precisely affluent; and its vexing politics, an issue I will return to

later. But in no sense does the book revert to an older form of history. Think about it: In *The Refinement of America*, Bushman writes about the multiple forms of cultural representation: about the body, performance, and spectatorship; about consumption and the consumer revolution; about manners, emulation, the persistence of British and aristocratic forms; about the representation of race. These topics were all at the cutting edge of cultural history around the time that the book was published or subsequently assumed a place there. Indeed, one way to read the book from the perspective of 2011 is as a kind of forecast for the development of a field—or interdisciplinary fields, more precisely. And this prescience is especially remarkable given that the book was, as Bushman confesses in the preface, a decade in the making.

Just as Richard Bushman could not have predicted the role his book would play for subsequent scholars, neither could he have predicted the kinds of speculation it would provoke decades after it was published. From my perspective, some of the most tantalizing issues concern the relation that Bushman sketches between things (clothing, silverware, houses, gardens) and texts. One criticism that has been leveled at the book is that it is—somehow—not really a book about material culture, not really a book about paintings or furniture or clothing. Instead, I have been told by any number of curators, art historians, and material culture experts, the *Refinement of America* is a book about texts. And if, in their remarks, “text” is not exactly a dirty word, neither is it something to boast about.

Certainly, *Refinement of America* is a far cry from the kind of scholarship oriented around a close reading of objects and images, the sort of work championed by someone like art historian Jules David Prown, a sort of approach realized most recently and most brilliantly by scholars as different as art historian Margaretta Lovell (*Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans, and Patrons in Early America*) and David Jaffee (*A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America*).³ And it is certainly the case that Richard Bushman does not have the same mastery of clothing, sofas, and architecture that he has of the secondary literature addressing those things. Bushman himself acknowledges this orientation in the book's introduction. He tells us that he is sensitive to the lack of depth of his knowledge. He knows that he is no cura-

tor. He explains that he is interested in the relationship between personal ideals and the material world (xiii, xii).

That relationship, I would argue, was realized through texts, both in the early American past and in Bushman's analysis. The book points, time and again, to the dynamic, ongoing, and complex relationships that connect objects, texts, and subjectivities. It is not an accident that the flowering of gentility coincided with the flowering of print culture, with the expansive worlds of reading and writing that opened between the end of the eighteenth century and middle of the nineteenth. The objects, performances, and spaces that captured Bushman's attention took on meaning in an explicitly discursive context, one that was historically specific. Two examples can suffice. In the first, Nancy and Tommy Shippen, members of one of eighteenth-century Philadelphia's finest families, correspond about their social lives. After receiving a letter describing a ball that Nancy attended with their father, Tommy responded that he "should have liked very much to see Papa attract the admiration of the Ballroom by his graceful minuet, and not less to observe you with your handsome partners setting an example worthy of emulation" (55). For Bushman, the scene evokes the double-mindedness of eighteenth-century refinement, the simultaneous experience of being in the moment and observing oneself in the moment. The second example concerns a very different form of visibility. Bushman contends that the mass-market domestic fiction of the mid-nineteenth century offered female readers the hope that refinement would "bring worthy women to the attention of the great world" (311). Hackneyed plots turned on the promise that any refined woman's home could be transformed into "a stage watched from afar. Through refinement," he suggests, "a reader could become a person in a story" (311).

Throughout *The Refinement of America*, Bushman used these texts (in this case, letters and novels) as tools for exploring very different experiences of refinement—one unfolding at the apex of eighteenth-century Philadelphia society, the other in the parlors of the antebellum middle class. Texts provide him with points of access. But what strikes me is just how profoundly connected those reading and writing practices were to the shifting construction of refinement itself, to the imaginative alchemy that binds

objects and performances to identity and subjectivity. The Shippens's eighteenth-century double-mindedness (and all the refracted "looking" on which it depended) was realized not merely in the performative space of the ballroom. It was also, and perhaps ultimately, realized textually, through the discursive conventions and practices that shaped the siblings' relationship with each other and the world. The antebellum woman's fantasy of visibility was far less dependent upon the social, upon collaborative performances. Her fantasy was realized only through texts.

My point is not simply that texts mattered but that the nature of the text and the context in which the text was created and circulated shaped individuals' experience of refinement and of themselves. In gracefully executed script, the Shippens' pen fantasies about how their refinement allows them to shine within a small, charmed, and completely familiar circle. The antebellum woman, on the other hand, becomes visible only as a solitary reader, curled up with a novel in her parlor. Even at the level of fantasy, she becomes visible only as a "person in a story"—that is, only to the far-flung and anonymous world of readers/viewers created by the expansion of the capitalist market. However unintentionally, *The Refinement of America* directs our attention not toward a reciprocal relation between personal ideals and the material world but toward the dynamic, triangular relationship between material culture, texts, and subjectivities.

My final speculation concerns the problem of politics, the politics of culture more specifically. It should surprise no one that Richard Bushman, a scholar whose first and third books are about politics and power, is acutely sensitive to the ways that culture operates as an instrument of power. What continues to surprise me is the extent to which the same scholars who have endlessly mined *Refinement of America* for data about architecture, fashion, furniture, and manners have overlooked its arguments about power. In the book's final chapter (titled, appropriately enough, "Culture and Power"), Bushman makes a series of complicated and provocative arguments about how culture operates. Gentility spreads, he suggests, because people emulate those with more: more money, more style, more knowledge, more cachet, more refinement, and more power. So provincial colonials emulate the English aristocracy, middle-class matrons emulate colonial gentry, free blacks

emulate white respectability, and so on down the line. This is emulation. It is not mere imitation, not exactly a matter of aping one's betters.

To be sure, Bushman attends to the ways in which refinement does and does not change as it spreads across space, over time, and through different sectors for society. He is also exquisitely sensitive to its effect on the human psyche, to its capacity for transcendence and humiliation in equal measure. Nonetheless, in the end, he explains, the spread of refinement suggests that "culture is created at the top for those lower down." (405) He acknowledges that this pattern will make us uncomfortable, for this way of thinking about culture flies in the face of our egalitarian instincts. Indeed, that level of discomfort might explain why so many scholars simply ignore that last chapter.

I confess that I am one of those uncomfortable scholars. My discomfort has less to do with my politics than with the way I inhabit culture. Do we always emulate, appropriate, and borrow up? Probably not. And probably not only in our postmodern culture, in which street so often informs high style. Consider one obvious, early American example: Virginia's colonial gentry. The eighteenth-century planter class, which figures prominently in the book's opening chapters, was a bastion of refinement in precisely the terms that Bushman sets out. But those men and women also inhabited a world that was deeply informed by and often literally made by African and African American slaves. Virginia's well-heeled planters may have aspired to the standards of refinement set by England's aristocracy, but their aspirations were realized (or not) in things and words and experiences that were both explicitly creole and explicitly hybrid. The most cursory survey of eighteenth-century Anglo-Virginian food, architecture, music, language, desire, and dreams reveals the extent to which the bottom percolates up. However unwittingly, Virginia's gentry appropriated down and up. And yet . . . And yet, when those same women and men memorialized themselves, they did so through the tropes and conventions of English gentility, with its exquisitely aristocratic pedigree. Now, in the twenty-first century, we may choose to tell a different, multi-cultural story about them. But that multi-cultural story is not the story they chose to tell themselves about themselves.

Ultimately, I suspect that Richard Bushman is more right than wrong about the way refinement operates. But as the brief and contradictory example sketched above suggests, refinement is always unrealized to one degree or another. For Bushman, this unrealized, partial quality has everything to do with the fact that refinement was an ideal, a personal ideal, forever receding just ahead of the pursuer's grasp. For me, it suggests that the worlds of refinement and gentility were also always fantasy worlds. Then as now, fantasy worlds have a habit of butting up against grubby, everyday, workaday worlds. What happens then? How did these intersections register in the lives of our historical subjects? How do they register in our scholarship?

The task that remains, I would argue, is not to expose these fantasy worlds as fantasies, as always incomplete and unrealized, much less to denounce them as hypocritical or undemocratic. We would do better to explore how, for example, Virginia's gentry appropriated down even as they emulated up. We would do better to ask how they did and did not incorporate stories about these cultural processes of emulation and appropriation into the stories they chose to tell about themselves. We would do better, in other words, to examine what happened when women and men moved from the center of refinement to its margins, to consider how they inhabited—both simultaneously and sequentially—worlds that were as rough and rude as they were refined.

Notes

1. Anyone questioning the ascendance of these phrases need go no further than a Google search. For the original formulations of the theories that have since become catch-phrases, see W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Martin Jay, "That Visual Turn: The Advent of Visual Culture," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 1 (2002): 87–92; Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2002): 1–22; and Jules David Prown, "Style as Evidence," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15, no. 3 (1980): 197–210.

2. Marley R. Brown, "Ceramics from Plymouth, 1621–1800: The Documentary Records," in Ian M. G. Quimby, ed., *Ceramics in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1973); Katherine Gee Hornbeak, "The Complete Letter Writer in English, 1568–1800," *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, 15 (1934); Daniel D. Reiff, *Small*

Georgian Houses in England and Virginia: Origins and Development through the 1750s (Toronto: Associated University Presses for the University of Delaware Press, 1986); Harold Wickliffe Rose, *The Colonial Houses of Worship in America Built in the Colonies before the Republic and Still Standing* (New York: Hastings House, 1963); Roger Moss, *Century of Color: Exterior Decoration for American Buildings, 1820–1920* (Watkins Glen, N.Y.: American Life Foundation, 1981); and Ellen Denker and Bert Denker, *The Rocking Chair Book* (New York: Mayflower Press, 1979).

3. Margaretta Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans, and Patrons in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); and David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

INTRODUCTION TO LAURIE MAFFLY-KIPP

LAURIE MAFFLY-KIPP has been at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill since 1989. She received her B.A. from Amherst College in English and religion (*summa cum laude*) and completed her Ph.D. in American history at Yale University (1990). She is now professor and chair in the Religious Studies Department and holds an adjunct appointment in the American Studies Department. Professor Maffly-Kipp's research and teaching focuses on African American religions, religion on the Pacific borderlands of the Americas, and issues of intercultural contact. In *Religion and Society in Frontier California* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994) she explored the nature of Protestant spiritual practices in gold-rush California. In articles on Mormon-Protestant conflicts in the Pacific Islands, African Americans in Haiti and Africa, and Protestant outreach to Chinese immigrants in California, Professor Maffly-Kipp has analyzed the religious contours of nineteenth-century American life. Along with Leigh Schmidt and Mark Valeri, she served as co-editor of *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America, 1630–1965* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2006). She also co-edited with Reid Neilson a collection of essays about Mormonism in the Pacific world, *Proclamation to the People: Nineteenth-Century Mormonism and the Pacific Basin Frontier* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008), wrote the introduction for the Penguin Classics edition of the Book of Mormon (2008), and serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Mormon History*.

In 2010, the prestigious Belknap Press imprint of Harvard University Press published Professor Maffly-Kipp's *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); and Oxford University Press published her *Women's Work: An Anthology of African-American Women's Historical Writings from Antebellum America to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), edited with Kathryn Lofton. As if all this were not enough, Professor Maffly-Kipp is president-elect of the American Society of Church History.

LAURIE MAFFLY-KIPP

It's a great pleasure to be here to celebrate and honor the work of a colleague and friend I have admired for many years. I feel particularly fortunate to have been asked to talk about Richard's monumental biography of *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005). One of the books on my list for my comprehensive exams as a graduate student was *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), the first installment of this project. When this extended treatment appeared in 2005, I felt as though I finally had the bookend to that earlier study. The story had been completed. I know that for Richard it felt as though it had been a long time in the making, too. But it was worth the wait. *Rough Stone Rolling* is so clearly the work of a judicious and seasoned scholar who has a thorough command of his sources and an encyclopedic knowledge of his subject. I can't begin to count the number of times in the last five years that I have returned to consult *Rough Stone Rolling* as the definitive account, the last word—well, maybe not the last, for we are academics, after all—on Joseph Smith's life and legacy.

It also seems fitting that Richard's work and this book in particular are the subject of a joint session sponsored by three groups: the American Historical Association, the American Society of Church History, and the Mormon History Association. For these overlapping communities are three of the intended audiences for this book, another being Mormon lay readers who are not scholars or historians. Richard took on a particular kind of challenge in addressing them simultaneously. They are diverse audiences, to be sure: *Rough Stone Rolling* has received views from multiple quarters that exhibit different and sometimes contradic-

tory modes of analysis and critique. They represent not simply different scholarly fields, but communities with distinctive questions, methods, and epistemologies. To Richard's great credit, readers in all of these areas have found much to praise. Ironically, Richard himself has been perhaps his own harshest critic, writing in his later memoir, *On the Road with Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), about his various regrets in terms of the way he approached the subject, detailing things he might have done differently. I would instead credit him with enormous bravery—not only in his willingness to voice publicly his own fears about the reception of his research—fears that we all feel and that most of us spend our lives trying to mask—but also courage in the optimism and audacity of his vision of the possibility of presenting Joseph Smith to believers and nonbelievers alike in a way that all might understand, if not entirely agree with.

If the first thing to be affirmed is the methodological difficulty of this task, the even more striking feature of this project is the stubborn opacity of its subject. I received an email several months ago from someone I did not know. The subject line was of the sort that should always give one pause: “a quick question.” Here was the email: “Do the elements of the Book of Mormon—language, phrasing, sentence structure, nouns, concepts—appear to be similar or related to any religious writings you are familiar with that existed before 1823? I just can't believe Jos Smith Jr. made all that up out of thin air, but I don't believe in divine personages, either. Can you recommend good books on this?”

The question might have been quick, but the answer, as we all know, is not. Joseph Smith Jr. is a complete puzzle of a figure; he is extraordinarily difficult to “explain” as a human being, even if one brackets the claims of miracles. An uneducated young farm-boy who produces an extraordinary text and eventually launches an elaborate and bureaucratically sophisticated religious movement; a man who gives his all to the growth of a community yet simultaneously acts in ways that he knows will result in persecution or even his own death; a charismatic figure who elicits both utter loyalty and intense loathing from observers.

These are not easy characteristics to explain, and there is a reason that few people have attempted a comprehensive biographical treatment. The fact that Fawn Brodie's work, first pub-

lished over sixty years ago, has until now been the “go to” book on Smith’s life by most historians outside of the LDS Church, speaks volumes about the reticence of mainstream historians to take on a tough personality—much less tackle the subjects of revelation, the miraculous, and the power of the religious imagination. It is also testimony to the elusiveness of Smith himself. *Rough Stone Rolling* bores directly into some of these puzzles and asks precisely the right set of questions: How can we possibly understand this man? What makes him tick? And I should note that Church leaders have been no more anxious than outsiders to rush to get comprehensive biographies of Smith in print.

One of the highlights of the book for me is the skill with which Richard thinks through a plausible logic for Joseph’s actions over time. He humanizes the young prophet; at times he presents a number of alternative possibilities for behavior—and he tells his reader honestly when Smith becomes a cipher in his own writings; this insight is enormously important as an admission of the limits of the historian’s craft. Richard steers a deliberate middle ground between a hagiographic portrait of Smith and an exposé of his more colorful exploits. The Smith that emerges here gets angry, sometimes impetuously and violently so. He agonizes over his family situation. He runs up debts and runs away from the law. But Bushman provides the social and cultural context that renders many of the Prophet’s reactions understandable, if not always laudable. Bushman gamely tackles the most controversial elements of Smith’s life: the early visions, the translation of the Book of Mormon, the failures of the community in Kirtland and in Missouri, and the intra-communal tensions surrounding the revelation on plural marriage. He gives historians precisely the kind of texture and density that they love, if not always the explanations they can accept.

Richard explained in his later writings that he was also trying to give believing Mormons what he thought they needed: honesty about the character flaws of the most revered of their religious leaders.¹ Smith’s deep humanity in the face of revelatory bombardment could be seen as an endearing attribute in a prophet. But here the gulf between non-LDS historians, who tend to view biography as evidence that can provide a distinctive path into a more general knowledge of the past, and believers, who seek

truth of a different sort in the life of the biographical subject, seems to have become most apparent.

Or is this the most accurate diagnosis of the battle over Joseph Smith's legacy? Is it really evidence of a division between believers and nonbelievers, between those who seek scientific fact in biography and those who clamor for a faith-promoting rendering? It is the easy explanation, to be sure, and it fits with a pattern of intellectual exclusion that Mormons have long felt within the academy and have themselves fostered at times. It is also the way I understood the divide when I reviewed Richard's book—believers versus hostile, nonreligious academics. But on further reflection I believe that this analysis is too easy, and it causes us to overlook some of the more significant methodological questions raised by Richard's work. This presumed war between secular and faithful readings of *Rough Stone Rolling* has been, to my way of thinking, overblown; this relatively simplistic analysis of the situation does not accurately describe the myriad reactions to Richard's interpretive choices or to Smith himself. Apologetics is not the only intellectual fault line that we can see; it prevents us from probing further into the very questions that this work so elegantly raises. I have time here for only a few brief examples that suggest a more complex mapping of the battle over the biography of a religious leader.

In an extended essay in the *FARMS Review* about reactions to *Rough Stone Rolling*, Daniel C. Peterson, a BYU professor, was quite laudatory of Richard's multi-faceted depiction of the prophet: "I hope that Joseph Smith will be perplexing to others. He should be. Unless and until onlookers come to grips with his claims—in my view, until they accept them—they should continue to find him baffling."² By "accept," I take Peterson to mean something quite different from understanding the facts of Smith's life as revealed in the biographical form. Indeed, he seems to suggest that biography cannot completely explain Smith but must be a preliminary step toward another kind of agreement with Smith's religious claims.

An online blogger, also a believer who praised the book, suggests a somewhat different aim: "Bushman's purpose wasn't to 'dig up dirt' on the prophet, but rather to point out that the 'dirt' that has already been dug up really isn't as bad as people sometimes think. Once it is placed in its historical context, and once we see Joseph as a man, then the so called 'dirt' isn't such a big deal,

and we can get back to the work of thinking of Joseph as the Prophet of God, and the 'Hero' that he was."³ In this case, the "dirt" of biography is an obstacle, not a help, to a different kind of knowledge of Smith as a prophet. In both cases, believers weigh in on this book and find it helpful—but their reasoning is radically different and the distinctions are worth pursuing if we are to understand how they and others might characterize their own relationship to the past and to Smith as a historical subject.

Lest we assume, though, that historians have a more unified, secular perspective on what biography should be, we need look no further than the editorial statement of the *American Historical Review*, which claims that, as a general rule, the journal does not publish biographical pieces—unless the biography can say something more fundamental about historical events or periods. The AHA has long displayed an ambivalence about the significance of biographical method, and some historians have even charged that it yields a "lesser" form of history than other kinds of analyses. (Who will define value and significance in these discussions is a subject left unexplored.) For others, biography is a more forthrightly presentist enterprise; rather than toeing a positivist line about the need for particular and verifiable forms of evidence (measures unmet by discussions of miracles and revelation), quite a few historians would agree with the formulation of Louis Menand that biography is a powerful form that verges on fiction: "A biography is a tool for imagining another person, to be used along with other tools. It is not a window or a mirror."⁴

I don't have time to do more than gesture to the fact that historians and believers both weigh issues of knowledge and truth in their formulations, and their assessments are hardly uniform, nor are they easily lined up along sacred/secular lines. If we can move past cultural battle lines, *Rough Stone Rolling* raises profoundly important questions for both historians and others about biographical method, about the value of study of the past for present communities (both those that are avowedly religious and those that are less explicit about the values they share and promote), and about the questions that motivate our study in the first place. For me, the book also opened up new sorts of questions about the power of religious imagination and how we evaluate it. Richard does a wonderful job of placing Smith's activities in a localized context of reli-

gious ferment and prophecy. The more one looks, the more one finds other ordinary and many unschooled Americans of his day thinking “like the Bible” (107), as Richard puts it, writing and publishing extrabiblical texts or glosses on scripture that, when taken in the aggregate, challenge easy assumptions about the inviolability of Protestant notions of the canon as closed.

The second point I want to raise concerns the relationship of Smith as biographical subject to the historiography of Mormonism as a whole. It seems to me that readers on all sides have conspired to equate Smith’s life story with the history of Mormonism. It is revealing that the *New York Review of Books* called on Larry McMurtry, a writer of fiction set in the American West, to review *Rough Stone Rolling*.⁵ Smith himself, of course, never set foot in anything resembling the American West of today (although admittedly Missouri was, at one time, a frontier); his life is not like the story told in *Lonesome Dove*. I read this editorial choice (to have McMurtry review the book) as a conflation of the later history of the Church with Smith’s life story. Surely Smith is inextricably linked to the church he founded, and his claims regarding the Book of Mormon (including writing himself into the story) forever bind his own life to the sacred history that he revealed. Yet many Mormons in the early period came to the Church without ever having met Joseph Smith or having seen the Book of Mormon. While Smith as a sign or symbol was surely important to their acceptance of religious claims, his life does not encapsulate the entire history of the early Church, and we should not treat it as standing in for a more full-blown look at why many believers from many different places joined the Mormons in this early period.

The temptation to conflate Joseph Smith’s life story with the history of the Church also springs, I think, from Richard’s success: the persuasive way in which he narrates the unfolding of revelation as a coherent and teleological set of steps, a series of events that dramatically unfold into a worldview. *Rough Stone Rolling* does a marvelous job of articulating the appeal and coherence of Mormon cosmology and ecclesiology for the uninitiated. This approach pays off in lucidity. Drawing on a number of excellent studies of early Mormonism and American culture in the Early Republic, Richard makes a strong case for the appeal of a family-based, priesthood-centered theology centered in ongoing reve-

lation. Despite the tendencies of anti-Mormons both then and now to make Mormon cosmology sound bizarre and exotic, Richard artfully connects Mormon beliefs to longstanding debates and issues in Christian theology. And he places the Mormons politically as well, noting the differences between their “kingdom talk” and the republican rhetoric of their neighbors.

Yet this smoothing down of the rough edges, the ignoring of the bits and pieces of revelation that never went anywhere, leads to a methodological question: Did Joseph Smith Jr. ever understand Mormonism in the way that Richard describes it, or is this a Mormon theology for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? What I want to make clear here is that this problem is not one of religious apology as much as one of historical method. I’m not convinced that Joseph understood the totality of his teachings in as lucid a manner as they are described here, since Richard also tells us that revelations came to Smith unsystematically, in scattered “flashes and bursts” (xxi). Surely many of Smith’s contemporaries did not share the certainty, for example, that women occupy the most central and important role in the Mormon system (444), or that the Book of Mormon is a transgressive text that champions the “native point of view” (98–99). At best these are contested issues, and certainly they are points that were not decided in Smith’s lifetime.

I want to stress, returning to my first point, that this issue is not necessarily a difference of belief versus nonbelief. It dovetails with crucial debates over the interpretive method employed by the biographer: How much coherence should an author attribute to the subject? How much is any life experienced as a fragmented and partial set of events? Here, of course, the stakes for understanding Joseph Smith’s life as existentially coherent are great for those who believe that he was an instrument in the unfolding of a grander cosmic scheme. But for historians, the question may simply be: Does this narrative tell us about Joseph Smith’s self-understanding, or does it provide a retrospective view of how one might imagine Smith’s bursts of insight to cohere? These, it seems to me, are questions well within the bounds of scholarly debate and are fruitfully asked about any portrait of a religious founder. Where does the leader stop and the tradition begin to take on a life of its own?

I return, in closing, to the difficulty of this task. Writing biography is hard work. But it is particularly difficult with a figure as

elusive as Smith, a religious leader who stands for so much to so many. *Rough Stone Rolling* is a terrific example of a book that achieves what such works do best: It gives us a comprehensive and compelling reading of an individual life, it uses that life as a window into a historical period, and it forces us to grapple with issues of meaning and value that are never settled or closed. That it leaves unanswered some questions about ultimate truth, while it may dismay those who want to just go back to seeing Joseph Smith Jr. as a “hero,” is in my mind a signal achievement. I applaud Richard for helping us all to continue these conversations.

Notes

1. Richard Lyman Bushman, *On the Road with Joseph Smith: An Author's Diary* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 19–20, 121.

2. Daniel C. Peterson, “Editor’s Introduction: Reflections on the Reactions to *Rough Stone Rolling* and Related Matters,” *FARMS Review* 19, no. 1 (2007): xi–liv, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/review/?vol=19&num=1&id=631> (accessed April 19, 2011).

3. James Carroll, “Rough Stone Rolling Review,” <http://amateurscriptorians.blogspot.com/2009/02/rough-stone-rolling-review.html> (accessed April 19, 2011).

4. Louis Menand, “The Lives of Others: The Biography Business,” *New Yorker*, August 6, 2007, http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2007/08/06/070806crbo_books_menand (accessed April 19, 2011).

5. Larry McMurtry, “Angel in America,” *New York Review of Books*, November 17, 2005, 35–37.

GRANT UNDERWOOD

What a rich and stimulating session! Thanks to all our presenters for their warm and insightful remarks. At this point, Claudia Bushman has graciously agreed to offer a few personal reflections by way of introduction to Richard. Immediately following Claudia’s remarks, Richard will have the last word.

[Claudia extemporaneously gave a few comments about Richard.]

RICHARD LYMAN BUSHMAN

My thanks to Grant Underwood for conceiving this panel and go-

ing to all the work to put it together under the auspices of the American Society of Church History. It was a generous act of friendship on his part. I am delighted also that Skip, Gordon, Catherine, and Laurie agreed to comment. It is a little uncomfortable for me to be the center of attention. But it is gratifying nonetheless to hear so many interesting people reflect on what I have written. My intention is to enjoy it for a few minutes and then forget everything that has been said.

I want to use the occasion to reflect a little on what this all means. At the Harvard commencement, the president welcomes the new graduates into the company of educated men and women. Today I wish to celebrate the company of men and women historians. I have been teaching American religion at Claremont Graduate University this past year, and it has brought me great pleasure to find how many of the books I assign were written by people I know. I know their styles, a few personal idiosyncrasies, and something of what matters to them. Although I see them only occasionally, I still feel that we constitute a circle of friends as well as group of scholars. Perhaps one of the most important parts of becoming an historian is to be initiated into that circle.

In forming these academic friendships, our books are our surrogate selves, commonly our initial introductions to one another. I rode up in an elevator at a convention once with David Hall; and glancing down at the nametag of another conventioneer, David snapped out two titles. There was instant recognition. Had there been time, there could have been conversation. In this company of historians, person and writing merge. As we become better acquainted, we begin to hear personality coming through the words on the printed page. That's so like her, I say to myself. Knowledge of the person helps us to understand the writing better, and the writing opens up the person. The combination creates a kind of intellectual kinship that is one of the great rewards of our profession.

In the interests of furthering our sociability, I want to speak about this intermingling of writing and life in my own work. As the years go by, my historical work, in my own mind, blends more and more with biography. I see my writing emerging from a life and not just from a discipline. Careful as I tried to be in reading the evidence, what went on the pages of the histories I have written is recognizably my own.

My first book, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), though written as a kind of bottom-up analysis in the spirit of the town studies coming out in the 1960s, also grew out of my Mormon upbringing in Portland, Oregon. When I was choosing a dissertation topic in the late fifties, most of the important work dealt with high politics or high intellectual history. I was not attracted to that kind of history. I wanted to work at another level, not because writing about ordinary people was in the air, but because I was interested in people like those I had grown up with—my family, friends, and fellow Church members in Portland. There was a huge gulf between my life in Portland and my life at Harvard. I actually loved Cambridge and was more myself there than anywhere I had been, but still the Portlanders were my people and represented the real world in my mind. It was that world I wanted to return to as I began my research.

I hit on the Great Awakening as the central problem of my work because it seemed like an exceptional opportunity to get inside the minds of a large number of otherwise inarticulate people. I had sat in testimony meetings in my Latter-day Saint congregation and heard people stand and talk about their innermost problems and views of the world as they were encouraged to do on the first Sunday of each month. Listening from my place at the sacrament table where young priests sat to bless the bread and water, I found the adults' expression of their inner turmoil reassuring. Their struggles resonated with my own adolescent miseries. Remembering those occasions, it was not a far stretch for me to see in the Great Awakening an opportunity to gain access to the inner lives of ordinary eighteenth-century people like my Mormon brothers and sisters in Portland.

Not just the subject, but my explanation for the revivals came out of my early life. In the book I posed the question: Why were so many eighteenth-century people willing to hear preachers tell them they were hopeless sinners and believe it? Where did the pervasive guilt come from that must have lain beneath the consciousness of thousands of hearers? The answer in *From Puritan to Yankee* was that many in the population had resisted the authority of the standing order—in moving out of the town centers, in breaking from the churches, in seeking wealth over piety. They

had not followed the Puritan practice of weaned affections—diligently pursuing their earthly callings without giving their hearts to them—but had sought material well-being to the point of repeated conflicts with civil and ecclesiastical authority.

Other historians at the time I wrote had seen the Great Awakening as resistance to oppressive authority, and it was surely that. What I added to the mix was an acknowledgment that resistance to authority produced guilt. People paid a price for standing up to authority, I believed. That came right out of my Mormon upbringing. Mormons live in a structured world of Church and family authorities who are not easy to resist. They are benevolent figures, dedicated to the well-being of those in their charge. Talking back to them is like talking back to a father who you know truly loves you. The price of resistance to that kind of power is guilt. It is heroic and liberating to resist authority—but costly. I cast this Mormon view of authority onto the Puritans and came up with the guilt that fed the Awakening.

That same dynamic ran through *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). Initially I thought of it as an extension of *From Puritan to Yankee*. The study I began on Connecticut would extend into Massachusetts and focus more on politics than on religion. I sensed a similar psychological structure in revival religion and revolutionary rebellion. Both began with a tyrant—a God who unfairly condemned the sinners he had made and a king who oppressed his subjects. The language in both contexts, religious and political, sounded the same to me. I thought I could write a book that joined the two, though the outcome was different in each case. Revival converts ultimately reconciled themselves to God. They admitted their unworthiness and found a way to love the God who threatened to cast them off. The revolutionaries never made peace with the tyrant king. They destroyed him, smashing his image and putting themselves on the throne. My work with Erik Erikson during a two-year post-doctoral fellowship at Brown University was an attempt to explore the psychodynamics of these two struggles.

The book I had planned never was written. I drew back for two reasons. The first was that I began to question my subject. Who and what was I writing about? I feared it was some abstract

“mind” of the culture. Scholars spoke of the American mind in the 1950s. In the 1960s, as the sociological turn occurred, we wanted to treat real people who could be named and numbered. My tyrant-ridden mind seemed to reside somewhere off the planet. I wanted to root my arguments in real people and events—hence, my turning to political culture and the realities of Massachusetts politics.

The second reason for the switch was my inability to sustain a narrative. I did a ton of research in political and religious documents, and each summer set out to write. I would turn out forty or fifty pages and the narrative would sink into the sand like river water in the Great Basin. I could not figure out where I was going. I came to doubt my powers as a historian. Where had the historian who produced a Bancroft Prize winner on his first try gone to? I thought of leaving the university and going to work in the Church Historian’s Office.

I was saved by the Bicentennial of the American Revolution. Every early Americanist in the world was asked to lecture during 1976. What was I to lecture on? All I had was the pile of notes I had accumulated over the past decade. I was forced to ask, “What is it I really want to say?” By staring at texts in the microfilm readers for hundreds of hours, I had discovered the themes of dependence and independence that run through *King and People*. I got down to the bare bones of my thinking, cobbled together the lectures, and by the end of the Bicentennial year I had the outline of a book. I was saved not by the bell, but by the celebration.

To my eye now, every one of my books has personal dimensions. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992) is a treatise on my mother’s and my grandmother’s culture. The book is shot through with ambivalence about the merits of gentility. In the book, gentility is portrayed as both a civilizing ideal and a meretricious and snobbish device for enforcing class boundaries. All that came from struggles with my own identity. My grandmother was the daughter of a German schoolteacher who had taught art in a Dresden *gymnasium* before he migrated to Utah as a Mormon convert. There his attempts at teaching school for tuition failed, and he became a shoe salesman. My grandmother as a girl worked in a shoe factory and had no education, but she created a home where her artist father’s frus-

trated tastes were made manifest. She had a gift for making everything beautiful, including the furniture she finished herself. To my youthful eyes, her living room was gorgeous. My mother grew up aspiring to make everything beautiful, too—the leading theme of genteel culture. I admired her but in a typically boyish way fought her as she imposed those standards on me. I didn't like that her model for my best dress was the Duke of Windsor. That prepared me to partake of the disillusionment with gentility in the larger culture as I was growing up. I was aware even then of class divisions and didn't like them. The outcome in the book, as in my life, was a kind of ironic distance between me and gentility—embracing it as the culture of my mother and grandmother while lamenting its superficialities and hurtful exclusions.

Besides recognizing gentility as an instrument of class power, I also saw it in a religious light. The book actually rests on a theology of culture I learned from Reinhold Niebuhr. In graduate school, I had come under the influence of Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1949). Niebuhr argued that humans combine a yearning for the infinite with the reality of finitude. They aspire to be gods when they are actually confined by human limitations and corruptions. Many of the highest human achievements grow out of this drive for power, but so do many of the evils of human history. The yearning for the infinite manifests itself in the noblest reaches of art, science, and politics but equally in the drive for power that underlies the most horrible crimes. I read into the genteel urge for elevation, for beauty, and for perfect grace another symptom of the yearning to transcend human finitude. It was an elevating aspiration, noble and generous at its best, but prideful, vain, superficial, and invidious in many of its manifestations, a source of hurt, shame, and social conflict. It was both godly and devilish. I probably should have dedicated the book to Reinhold Niebuhr.

My personal involvement in my early books might never occur to a casual reader; not so with *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), my biography of the Mormon prophet. It probably appears to be the most personal of all my books. Here I bring my personal religious beliefs into the open in directly addressing Mormonism's most controversial figure, Joseph Smith. Readers both Mormon and non-Mormon have imag-

ined this as a difficult book to write, since it attempts to confront the whole Joseph Smith—his extravagant claims to visions and revelations, his polygamous excursions, his boosterism and braggadocio, his engagement with magic, his temper and raw emotional force as well as his religious ingenuity and his capacity for evoking the sacred. Was it not hard for you as a believing Mormon, I am asked, to lay it all out for your readers? Weren't you challenged in your beliefs? Weren't you worried about what other Mormons would say? Weren't you divided in yourself?

Strangely that was not my experience in writing the book. I was not constantly asking, "How do I handle this hot potato or that?" I simply gathered what information I could from the sources and wrote the story. There were no long debates with myself about what to include and what not. Everything I thought relevant I put in. Virtually every reader will sense my sympathy for Joseph Smith, but that is how I write about all historical subjects. My inclination is to give the historical subject's own perspective priority, rather than to act as critic. I felt I was treating Joseph Smith as I would treat Benjamin Franklin were he the subject. Anything that revealed something about Smith's character or his plight went into the book.

I have always applauded Fawn Brodie for creating a Joseph Smith who was a credible human being and not a caricature of religious fanaticism as earlier works had presented him. She made him a pious fraud, but intelligible and sympathetic, a believable person. I wanted to portray a believable Joseph Smith, too, but one who was sincere, a man who thought he was a prophet and who carried that conviction through his life. On the basis of the evidence alone, I am not sure that you can choose between the two, but I wanted readers to have a choice. That simple aim made the book relatively easy to write. I was aware that many would not follow me through the book. I asked them to accept more than they could stomach. But the simple premise of Smith's sincerity guided me through the tangled story.

So what have I offered you? Probably the least trustworthy of all histories is a writer's account of his motivations in writing. How can we take a writer's stories seriously when we know that all of us have to protect ourselves and make ourselves presentable to the world? The need for myth-making is all the greater when we

write about something we cherish as much as our own work. But trustworthy or not, I think it useful to tell our stories about ourselves as I have tried to do today. I go back to the Mormon testimony meetings I attended as a boy. When those people stood to account for themselves, they spoke from a mythic world spun from their culture and their psychic pain. I can see now that they were spinning the stories to make themselves believable and the world sensible. Even so, as I listened, I felt that I encountered life at a deeper level. I was hearing human beings trying to create meaning out of the raw materials of their experience.

In something of the same way, I listen for the deep bass notes in the writings of my fellow historians. I value their skill, their industry, their pursuit of truth, but I read their books as more akin to my Mormon friends than you would think. They, too, are constructing mythic meanings for themselves and their readers. However scholarly, they are trying to make themselves believable and the world sensible. You will understand, then, why I hear in the works of my esteemed colleagues a kind of testimony bearing, and why I value their friendship all the more for that.