

MORMON SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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Ryan T. Cragun, Editor

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President's Message

It was great to see a number of you in Kansas City last Fall. The meetings were very interesting and engaging. I express my thanks to the presenters of three sessions sponsored by MSSA. Special thanks to Jan Shipp for her Glenn Vernon Lecture. Her lecture is summarized in this issue of the newsletter. It will be especially useful for those who could not attend the Kansas City meetings.

In the Fall MSSA Business Meeting, we discussed the possibility of sending out the newsletter electronically to our members. We are considering this idea. If you have feelings about this proposal, please let me know. Also, if interested in early adoption of the electronic format, please see the notice for electronic distribution in the announcements section below.

In addition, there was a proposal and agreement to change the amount of our dues from \$5 to \$10 per year. This will allow MSSA to fund the Glenn Vernon Lecture at the level needed and to support other association projects. Dues for 2005 are payable to Cardell Jacobson, Department of Sociology, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 85602. Thanks to Cardell for his work as our Secretary/Treasurer.

MSSA leadership has identified two very interesting sessions for the Fall meetings in Rochester on November 4-6. I give special thanks to Armand Mauss for his conceptual

leadership and ideas in the formation of these sessions. The following descriptions were accepted by Laura Olsen, SSSR Program Chair:

1. MSSA is planning an edited volume of scholarly essays to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Thomas O'Dea's classic sociological study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, *The Mormons*. The University of Illinois Press is very high on this idea and has encouraged MSSA to provide a proposal for the project. A prospectus for this project is in the works. We propose a panel discussion, led by the editors and selected authors on this project. This would give attendees a chance to make their own suggestions and provide input to the project.

Title: Revisiting O'Dea's *The Mormons* 50 years later: A discussion on editorial direction and content for an updated volume.

Organizer/Chair--Rick Phillips
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Panelist--Ryan Cragun
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Panelist--Armand Mauss
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2. A critique of Richard Bushman's new biography of the prophet Joseph Smith. The Rochester area, particularly Palmyra, is the birthplace of Mormonism. In 2005, the LDS Church celebrates the 200th birthday of Joseph Smith. Richard Bushman, a prominent historian, has produced a "cultural biography" of Joseph Smith. We propose a panel of scholars to review this work and critically and constructively discuss the sociological aspects of such a book

Title: A review of Richard Bushman's cultural biography of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Organizer/Chair--Jan Shipps
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Panelist---Ryan Cragun
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Panelist---Gordon Shepherd
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Panelist---Gary Shepherd
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Please note that SSSR is organizing a tour of the Joseph Smith historic sites, including the LDS Church's visitors center, Joseph Smith homes, the Sacred Grove and printing press, during the Fall meetings in Rochester. Additional details are provided in the announcements section below.

I also encourage each MSSA member to forward ideas for content and material for future MSSA newsletters to Ryan Cragun, Editor at: ryan@genesoc.com.

Lynn Payne

Glenn M. Vernon Lecture

The Recent Renewal of Derogatory Coverage of the LDS Church or Searching Anew for Skeletons in the Mormon Closet

Being invited to present the 2004 Glenn M. Vernon lecture to the Mormon Social Science Association at the SSSR annual meeting is a real honor. But as I turned to preparing this lecture, I realized that I was not only honored, but also intimidated because my bona fides do not include formal training as a social scientist. I studied history and, probably because I became a student at Utah State University at a point in my intellectual development when I knew absolutely nothing about Mormonism, the history of the Latter-day Saints became a main object of my attention. I read voraciously in Mormon history and when it came time to write an M.A. thesis and a doctoral dissertation, my subject was the history of the Mormons in politics.

Still, social science sneaked up on me. When I needed work after we moved to

Bloomington, Indiana, I managed to land a position as a project coordinator—read that glorified secretary—at the (Kinsey) Institute for Sex Research where I received intensive on-the-job-training in survey research. Bypassing the study of Mormonism for almost two years, I learned a lot about what Americans thought about sex in the 1960s and early 1970s. At the same time, I became reasonably sophisticated in the methodology as well as the practice of this particular kind of social science research.

Near the end of that strange detour (and it was pretty strange), I embarked on a research project in which I applied what I knew about survey research to historical materials. Aware that the Latter-day Saints had in effect been concealed for almost a century behind what I have come to call a dense mountain curtain, I concluded that American perceptions of the Mormons and Mormonism had to have been formed from what people in the United States read or what they heard in sermons preached in Protestant churches. Since close reading of many of those sermons revealed that most of the sermonic information also came from articles in the press written by visitors to what was then often called the intermountain “den of iniquity,” I decided to see if survey research methodology could be applied to the print media. What I wanted to do was to conduct a posthumous public opinion survey that would allow me to pin point shifts in public opinion toward the Mormons across time.¹

At one level, what I did might be called an exercise in content analysis of periodical literature. I examined every article on Mormons, Mormonism, Utah, and polygamy indexed in *Poole's Index* and *Reader's Guide* and for each article I made a determination of how many references it contained that could be considered negative and how many references it contained that could be considered positive. In order to make articles comparative, I counted words and figured out how many negative and how many positive references there were per 100 words.

That was just the beginning. Consulting with

¹ The results of the elaborate study described below is fully reported in “From Satyr to Saint: American Perceptions of the Mormons, 1860-1960,” in my *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 51-97.

some 20 established scholars who had a history of studying and publishing about Mormonism, I developed a schedule of queries to be applied to each article. In answering these queries, I was able not only to establish an exact negative-positive valence for every article, but also to classify every reference in each article as to its topic (theology, politics, morality—mainly polygamy—and quality of life). Finally, I added an overall assessment of the article that sometimes over-rode the negative-positive score. For example, I found an article written for a New York newspaper that was widely reprinted in the periodicals of the day in which the following statements—here paraphrased—occurred:

The Mormons have built a beautiful city on the shores of the Great Salt Lake. It is neat and clean. Through enormous effort, crystal clear water has been directed in a series of canals to make the city blossom as a rose. The men and women are well dressed and the children well-behaved. FOR ALL THAT, if you'd put a roof over the place, it would be the biggest whorehouse in the world!

Obviously, despite the numerical positive valence, this was not an article that belonged in the positive column.

In addition to the internal evidence that I gained from each article, I tried and was fairly successful in determining the line of work—journalist, politician, clergyperson were the main categories—of the authors of the signed articles. I also tried to determine whether the author of each article was a Latter-day Saint, a gentile, or a “jack-Mormon.” As a final bit of data, by consulting an early publication that provided information to set rates for advertising, I was able to figure out roughly how many copies of each article had been published. This allowed me to weight the scores for each article.

With all this information, I was able to trace changing perceptions of Mormons across time with a reasonable amount of specificity. Considering what is known from the historical sources about the Mormon past, I divided the century between 1860 and 1960 into three time periods; 1860 to 1895; 1896 to 1925; and 1926 to 1960. Then, analyzing my rich body of data, I

was able to establish with a fair level of confidence a number of specifics about the Mormon past that had not been known up to that time.

In order of importance (determined by the total number of negative references), the problems Americans identified with Mormonism were

1. Polygamy;
2. Mormon political activities and the LDS Church's control of same;
3. The Mormon theological system;
4. The LDS Church's control of the economy in Utah and surrounding regions;
5. The social control Mormon leaders exercised over the community of Latter-day Saints.

Of the total number of references to polygamy, only about 10 percent were references to sexual debauchery or other overt sexual concepts. This appears to indicate that the “gross sensuality” aspect of plurality was not nearly as important as the way it seemed to threaten the institution of marriage and the nuclear family. (Given the current effort to add a definition of marriage to the U.S. Constitution in order to protect the traditional family, I find it interesting that in the late 19th and early 20th century efforts were made to add an amendment to the constitution that defined marriage as a contract between *one* man and *one* woman.)

With regard to politics, what my data reveal is more complicated. In the first and last time periods, the total number of references to politics was almost evenly divided between references to Mormonism as a definite practical political threat and to Mormonism as a generalized threat to the American political system and way of life. But in the second time period, no doubt reflecting the importance of the Reed Smoot hearings, the references were overwhelmingly (three to one) to Mormonism as an actual, literal threat to the American political system as well as a threat to the American way of life.

One reason I called my study “From Satyr to Saint” is that the study results tell us that there were more objections to polygamy—even more than to the Church's political activities and control—than there were to Mormon theology. There is

no information that truly bears on motive and therefore it is not clear how much of the theological opposition aimed at the extirpation of heresy. The only thing that can be said for sure is that in this sample there were almost twice as many negative references to Joseph Smith, the golden plates and the origins of Mormonism as there were references to Mormonism as heresy, and that even though the total number of negative theological references diminished, the pattern itself remained consistent across the century.

With economics and social control, there were so few references that any attempt to differentiate further would be misleading. This is especially true since the economic practices of the Mormons ceased being the source of negative references about 1930, and became the source of a large proportion of the positive references made in articles published since then.

Altogether the data from this study are so rich in explanatory detail that generalization is difficult. Nevertheless, it is roughly accurate to characterize American attitudes toward the Mormons between 1860 and 1960 in the three time periods. At first everything was subject to criticism. The religion was "one of the most monstrous systems of imposture ever born of Satanic cunning, or accepted by credulous man."² The Mormon leaders were cruel, unethical, ambitious, greedy, and immoral; the people were crude, coarse, illiterate, dishonest, and sensual; and the system was totally foreign to the United States.

The demise of polygamy and the arrival of Utah statehood made little difference in the way the Mormon religion was described in the periodical press; it was still ridiculous, and if anything, even more un-Christian than before. However, there was a definite change in other areas. The leaders were even more ambitious, greedy, unethical and immoral, but now they were invariably able, efficient and effective as well. The people were inherently good, but as the victims of the temporal ambitions of their leaders, still a part of an un-American system. At the same time that this picture was most fully developed, a new subtext appeared. Again and again authors intimated that somehow the

2 Andrew J. Hanson, "Utah and the Mormon Problem," *Methodist Quarterly Review* 64 (April 1882): 214.

Mormons were managing to solve the problems that were facing America better than their non-Mormon counterparts.

Between 1935 and 1960, there was almost no emphasis on the origins of the religion or the ways in which it differs from Christianity. During this period, the important thing was not what the Mormons believed, but the fact that they believed it sincerely. With the increasing emphasis on self-reliance, the people were no longer seen as the victims of their leaders, who were—in any case—gentle, thoughtful, and kind persons of the highest ethical and moral character presiding over an extraordinarily American society and culture.

To put it another way, the early descriptions of Salt Lake City are much like the witty Irishman's reply when he was asked if Port Said were the wickedest spot on earth. "Oh, my dear," he said, "it's really a great deal wickeder than that." Descriptions of the city that stood at Mormondom's center in the years following the transformation of the Mormon image in the 1930s were foreshadowed by a description of Utah written way back in 1912:

*If ever the typically American qualities, the dauntless enterprise of the pioneers, their fierce courage, their ingenuity, adaptability and foresight, left a monument for posterity, that monument is the new Zion overlooking the Great Salt Lake.*³

While this foundational study of American perceptions of Mormonism laid the groundwork for a thorough examination of what Americans thought about the Saints during its first 130 years, the methodology that worked so well for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not as effective in getting a broad picture of those perceptions during the last few years of the century I dealt with in "From Satyr to Saint." Historical developments intervened.

As long as the Mormons remained behind the mountain curtain and as long as perceptions were mainly formed from the contents of the print media, it was possible to get a fairly reliable and

3The witty Irishman's remark is adapted from J. B. Halsey, "Mormonism As It Is Today," *Era*, XI (June, 1903), 511. The more modern description comes from Walter V. Woehlke, "The Garden of Utah," *Sunset: The Pacific Monthly*, XXIX (October, 1912), 362.

realistic portrait of public opinion about the Latter-day Saints. As early as the 1930s, however, electronic developments began to call portraits of perception based on the printed word into question. With the coming of the radio and the inauguration of weekly "Music and the Spoken Word" broadcasts, the American public's perceptions of Mormon identity started to change.⁴

In addition to radio—and particularly important to the Saints—was the coming of the long-playing record. From 1912 forward, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir had made concert tours to Washington, New York, Chicago, and other urban centers in the U.S. But with the arrival of inexpensive LPs, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir made an entrance into practically every American home with a turntable and a sound system. This made a real difference. And then along came television and Donny and Marie, plus sports in which LDS figures made a definite mark—Johnny Miller, Steve Young, *et al.*⁵

In the 1950s and 1960s, however, print still held sway. An article written by Andrew Hamilton called "Those Amazing Mormons" was published in 1952 in *Coronet Magazine*, a *Reader's Digest* clone. Reviewing LDS history, it cast the early Saints as long-suffering heroes and heroines and described their descendants as hard-working people with all the Boy Scout virtues. In addition, they neither drank alcohol nor anything containing caffeine, did not smoke, and consistently refused government assistance since they took care of their own.⁶

4 For an excellent account of the importance of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, its tours, and its weekly broadcasts in "Maintaining and Mainstreaming [LDS] Sectarian Identity," see the chapter on Mormons and Music in Stephen A. Marini, *Sacred Song in America* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 213-238.

5 For more on the shifting sources of media coverage, see "Surveying the Mormon Image since 1960," *Sojourner in the Promised Land*, pp. 98-123.

6 Andrew Hamilton, "Those Amazing Mormons" *Coronet* 31(April, 1952):26-30. Written by a Latter-day Saint, the editors of *Coronet* decided to publish this article even though they received a devastating pre-publication critique from LDS philosopher Sterling McMurrin, then Dean of the College at the University of Utah, to whom the article had been sent for review. An extended exchange of letters between McMurrin and the *Coronet* editors is contained in

This article is representative of a positive trend that, starting in the 1930s, would undercut the negative image that had been central to coverage of the Saints in the nation's periodical press during Mormonism's first hundred years. Marred mainly by a smattering of references to Short Creek, Arizona, and the continuation of plural marriage, a practice that many readers continued to connect with mainstream Mormonism, and by expressions that were a prelude to the growing concern of non-Mormon writers about the business activities of the LDS Church and its incredible wealth, press coverage of the Latter-day Saints remained positive, even laudatory, throughout the decade of the 1950s.⁷ By that time, however, the days when perceptions could be determined by study of the print media were passing.

And that was not all. Just as the end of World War II brought change to many areas of American life, so the end of that conflict also brought about a dramatic change in the opportunity citizens of the U.S. had to get to know members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although it would be decades before LDS wards and stakes would be organized throughout the nation, the end of the war accelerated the Mormon diaspora, as Saints started settling far beyond the boundaries of the state of Utah (and, in fact, outside the American West). By the 1950s, as a result of this "scattering of the gathering," people all across the country were beginning to learn about Mormonism first hand by meeting neighbors, people not unlike themselves, who happened to be Mormons. In addition, as soon as the wartime dearth of automobiles for sale was replaced by the availability of reasonably priced new cars, a huge increase in recreational travel carried hordes of tourists to Mormonism's center place. Utah, and most particularly, Salt Lake City became one of the most popular places that tourist wished to visit.

Another critical development also needs to be taken into account in assessing non-Mormon perceptions of Mormons. That is the LDS Church's extraordinary move into public relations

the McMurrin papers in the Special Collections Division in the Marriott Library at the University of Utah.

7 A fine study of press coverage of Mormonism between 1950 and 1967 is Dennis L. Lythgoe, "The Changing Image of Mormonism," *Dialogue* III (Winter, 1968) 3: 45-58.

in a very big way. Actually, the church had engaged in public relations, even to the point of hiring a non-Mormon expert on managing its image in the nineteen-teens. But by the middle of the twentieth century, the PR activity became in-house; a significant shift since projecting a flattering Mormon image became a part of the church's missionary thrust. The church's public communications division—now called public Affairs—was able to take marvelous advantage of the many new venues for telling the Mormon story.⁸

Now I would like to turn to the situation in the 1960s and 1970s. These two decades—and most especially the decade between, say, 1963-1964 through 1975-76—form a unique period in the history of perceptions of the Saints.⁹ During this time, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints held what Americans who embraced the civil rights movement regarded as a retrograde position on race, a position that was noted and commented upon in the print media, especially *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *Christian Century*, and elite newspapers on the east and west coasts.¹⁰ But that encumbrance was usually overlooked in radio and television broadcasts in which, almost as a reminder that the entire nation had not gone the way of the much-maligned, pot-smoking, flag-burning counterculture, all sorts of images of Mormons

as neat, modest, virtuous, family-loving, conservative, and patriotic people were featured.¹¹ The contrast with the radical left made the image of the Saints even more appealing than it had been in the fifties, making this a time when at least perceptions of the Saints in middle America would be overwhelmingly positive. In fact, I am convinced that it was the dramatic discrepancy between clean-cut Mormons and scruffy hippies that completed the transformation of the Mormon image from the quasi-foreign somewhat alien likeness that it had in the nineteenth century to the more than 100 percent super-American portrait of the late sixties and early seventies. The situation was such that it became not at all uncommon to hear, in presentations at American Studies meetings, that Mormons are “more American than the Americans.”

It is true that members of the church had to maintain their distance from a growing body of so-called “new polygamists” by making sure that these schismatics were not confused with the genuine article, i.e., “real” Latter-day Saints.¹² The LDS Church also needed to downplay the importance of a vocal and somewhat truculent group of former Saints by ignoring their efforts to scour the historical record and to find and publish information that helped them justify their turn away from the faith.¹³ But the 1978 revelation

8“Marketing the Mormon Image: An Interview with Wendell J. Ashton,” *Dialogue X* (Spring, 1977) 3: 15-20. Initially organized in 1972 as the “External Communications Department, the public communications arm of the church was given the official title Public Communications Department in 1973. Ten years later the department was merged with the Special Affairs Department and renamed Public Communications/Special Affairs. In 1991, the department’s name was again changed, this time to Public Affairs. (I am grateful to Don Lefevre for this information about what the department he works for has been called over the years.)

9This argument is at odds with Dennis L. Lythgoe’s conclusion, based entirely on a study of the print media, that the Mormon image was overwhelmingly positive in the 1950s, but that in the next decade there was so much criticism of the Saints that the Mormon image lost its positive bloom. See “The Changing Image of Mormonism,” p. 48 ff.

10A typical example is “Mormons and the Mark of Cain,” *Time* 95 (January 19, 1970) 46-47.

11The “Homefront” series of public announcements which were created in the early 1970s and started being broadcast soon thereafter added immeasurably to this perception of the Saints.

12While the policy regarding the way members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ought to be described by themselves and others was articulated absolutely in the press release that accompanied the adoption in 1995 of a new logo emphasizing the LDS Church’s understanding of itself as a Christian church, the effort to replace “Mormon” with “Latter-day Saint” goes back at least to the 1960s. It is possible that this earlier attempt at nomenclature adjustment was an effort to distance LDS church members from modern polygamists.

13 Chief among this group were Jerald and Sandra Tanner who, in the mid-1960s, established the Modern Microfilm Co. (now the Utah Lighthouse Ministry) as an outlet for mimeographed materials, pamphlets, a newsletter, and, eventually, books. Many of their publications include early Mormon documents that make it obvious that the Mormonism of the second half of the twentieth century differs, sometimes dramatically, from the LDS movement in

permitting all worthy men to hold the priesthood appeared to put the troublesome race issue behind the LDS Church.

On another front, despite the press brouhaha around the excommunication of feminist Sonia Johnson and a Utah International Women's Year convention debacle, the Mormon emphasis on family values seems to have trumped the church's anti-ERA stance in the eyes of a majority of those who thought much about the matter. As a consequence, race and gender issues—they would now be described as political correctness issues—were apparently doing little to besmirch the positive Mormon image.¹⁴

If the Mormon sesqui-centennial can be seen as a true high point in the history of the Saints, an underside of the Mormon story was starting to unfold. The Saintly image seems to have been so picture perfect that certain observers began to suspect that surely something was wrong with the portrait of a people with all the Boy Scout virtues whose family friendly faith was powerful enough for its appeal to be spread far and wide by late adolescents who had barely ceased being boy scouts themselves. Sure enough, along with the incessant drumbeat of ever-increasing numbers of church members being organized into ever increasing numbers of wards and stakes and regions and areas, not just in the U.S. but throughout the world came two strong

its early years. In addition, they have documented all the changes that have ever been made in the Book of Mormon and have published the purported-to-be-secret LDS temple rituals. Generally, the Tanners have been a thorn in the side of the church as well as a boon to historians of early Mormonism. Their most famous publication is probably *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* In the bookstore they maintain in Salt Lake City, they not only sell their own works, but also the works of others. Like the bookstore's proprietors, many of the authors of the works sold by the Tanners were/are interested in making the case that Mormonism is by no means all that it claims to be.

14 Although the interpretation being put forward in this paper might appear to be directly at odds with Dennis L. Lythgoe's picture of a change from a positive to negative image of Mormonism when the 1950s are compared with the 1960s (and beyond), this disagreement is more apparent than real since his analysis was based entirely on the print media and this one is an effort to go beyond the print media to take the electronic media *and* the LDS Church's paid and unpaid advertising into account.

and very discordant sounds: Mark Hoffman and the "Godmaker" folks. In addition, shadows detracting from the idealistic image projected by "happiness is a family home evening" bumper stickers and the ongoing transformation of the traditional church welfare plan into massive industrial-like humanitarian activities included a series of sensational books focused on the open manifestation of plural marriage on the Utah scene as well as several new exposés.

Without revisiting the horrible Hoffman episode, reviewing the *Godmaker* books and films or exploring the content of Peter Bart's *Thy Kingdom Come*; Ben Bradlee, Jr. and Dale Van Atta's *Prophet of Blood: The Untold Story of Ervil LeBaron and the Lambs of God*, John Hinerman and Anson Shupe's. *The Mormon Corporate Empire*, and Shupe's *The Darker Side of Virtue: Corruption, Scandal, and the Mormon Empire*, it is possible to take note of what seems to be happening in the public coverage of Mormonism generally and the LDS Church specifically:

- Whenever the public image gets too rosy, so flawless that it is essentially unblemished, renewed derogatory coverage emerges to undercut the idealized portrait of the Saints.
- Derogatory or negative coverage is focused in two directions,
 - ◆ Mormon beginnings, Mormon scriptures, Mormon belief fundamentals
 - ◆ Mormon practices (the general LDS cultural milieu; what the church does; and how Mormons run their lives).

In light of my study of the history of perceptions of the latter-day Saints, I think it is possible to identify earlier examples of this "super-Saint/blemished" LDS believer dialectic. Rather than looking to the distant past, however, I want to finish this Vernon lecture by pointing to the most recent example of how this dialectic has been playing out in recent times.

The most visible projection of the positive image of Mormonism, its people and its ecclesial organization in recent years was that transmitted in the months leading up to and during the Winter Olympic Games in 2002. If stereotypes were glass, the ice-covered floor of the stadium where the closing ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympics were held would have been littered with

shards. Shattered were the images of Mormonism as a peculiar faith tradition ensconced in the intermountain region of the American West, and of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as spooky clean-cut zealots whose main goal is making converts.

Rather than being pestered to convert to their faith, most visitors to Salt Lake City encountered Latter-day Saints who were simply doing their best to be, as the church put it, "gracious hosts." Youthful and attractive "lady missionaries" were eager to answer religious questions, but only on historic Temple Square. Elsewhere the Saints were just there to be helpful and, no less significantly, to join in the fun.

And at the end of the day, the print and electronic coverage of Mormonism accompanying the story of the international festival of sport created a new picture of the LDS Church and its members that is unlikely to be ephemeral. This splintering of the old Mormon stereotypes occurred because the leaders of the Latter-day Saints took advantage of the Olympics to introduce modern Mormonism to the world.

There is no question that the church's PR effort shaped the way Mormonism was covered in the tens of thousands of stories about the Olympic games filed worldwide between early December and the end of February. According to Michael Otterson, the LDS Director of Media Relations who became the church's primary spokesperson during the Games, an overwhelming majority—perhaps 95 percent—of the stories featuring Mormonism and/or the LDS Church were either "positive or fair." He could, he told me in March, "Count on the fingers of both hands" the truly negative articles published in English language newspapers.

No doubt Otterson was correct in his assessment of the media's coverage of the Saints during the Olympics. But the broken stereotypes and the evidence put forward during the games to prove to the world that, in President Gordon B. Hinckley's words, Mormons—he prefers Latter-day Saints—"are not weird," were soon challenged by two critically important issues that the people in Public Affairs could not sweep neatly away with their internet "Mistakes

in the News" column.

The first of these was the 2003 publication of *Under the Banner of Heaven* by John Krakauer, a work that was published after the Olympics were over and done. The interesting question about this book is not whether it was written to counter the image of the super Saint set forth in Olympic coverage. We know that answer is negative. The work had to have already been in process before the beginning of the Games. What we don't know is why Krakauer's tome received so much attention and why it received such high praise from reviewers. That this book would gain attention in the national book review venues was to be expected because the author's most recent work, *Into Thin Air*, had been so very successful. But that does not explain why this book—far less substantial and exceedingly flawed—should garner enough attention to make it a best seller..

Even before I read the book Peggy Fletcher Stack, religion writer for the Salt Lake *Tribune*, told me that Krakauer's work about the cold-blooded murders committed by Dan and Mark Lafferty contains a good description of the descent into madness of the Lafferty brothers. I agree with her on this point. But beyond that, it seems to me that this work is a run-of-the-mill exposé that seizes on the new polygamy and tells the Mormon story from the perspective of some of its participants who went off the "deep end."

Maintaining that certain episodes in the Mormon past "exemplify the fanaticism and concomitant brutality" of LDS culture, Krakauer blames the faith for

- everything that happened to Laffertys' victims;
- the Elizabeth Smart tragedy;
- the horrible episode when Latter-day Saints, caught up in an emotional response to a revitalization movement within the church and an equally emotional reaction to the U.S. government's sending of the army to Utah that seemed to presage a new "driving," reacted with what was clearly displaced rage and killed all the people in a wagon train-load of "Gentiles."

Krakauer paints Mormonism as a hoax perpetrated on dupes by a charismatic money-hungry sex-crazed figure that just also might have

been a religious genius.

Aligning his text alongside the nineteenth century accounts of Mormonism that I analyzed in my "Satyr to Saint" study allowed me to see that what Krakauer has produced is a standard nineteenth-century treatment of Mormonism gussied up with "edge" psychology. It contains some insights into the new polygamy, but even within that movement this author refuses to see anything but the negative side. He failed to acknowledge that many women as well as men find the way they practice Mormonism to be deeply satisfying.

Perhaps this work would have been just as successful in garnering readers and gaining praise if it had come at a different point in time when the Saints were not held up as regular folks who also happened to be paragons of virtue. But it is at least conceivable that the success of this exposé was helped along because it was a reaction to the super Saint image projected by the LDS Church and its public affairs division.

But the book contains something more than dramatic accounts of murders committed by two clearly mad modern fundamentalists. The author connects those murders to the darkest spot in the history of the LDS Church, the Mountain Meadows Massacre, an event he described, with justification, as one of the "most chilling episodes" in the history of the American West. What he never explains, however, is exactly how the murderous Lafferty brothers could have been so much affected by the "fanaticism and concomitant brutality of [Mormon] culture" revealed in that episode. Yet his connecting them to the dark side of the Mormon past in this way contributes to a renewal of the polarizing tendencies in late nineteenth-century American society that turned Mormons into *other*.

From the time of Mormonism's appearance on the American scene until very recently, its adherents were regarded as *other*, as far apart from everyone else in the nation as Jews used to be and as Indians and black people still are. But this outsider (otherness) status gradually dissipated in the past quarter century, so much so that what once was *other* seemed steadily to be turning into *difference*, a far less threatening status. When the media coverage of

Mormonism during the Olympics turned the Saints into white bread folks rather than quaint exotics or something worse, as a group, they lost their status as a reverse social mirror that had provided non-Mormons with something to measure themselves over and against. By its very existence, as long as the Latter-day Saints fit into the *other* category, Mormonism permitted outsiders to reassure themselves that they were in the cultural and religious mainstream.

I added "Searching Anew for Skeletons in the Mormon Closet" as a subtitle to this lecture because it reflects the heightened interest in the Mountain Meadows Massacre that has given new life to the most awful of all the stories in the Mormon history arsenal, one, as I indicated above, involving the brutal murder of an entire adult company of emigrants who happened to be in the wrong place (Utah Territory) at the wrong time (during the 1857 Mormon-Utah War). During this ghastly incident, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints turned southern Utah into a killing field and gave the church and its members something to be sorry and apologetic about ever since.

The great Mormon historian Juanita Brooks' carefully chronicled this September 11, 1857 tragedy and its aftermath almost a half-century ago. In 2003, Will Bagley published a thoroughly researched volume on the massacre that he called *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Tragedy at Mountain Meadows*, and less than a year after that "investigative reporter" Sally Denton also published *American Massacre*. Besides that, a veritable multitude of articles and other book-length accounts of the merciless slaughter have been published. A new film on the Massacre has just been released. A session at the 2003 annual meeting of the Western History Association provided evidence that additional massacre study is underway. Innumerable details about what occurred in the months leading up to the tragedy and in the years that followed are being uncovered by three historians in the employ of the LDS Church who are being assisted by a large research team as they prepare yet another volume on the topic.

What is going on here? To cut to the chase, two things seem to be taking place. One is that Will Bagley has used circumstantial evidence to charge Brigham Young with ordering the murder

and the new film and the Denton book take this same position. The other is that the story, which everyone assumed was done and over with, was reopened when a back hoe driver who was preparing the ground for a new memorial dug up 28 new bodies. This appeared—to use an unfortunate pun—to give the story ‘legs.’ But not, it seems, legs that could take it very far. The bodies were quickly reburied before the full evidence of how they were murdered (by being shot in the head) was gathered.

And that is about it—except for two more things. First and possibly more important, the church is putting huge resources into preparing a book based on all the evidence in the church archives. Whether it will move the story in any significant way is an open question. The other question is why President Hinckley, who is clearly concerned about the tragedy and what it did to the descendents of the massacre seems unable to bring himself to issue a full apology.

The reason, it seems to me, is that such an apology might very well lead to a demand for reparations. If Brigham Young ordered the massacre, modern LDS Church leaders would not have the luxury the Pope exercised in apologizing to the Jews for the actions of Catholics during the Holocaust. The Catholics may have given aid to the enemy, but they did not order murder. In this instance, if it can be established that church president Brigham Young did order it, the Church is then responsible to the descendents of those who were seeking to cross Utah Territory during his lifetime.

A careful reading of Sally Denton’s account of this particular nine-eleven bloodbath reveals that the author’s purpose was not providing a new history of the massacre. Instead she reviews the complicated story using information drawn indiscriminately from reliable primary depictions of what happened and careful reconstructions of the event on the one hand and careless, often clearly biased secondary accounts on the other in order to place the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the dock. Taking advantage of the work of the historians who have proved the slaughter was committed by men in good standing in the LDS Church, she accuses this respected ecclesiastical body with knowing complicity in

the murder of at least 120 men and women, complicity that it still refuses to acknowledge. Then she sets about constructing an argument designed to convince readers that the institution is guilty as charged.

Denton’s case is much beholden to Will Bagley’s prize-winning study that, in the most forthright manner imaginable, charges the Mormon leader with ordering his followers to stir up the Indians against an assemblage of innocent people and with instructing them to “use up” the emigrants. Unlike Bagley, however, Denton calls the very legitimacy of Mormonism into question. Characterizing the first Mormon prophet as a religious con man, she points to how he collected slights that could be described as persecution. Downplaying the actual persecutions the Saints suffered, she argues that, in time, Mormon courting of persecution led to their manipulating President James Buchanan into sending the U.S. Army to attack the Saints. Her conclusion is that the horrendous fate of the emigrants was a by-product of Brigham Young’s effort to proclaim the Mormon kingdom’s independence from all human governmental oversight.

Instead of placing the summation of her argument in the book’s conclusion, Denton placed it in a New York Times “Op-Ed” piece that appeared just as the book came out. It reads as follows: “Without a sustained attempt at accountability and atonement, the [Mormon] church will not escape the hovering shadow of that horrible crime.”

I will bring this presentation to an end with an account of a recent conversation I had with a librarian in our local public library. She and I have known each other for years and she knows of my interest in Mormonism. Therefore, as we were talking about how the library had found it necessary to buy 20 copies of the Da Vinci Code, she looked at me with a twinkle in her eye and said, “I just read a pre-publication notice of a new book by Dan Brown. It’s called The Temple Talisman and it’s all about the connection with Masonry that stands at the heart of Mormonism.

I laughed. But that conversation gave me a start. What would it be like to get on a plane and see every third or fourth passenger carrying such a book for flight-time reading? Even if the author had things all cock-eyed, the correlation between the two movements—between Masonry and what

happens in the temple—is obvious to anyone familiar with the LDS Church’s reaction to Reed Durham’s 1974 Mormon History Association presidential address and familiar as well as with the rituals of York Rite Masonry practiced during the youth of the prophet Joseph Smith. Therefore, even if such a work were fiction, it would not simply raise questions about what some Latter-day Saints did in 1857 or what others who, with full historical justification call themselves Mormons as they continue the practice of plural marriage nowadays. Such a book would look into what some think of as the great Mormon secret.

Now that might truly be regarded by those who read a Dan Brown historical detective novel about Mormonism and Masonry to be a skeleton in the closet of this new religious tradition.

Thank you.

By Jan Shipps

Presented at the 2004 SSSR meetings in Kansas City Missouri

Announcements

O’Dea Volume Planned

The Mormon Social Science Association is planning an edited volume of scholarly essays to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Thomas O’Dea’s classic sociological study of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *The Mormons*. Appropriate essays could focus on (but would not be limited to) assessments of O’Dea’s ideas and scholarship on (a) Joseph Smith in the context of his religious environment, (b) the Book of Mormon, (c) the state of contemporary Mormon identity, (d) O’Dea’s “sources of strain and conflict” within Mormonism, (e) the O’Dea archive at BYU, and (f) O’Dea’s sociology as seen through the lens of other disciplines (e.g. history, anthropology, psychology, etc.) The project has the preliminary encouragement of the University of Illinois Press. Scholars interested in contributing to this project should contact the MSSA via Ryan Cragun at ryan@genesoc.com or Ryan T. Cragun, University of Cincinnati, Department of Sociology, P.O. Box 210378, Cincinnati, OH 45221. Please respond by April 1.

Call for Papers on International Mormonism

During 2005 and 2006, *Dialogue* expects to publish a series of articles on the Mormon experience, identity, and use of history outside the usual Anglo-Mormon cultural realm.

Under Guest Editor Ethan Yorgason, this series will feature articles on a variety of topics from the perspective of various scholarly disciplines, including history, literature, and the social sciences. Each paper may focus in depth upon a particular cultural setting, preferably outside the U. S., or offer cross-cultural comparisons among two or more settings.

Manuscripts for this series must be received no later than May 1, 2005. They should be sent as attachments in MS Word or WordPerfect to yorgasoe@byuh.edu; or, if typed “hard copy” is absolutely unavoidable, it may be sent in triplicate to

Ethan Yorgason,
BYU-Hawaii, Box 1970,
Laie, HI 96762.

Manuscripts should be sent as soon as possible up to the deadline. Questions may be directed to Dr. Yorgason at (808) 293-3617; fax: (808) 293-3888.

Summer Seminar on Mormonism:

Last week Richard Bushman and I received official word that the National Endowment for the Humanities had accepted our proposal to offer one of its “Summer Seminars for College Teachers and University Professors.” Consequently, a six-week seminar entitled “Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormonism: Bicentennial Perspectives” will be held at BYU from 20 June to 30 July 2005. From what we understand, this is the first time the NEH has funded a summer seminar on a Mormon topic.

First and foremost, this strikes me as a significant statement about attitudes toward BYU and the Church. That the study of Joseph Smith and Mormonism would be considered, by the non-Mormon scholars and public officials associated with the NEH and charged with fostering the humanities in this country, worthy of a nationally sponsored seminar says much about how far the Church has come forth “out of obscurity and out of darkness.” The NEH seminar grant also highlights the degree to which BYU itself has

achieved a national reputation for academic excellence and scholarly integrity without, in the words of President Samuelson, repudiating its religious roots. To be trusted by the premier humanities sponsor in the United States that its faculty can conduct a seminar on the life and thought of the Church's founding prophet with sufficient care and objectivity that federal funds (over \$100,000) might appropriately be spent and that professors from diverse religious backgrounds might participate without fear of encountering undue ideological bias or covert proselytism is no small achievement. It is pleasing to reflect on the contributions of numerous colleagues past and present that have helped bring BYU to this milestone in national recognition.

The seminar grant also draws attention to how fully Mormon history has come of age in the academic arena. An abundance of superb, balanced scholarship made selecting the proposed seminar readings a challenge of sifting and narrowing rather than searching for the sound and the substantial. To the many who have devoted a portion of their lives to researching and writing the history of Mormonism, a debt of gratitude is owed. Without their efforts the quantity, quality, and credibility of Mormon historical scholarship would be such that an NEH seminar on Joseph Smith and the origins of Mormonism would be neither feasible nor palatable. In particular, thanks go to seminar co-director Richard Bushman for the probity and profundity of his decades-long work on Joseph Smith and Mormon origins.

In the end, this NEH grant is an event to which many have contributed and in which many can take pride. Here's to all who have helped make it possible!

Grant Underwood

News Items

Interactive Online Bibliography for Members

While far from complete, some free software (and free hosting) has allowed for the creation of a searchable and editable online bibliography for references relating to the social scientific study of Mormonism. The bibliography can be found at the following URL:

<http://www.genesoc.com/mssa2/>

To prevent abuse, the bibliography is presently password protected. To access it, enter the following:

User: **Glenn**

Password: **Vernon**

The link on the main MSSA website within the members' section will also point to this interactive bibliography once all of the references there have been transferred. The bibliography allows for the creation of an account, which means all members of the MSSA can participate in editing the bibliography. If you would like to add some references or participate in editing the currently existing references in the bibliography, please contact Ryan Cragun at: ryan@genesoc.com.

Conference at University of Texas, Austin

On February 17-18, 2005 at the University of Texas at Austin a conference was held entitled, "Is God Brazilian? Christianity and New Religious Movements." One of the sessions was, "The Mormon Church in Brazil" at which there were two presentations, "History of the Mormon Church in Brazil," by Mark L. Grover, Brigham Young University and "The Mormon Church in Brazil's Contemporary Religious Market Place," by Joseph Straubhaar, Radio-TV-Film, University of Texas at Austin and Rolf Straubhaar, Student, Brigham Young University. If you are interested in information on these presentations, you can contact the presenters at the following email addresses:

Mark_Grover@BYU.EDU

jdstraubhaar@mail.utexas.edu

Newly published

Tim B. Heaton, Stephen J. Bahr, and Cardell K. Jacobson. 2005. *A Statistical Profile of Mormons—Health, Wealth, and Social Life*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press. 233 pps.

Soon to be published

Neilson, Reid L. Forthcoming. *The Rise of Mormonism*. New York: Columbia University Press

FUTURE SSSR MEETINGS

2005: November 4-6, Rochester, New York

2006: October 20-22, Portland, Oregon

Palmyra Tour at SSSR 2005

The organizers of the 2005 SSSR meetings in Rochester New York have worked out a tour of the Palmyra area (exact time and date to be announced). The tour will last between three and four hours and will include the following:

- The 18-minute introductory film at the Visitors' Center
- Some time in the Exhibit Space in the Visitors Center.
- Some time at the two Joseph Smith homes and the sacred grove.
- A quick drive-by of the Temple.
- A tour of the print shop in Palmyra.

Additional details will be made available through both the SSSR's the MSSA's websites.

Moving to Electronic Distribution

To reduce printing and mailing costs and to facilitate more rapid distribution of the newsletter, we are considering the option for people to receive an electronic copy of the newsletter rather than a paper copy. In order to proceed with this change, your help is requested. If you would like to receive an electronic version of the newsletter, please contact
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Provo, Utah 84602.

cardell_jacobson@byu.edu

If you do not contact Cardell indicating your interest in an electronic version, you will continue to receive a paper copy of the newsletter.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Would you like to see early publication of your work on Mormons from a thesis, dissertation, senior project, or class paper? The Mormon Social Science Association (MSSA) is sponsoring a student paper competition (both undergraduate and graduate) for papers employing social scientific perspectives in the analysis of Mormon social life and culture.

The top three winners will be invited to present their research at the annual meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in a session sponsored by the MSSA, and the papers will be published on the MSSA website (www.mormonsocialscience.org). The winners will also receive \$300 each to defray travel costs to the conference. In addition, the first place winner will receive a \$100 prize, and a summary of his or her paper will be included in the semi-annual MSSA newsletter. Submission of a paper to this MSSA competition will not preclude submission of the same paper to any other competition.

Requirements:

An abstract of about 250 words must be submitted for each entry by December 31, 2005. The abstract should describe the general nature and thesis of the paper, as well as the kind of data on which it will be based. The completed paper, postmarked by March 1, 2006, should be no longer than 30 pages, including tables, notes, and references. Submissions and questions should be sent electronically to ryan@genesoc.com.

A \$10 submission fee is required but the fee includes a 1-year membership in the MSSA and a 1-year subscription to the MSSA newsletter. Winners will be announced within 1 to 2 months of the submission deadline.

MSSA members:

Please post this notice in your department and spread the word about the competition.