

# Understanding Mormonism: Foundational Sources on its Culture, History, and Theology

by Gerrit van Dyk

**ABSTRACT:** Over the past couple of decades, the media and popular culture have shown growing interest in members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, its leadership, its practices, and its splinter groups. With all of this recent interest, it is possible that a religious studies librarian at an institution of higher education or at a theological seminary could receive a query regarding Mormonism, the broad term used to include all groups within the Church tradition, either out of popular culture curiosity or for academic investigation. This essay reviews major sources in this growing field for any who wish to either assist patrons in comparative religion projects related to Mormonism, develop a working collection in Mormon studies, or both.

In 2002, the Olympics came to Utah for the first time. It was on this global stage that the traditionally mysterious members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter the Church or members of the Church) were visible, in some cases for the first time, to the world. The Church launched a public relations initiative to assuage concerns about having the Games in such an openly religious location. Instead, journalists from all over the United States raved about the Games and the local hospitality, including Mitt Romney's last-minute rescue of an Olympics plagued by poor management and scandal.

Over the twenty years since the Games, Church members have become increasingly visible in the media. Novelists like Shannon Hale (*Princess Academy* and *Goose Girl*), Brandon Sanderson (*Mistborn*, *Wheel of Time*, and *Stormlight Archive*), and Stephenie Meyer (*Twilight*), have played a significant role in contemporary young adult and fantasy fiction. Brandon Flowers from *The Killers* and Dan Reynolds from *Imagine Dragons* both are outspoken about their faith, as is fellow musician and YouTube sensation Lindsey Sterling. Athletes who practice the faith, like Jimmer Fredette and Jabari Parker, have also made a splash in the ocean of contemporary life. Mainstream pop culture creators have even found ways to explore outsider (mis) conceptions of Mormonism in such works as the satire *The Book of Mormon Musical* (2011) and HBO's *Big Love* (2006-2011). Mitt Romney's speech "Faith in America," delivered in 2007, has been seen as a parallel to John F. Kennedy's speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in 1960, in which Kennedy addressed his Catholic background as a candidate for the presidency.

In academia, Mormonism has similarly blossomed as a discipline, in which hundreds of scholarly monographs, a similar number of dissertations, and thousands of peer-reviewed articles have been published since 2000. Oxford University Press alone has published over fifty volumes in the past twenty years related to Mormon culture, history, or theology. As is to be expected, there are various programs and initiatives related to Mormonism in Utah, the headquarters of the Church, at the University of Utah, Utah Valley University, the University of Wyoming, and the Utah State University. This development has spread, however, to institutions in other states and regions. In 2008, Claremont Graduate University established the Howard W. Hunter Chair for Mormon Studies. Four years later, the University of Virginia created the Richard Lyman Bushman Chair for Mormon Studies. In 2015, the University of Southern California announced the John A. Widtsoe Chair for Mormon Studies. Most recently, in 2017, the Graduate Theological Union appointed Robert A. Rees Director of Mormon Studies.

With all of this recent activity and interest in Mormon studies, a religious studies librarian at an institution of higher education or at a theological seminary could conceivably receive a query regarding Mormonism,

either out of popular culture curiosity or for academic investigation. This essay reviews major sources in this growing field for any who wish either to assist patrons in comparative religion projects related to Mormonism, develop a working collection in Mormon studies, or both. Due to space, I concentrate primarily on recent sources, even when historical classics exist in a genre or on a topic.

Before continuing, however, I wish briefly to address the complexities and assumptions behind using the term “Mormon.” After Joseph Smith was murdered by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, in 1844, the young religion faced a succession crisis. There were many individuals who believed they should lead the Church. This led to several different splinter groups, or what some refer to as “Restoration” schismatic groups from the Church, the largest of which is the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (now called the Community of Christ). While the field of Mormon studies includes all sects in the Restoration tradition, when the members of the general public think of “Mormons,” they are almost certainly equating this term with the adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is headquartered in Salt Lake City, however naively erroneous that equation may be. Even in the field of Mormon studies, many of the publications discussed in this article follow this general trend of equating the term “Mormon” with members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, specifically.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, while some works discussed focus on schismatic groups, most of those in this essay focus on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

### CITATION INDEX DATA AND THE STUDIES IN MORMON HISTORY DATABASE

This bibliography draws heavily from the citation data found in the *Studies in Mormon History Database* (SMH), the most comprehensive index of scholarship in Mormonism available. SMH is based on the book *Studies in Mormon History, 1830-1997*.<sup>2</sup> This work attempted to find and index all works of scholarship related to Mormonism from the founding of the Church to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Shortly after publication, one of the authors, James Allen, worked with BYU personnel to move the content to a free online database and to keep the dataset updated with new publications. Since that time, it has been managed by my predecessor, Michael Hunter, and now I co-manage it with Trevor Alvord, Curator for Contemporary Mormonism at BYU. Between us, we have added nearly 6,000 books, 1,600 articles, 4,000 book chapters, and 700 theses and dissertations to the database in addition to the original sources in the print bibliography. In 2017, we began adding citation index information in which citations are linked to other citations whose sources cite them. In this way, we hoped to discover the most-cited works in Mormon studies.

### GENERAL WORKS AND ENCYCLOPEDIAS

As with any religious tradition, it is difficult to grasp a religion without first understanding its origins—its history, theology, rites, culture, and quirks. Richard Bushman’s *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* serves as a brief primer for anyone interested in an overview of the Church and its people.<sup>3</sup> Jan Shipps’ *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* offers a nicely contextualized history of the faith, with particular emphasis on

<sup>1</sup> While this essay was in the composition and publication process, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints published a preferred style guide for referring to itself and its members in media outlets. The term “Mormon” is now discouraged. However, this new preference creates with it some confusion with regard to past publications (many of which are reviewed in the current study) in the scholarly field known as Mormon studies. The author has attempted to follow the guide where possible, using the full name of the Church or simply “the Church” and “members of the Church” to speak particularly about that branch of Mormonism. Where all schismatic groups in the religious tradition and/or their members are implied or explicitly stated (and not just the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its practicing members), the term “Mormon” or “Mormonism” is used as a broader, that is, generic, inclusive.

<sup>2</sup> James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker, *Studies in Mormon History, 1830-1997: An Indexed Bibliography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

its place in American religious history.<sup>4</sup> Matthew Bowman's *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* is also an important overview of the tradition, meant primarily for a general audience.<sup>5</sup> In 1992, Macmillan published an *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, a comprehensive guide to various aspects of the faith and its history.<sup>6</sup> The resource has since migrated to an online platform and is updated periodically by Brigham Young University personnel. More recently, Oxford and Columbia have released two volumes that complement the *Encyclopedia*, the *Oxford Handbook to Mormonism* (2016), and the *Columbia Sourcebook to Mormons in the United States* (2014).<sup>7</sup> The *Handbook* is an edited volume with dozens of article-length chapters written by leading Mormon studies scholars. Topics range from Mormon history and culture to the growth of the religion globally. While not as comprehensive as the *Encyclopedia*, to be sure, these chapters offer an in-depth look at the major issues and questions asked by Mormon studies scholars today. The *Sourcebook* instead allows Mormons to speak for themselves on these same topics. The editors include sermons, opinion editorials, speeches, letters, and poetry written by Mormons throughout the history of the faith. *Mormonism: A Historical Encyclopedia* is a more condensed but still valuable reference book, with entries from over fifty scholars in the field.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the Church itself published in 2004 a glossary of terms entitled *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference*, named after a beloved hymn in the tradition.<sup>9</sup> This small volume contains brief descriptions of what members of the Church believe about such doctrines as baptism for the dead and eternal marriage, or social issues like abortion, gambling, or homosexuality. It can be found free online on the Church's website, [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org).

## SACRED TEXTS

Any serious study of a religious tradition must include time, effort, and space for the sacred texts of that people. Aside from the Book of Mormon, the sacred work from which Church members gained their nickname "Mormons," the Church also has two other canonized scriptures in addition to the King James Version of the Bible. The first, the Doctrine and Covenants, is a text of recorded revelations to early church leaders about the management of the Church itself; it contains some doctrine as well. The second, called the Pearl of Great Price, is a collection of other translated sacred works by Joseph Smith, as well as a personal history he wrote in which he relates his claims of theophany, visitation by angels, and his call as a prophet, like Moses and Elijah. The King James Version is likely readily available in any theological library, and one can purchase the other three "Standard Works," as members call them, in a "triple combination." They can also be found for free online at [www.lds.org/scriptures](http://www.lds.org/scriptures). Penguin Books has also published a popular edition of the Book of Mormon, which includes a fine introduction by Laurie Maffly-Kipp.<sup>10</sup>

A fair amount of scholarship has been written on the Book of Mormon and on the Mormon reception of the Bible. Philip Barlow's trailblazing work, *Mormons and the Bible*, opens the scholarly discussion of how Mormons create, adapt, and engage with sacred texts.<sup>11</sup> Barlow reviews how Mormons have utilized the Bible in their praxis and doctrine over time. In a landmark study *By the Hand of Mormon*, Terryl Givens approached the Book of Mormon for the first time as an academic (rather than polemical or apologetic) enterprise, using reception

<sup>4</sup> Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Burton Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (New York: Random House, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel H. Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Terryl Givens and Philip L. Barlow, *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Terryl Givens, Reid L. Neilson, and Michelle Taormina, *The Columbia Sourcebook of Mormons in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> W. Paul Reeve and Ardis E. Parshall, *Mormonism: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> *True To The Faith: A Gospel Reference* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> *The Book of Mormon* (Penguin Classics; New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-Day Saints in American Religion* (Updated Edition; Religion in America Series; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

theory to discuss the book's cultural and theological impact.<sup>12</sup> Grant Hardy later published *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, in which he reviews the Book of Mormon from a literary perspective.<sup>13</sup> Paul C. Gutjahr's *The Book of Mormon: A Biography*, part of the "Lives of Great Religious Books" series, adds to the conversation some of the reception history of the book by other schismatic groups, like the Community of Christ, as well as depictions of the text and its stories in literature and film.<sup>14</sup> Finally, *The Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, now in its twenty-fifth volume, publishes peer-reviewed articles, book reviews, and interviews related to the Book of Mormon and its impact on believers. Hardy also recently published a Study Edition of the Book of Mormon highlighting parallels with other scripture and formatting the text according to genre (e.g., poetry is written in verse form).<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, this subfield of sacred text analysis in Mormonism is still too young to have a corresponding set of monographs directed toward the academy examining the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. While there are several books on these two texts written by reputable scholars, their target audience is invariably believing members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The one exception is Brian Hauglid's *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham*, focusing on one of the books in the Pearl of Great Price.<sup>16</sup> Hauglid's work fits alongside Royal Skousan's *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* in textual criticism of these sacred writings.<sup>17</sup>

## OTHER PRIMARY SOURCES

While the Church has designated the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price to be official scripture, the organization also has several extra-canonical works which help clarify doctrine and practice. Since it began in 1830, the LDS Church has held a regular "general" conference—general in that all members are invited to attend but also general in the sense that it is conducted by *general* leaders over the entire church, as opposed to *local* leadership. Over the decades this has taken several different forms, but today it is an opportunity twice per year to hear from executive officers of the church who are over the global membership of more than 16,000,000 today. These leaders deliver sermons on a variety of topics related to worship and to living as a Mormon. Practicing members of the church treat these sermons close to, or at the same level as, canonized scripture. A group of Brigham Young University professors maintains a website called the Corpus of General Conference Talks, which allows anyone with Internet access to search across the sermons of these meetings, dating back to 1851.<sup>18</sup> This is a valuable resource for anyone doing research on doctrinal or practical theology as it relates to Mormons. A researcher can get a sense of how the LDS Church understood a particular doctrine, practice, or political issue at any given time since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Church also publishes online a manual for local lay leadership, *Handbook 2: Administering in the Church* (2010).<sup>19</sup> The Handbook has official policies on issues such as euthanasia, cremation, and birth control.

With regard to its earliest history, for the past two decades the Church has published the *Joseph Smith Papers*, an archival project in which it has tried to find and reproduce documents created by Joseph Smith or by staff

<sup>12</sup> Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Paul C. Gutjahr, *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* (Lives of Great Religious Books; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, Maxwell Institute Study Edition (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, BYU Religious Studies Center, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Brian M. Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions, Studies in the Book of Abraham* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.lds-general-conference.org/>.

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.lds.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/language-materials/08702\\_eng.pdf?lang=eng](https://www.lds.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/language-materials/08702_eng.pdf?lang=eng).

whose work he directed, including journals, revelations and translations, contemporary reports of discourses, minutes, business and legal records, editorials, and notices.”<sup>20</sup> The volumes are still being published, but researchers can freely access much of the content online at <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/>.

The Church also is active in publishing its own periodicals. Since its earliest days, the members of the Church have published newspapers and magazines. Many of these works have been fully digitized and are available through the Internet Archive. Today the Church publishes three periodicals, the *Ensign*, for general readers, the *New Era*, for youth, and the *Friend*, for young children. Each of these periodicals can be a valuable resource for anyone studying the lived religious experience of practicing Mormons. The Community of Christ has its own periodical, the *Herald*, published since 1860.

## ACADEMIC JOURNALS

Before reviewing current trends in monographs, I submit a quick review of major scholarly journals in the field. According to the SMH, the most-cited academic journal in Mormon studies is *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Founded in 1966, *Dialogue* has provided an academic forum for scholars interested in Mormon culture (including literary studies) and theology. Close on *Dialogue's* citation heels is *BYU Studies Quarterly (BYUSQ)*. *BYUSQ* began its run in 1959 and publishes articles on Mormon studies, culture, sociology, and Brigham Young University history. The next most-cited journal is *Utah Historical Quarterly (UHQ)*, which began publishing in 1928. *UHQ* focuses on the history of Utah, which in many cases is inseparable from the history of Mormonism. In spite of not seeing the most citations across its entire journal, the *Journal of Mormon History* (1974-present) is regarded as the premier journal in Mormon studies. It is the official journal of the Mormon History Association. The *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* (1981-present) is another important contributor to Mormon studies, focusing on early Mormon history and schismatic traditions, particularly the Community of Christ. The *Religious Educator* (2000-present) is a scholarly pedagogical journal focusing on teaching Mormon theology to youth and adults. In 2014, the annual *Mormon Studies Review* was launched, which presents scholarship and review essays on the state of Mormon studies as a field.

## CURRENT TRENDS IN SCHOLARSHIP

It is beyond the scope of this essay to list every major subfield in Mormon studies, but I discuss a handful that are popular in the scholarly zeitgeist. Currently, there are several Mormon studies academic conferences, such as *Mormon Scholars in the Humanities Conference*, sometimes co-sponsored by the *Association for Mormon Letters*, the *Mormon Studies Conference*, held annually at Utah Valley University, the now biannual *Church History Symposium*, sponsored by BYU and the LDS Church, the *John Whitmer Historical Association Conference*, focusing on early Mormon history and schismatic groups, and the premier *Mormon History Association Conference*, which welcomes studies related to Mormonism and all of its different facets. Many of the books highlighted in this essay received best book or biography honors through these associations. In addition to holding annual awards for best monograph or article in their focused fields, these conferences consistently have panels and papers discussing the following topics identified below.

### Works Covering the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

Until recently, Mormon studies scholarship was dominated by 19<sup>th</sup> century history. Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of the faith, and Brigham Young, Smith's successor in the LDS Church, governed the Church for almost half a century. Accordingly, most works in 19<sup>th</sup> century Mormonism rely heavily on sources and research related to these two colorful figures. In addition to the *Joseph Smith Papers* mentioned above, several

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/articles/about-the-project>.

biographies have been published on Joseph Smith. Two of these have had the greatest impact: Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* and Richard Bushman's *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*.<sup>21</sup> Both books take as their titles quotations attributed to Smith. Brodie's approach to Smith was a landmark in Mormon studies. She psychoanalyzed the farm boy prophet and attempted to write about his life in an academic way, whereas older biographies came closer to polemics. According to the *Studies in Mormon History* database, *No Man* is the second-highest cited work of secondary criticism. Contemporary scholars have found multiple flaws in Brodie's methodology and conclusions, so her work has fallen out of fashion considerably, but its impact on the field cannot be overstated. The premier Smith biography for scholars today is *Rough Stone Rolling*. Of the top ten most-cited works in SMH, Bushman's critically acclaimed biography, published less than fifteen years ago, is already number five. All other works in the top ten were published before 1995 and most before 1970. It is not outside of the realm of possibility that *Rough Stone Rolling* will one day be the most-cited work of criticism in Mormon studies.

As a counterpoint to the Smith biographies, Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery's *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* devotes itself to telling the story of Emma Smith, the first wife of Joseph Smith.<sup>22</sup> Emma was married to Joseph until his death, despite her opposition to her husband's polygamy. She would later sponsor their son, Joseph Smith III, as Smith's successor, leaving the LDS Church and laying the foundation for what would become the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The book spends most of its pages on the one major issue upon which Joseph and Emma disagreed: polygamy. Indeed, relatively little space is devoted to the thirty-five years Emma lived after Joseph was murdered. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, Newell and Avery's otherwise excellent contribution to the field is the 15<sup>th</sup> most-cited book in SMH.

As with Smith, Brigham Young has been the subject of a number of biographies. The most recent is *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* by John Turner.<sup>23</sup> Turner's work, while at times a bit tongue-in-cheek about Young's quirks, perhaps even sensational in parts, is a highly regarded biography of the religious leader with the most recent scholarship behind it. Young's most-cited biography, however, and indeed the 9<sup>th</sup> most-cited work in SMH, is *Brigham Young: American Moses* by Leonard Arrington.<sup>24</sup> Although over thirty years old, *American Moses* is still the standard Young biography in the field, in spite of its age and dated sources.

Polygamy, what Mormons officially refer to as *plural marriage*, is a major topic in 19<sup>th</sup> century Mormon studies. Practiced publically for close to forty years and privately for twenty years before that, the institution, famously called one of the "twin relics of barbarism" (alongside slavery), influenced every aspect of Mormon life in the second half of the century. While today the LDS Church consistently distances itself from the practice, which has been forbidden in the Church since 1890, the general public still commonly associates polygamy with Mormons. Historians and scholars focus on plural marriage because of its social and cultural impact on the membership of the church prior to, and immediately after, the conclusion of the practice. Of the 28,000 items in SMH, over 1,000 have the subject tag *plural marriage*. Not surprisingly the highest-cited monograph with *plural marriage* as its heading is Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom*.<sup>25</sup> This title concentrates on the economic history of the church during its first century. It is widely considered to be the first serious academic treatment of Mormonism, ushering in what would later be known as the New Mormon History, or a history dedicated to presenting the story of the Latter-day Saints to scholars to further the academic understanding of the faith

<sup>21</sup> Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, The Mormon Prophet* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1945); Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Linda King Newell and Valerie Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe, 1804-1879* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984).

<sup>23</sup> John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Knopf, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-Day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).

rather than for polemical motives. The next most-cited book about polygamy is Brodie's *No Man*. The third is a relatively new player in the field: Thomas Alexander's *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930*.<sup>26</sup> Alexander opens a new line of inquiry discussing the political and social changes in the Church after it denounced polygamy. It was during this period that the Church overcame its complicated relationship with the United States, and members instead sought to be seen and known as patriots and contributors of the growing national power.

Other important contributions to the study of polygamy and early Mormonism are Kathryn M. Daynes' *More Wives than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910* and Sarah Barringer Gordon's *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth Century America*.<sup>27</sup> Kathleen Flake lays the groundwork for 20<sup>th</sup>-century work in Mormonism and politics in her book *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle*.<sup>28</sup> Flake explores the debate over Reed Smoot, a practicing polygamist and elected senator. Additionally, Brian C. Hales's three-volume work *Joseph Smith's Polygamy* is the most up-to-date source on Smith's concept and practice of plural marriage.<sup>29</sup> Hales also published *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations After the Manifesto*, documenting the history of polygamy after the LDS Church banned it, including the rise of the schismatic group, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.<sup>30</sup> The most recent contribution to polygamy in Mormon studies is Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835-1870*.<sup>31</sup> Ulrich uses diaries, letters, and other primary sources to tell the story of polygamy from the perspectives of the women living it in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Utah.

Outside of the biographies of prominent LDS leaders and the subject of polygamy, LDS theology—particularly its growth over time—and the general Utah period of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Church has also received significant attention. For the Utah period of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Mormonism, Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom* and Alexander's *Mormonism in Transition*, both discussed above, are still the standouts in quality and citations. Spencer Fluhman's *A Peculiar People: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* and Patrick Mason's *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South* also discuss public perception of Mormonism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>32</sup>

Aside from titles already mentioned above, several important books have scrutinized LDS theology. Thomas F. O'Dea published *The Mormons* in 1957, reviewing various religious practices of the Mormons and how they relate to, are contrasted by, or are otherwise contextualized by American Christianity.<sup>33</sup> Sterling McMurrin continued this trajectory ten years later with *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion*.<sup>34</sup> Grant Underwood focused his work *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* on the millenarian theology of

<sup>26</sup> Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-Day Saints, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

<sup>27</sup> Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Studies in Legal History; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 3 vols. (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Brian C. Hales, *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835-1870* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> J. Spencer Fluhman, *A Peculiar People: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Patrick Q. Mason, *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957).

<sup>34</sup> Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965).

early Mormons in the context of other American religious traditions.<sup>35</sup> One final important contribution is Charles R. Harrell's *This is My Doctrine: The Development of Mormon Theology*.<sup>36</sup>

### Works Covering the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

Scholarship concentrating on the last 100 years of LDS history and culture tends to fall into the following major categories: LDS Church growth, public perception of Mormons, race and the LDS Church, women's studies, and interfaith dialogue. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was significant growth in Church membership reaching quickly the levels of one million, two million, and eventually ten million global marks in the latter half of the century. Gregory A. Prince's and William Roberts Wright's *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* tracks the shifts in Mormon leadership during the early period of this growth, including the consolidation of authority from radical pioneers in the wilderness to conservative capitalists in mainstream America.<sup>37</sup> J.B. Haws's *Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* documents the American perceptions of the Church and its members as they increasingly found themselves in the cultural spotlight, including myths and common misconceptions.<sup>38</sup>

Due to the Church's restriction on priesthood and temple ordinances for any persons of African descent until 1978, it goes without saying that the LDS church has had a complex history of race relations. The most-cited work in SMH regarding the subject of race is Armand L. Mauss' *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage*.<sup>39</sup> More recently, W. Paul Reeve published his study of the Church and its complex relationship with ethnicity and race in *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness*.<sup>40</sup> Reeve discusses the 19<sup>th</sup>-century tactic used by non-Mormons to define LDS church members as non-white in an effort to justify their poor treatment and violence toward Mormons before the Utah period. The LDS Church responded through various means to demonstrate their own whiteness, including what would later be known as the priesthood ban. Another important work, Russell W. Stevenson's *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism*, presents the story of LDS race relations and policies through documents and oral histories.<sup>41</sup> Finally, Jared Farmer's *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* focuses on the relationship between the Mormon settlers of Utah and the Native Americans in the region.<sup>42</sup> While some of these other studies on race and Mormonism touch on the Church's cultural and theological connection to indigenous populations (particularly North and South American and Pacific Islanders), Farmer concentrates primarily upon tribes in the Utah basin and colonization under Brigham Young.<sup>43</sup>

There has been a recent burgeoning interest in Mormon women's studies. Beginning with *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, most Mormon women's studies volumes have been

<sup>35</sup> Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>36</sup> Charles B. Harrell, *This Is My Doctrine: The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Gregory A. Prince and William Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> J. B. Haws, *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>41</sup> Russell W. Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism, 1830-2013* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> The Book of Mormon maintains that some of the ancestors of Native Americans were a group of trans-oceanic Jewish refugees who fled Jerusalem during the time of Nebuchadnezzar.



collections of essays by major Mormon studies scholars on a variety of Mormon women's experiences.<sup>44</sup> In 2016, two of these works were published: *Women and Mormonism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* and *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings*.<sup>45</sup> Most recently *Mormon Women's History: Beyond Biography* attempts to broaden the conversation surrounding Mormon women to include more than just biographies.<sup>46</sup>

To conclude this essay, I address another current publishing trend: interfaith dialogue and comparative religious studies. Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen published *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*.<sup>47</sup> Stephen H. Webb issued a call to Mormons and non-Mormons to be more understanding of each other in his *Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-day Saints*.<sup>48</sup> Later, Webb co-authored another work with Alonzo L. Gaskill: *Catholic and Mormon: A Theological Conversation*.<sup>49</sup> Other anthologies on Mormons in dialogue with Christians include *Talking Doctrine: Mormons and Evangelicals in Conversation* and the dialogue between Gerald R. McDermott and Robert L. Millet, published as *Claiming Christ: A Mormon-Evangelical Debate*.<sup>50</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The field of Mormon studies continues to grow. In the past twenty-five years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of journals and imprints that have published Mormon studies materials directed at an academic audience. While there are still polemical works being published, most scholarly studies of Mormonism are more concerned with understanding the various groups in the tradition than in justifying or attacking their history and theology. History continues to dominate this scholarly landscape, but there has also been significant development in sociology, literary studies, women studies, and theology. One of the great tasks of Mormon studies scholars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to dive into more global studies of Mormonism, examining the growth and history of the various schismatic groups in countries around the world.

<sup>44</sup> Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

<sup>45</sup> Kate Holbrook and Matthew Burton Bowman, eds., *Women and Mormonism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2016); Joanna Brooks, Rachel Hunt Steenblik, and Hannah Wheelwright, eds., *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>46</sup> Rachel Cope et al., *Mormon Women's History: Beyond Biography* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press Mormon Studies Series; Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> David L. Paulsen and Donald W. Musser, eds., *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007).

<sup>48</sup> Stephen H. Webb, *Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn From the Latter-Day Saints* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> Stephen H. Webb and Alonzo L. Gaskill, *Catholic and Mormon: A Theological Conversation* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Richard J. Mouw and Robert L. Millet, eds., *Talking Doctrine: Mormons and Evangelicals in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015); Robert L. Millet and Gerald R. McDermott, *Claiming Christ: A Mormon-Evangelical Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007).

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