

The Present State of Mormon Studies:  
An Inquiry Concerning the Development of an Academic Field

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**Abstract**

This thesis examines the development of the field of Mormon studies, and the concomitant shift in authority from religious official to scholar. Scholars are continually reminded that they do not work in a vacuum. They are both affected by, and have an effect on, the religious groups which they select as their subjects of investigation. In the development of an academic field, although scholars perform much of the labour, religious practitioners can shape the direction the field takes. Officials, (by supporting schools, Chairs and publications) and believers (by their active participation in or reaction to scholarship) play a major role in determining which sorts of investigations are conducted, and ultimately what sort of presentation of the group is produced. My thesis interrogates the role that scholars and officials play in constructing religious identity, and asks what responsibility scholars have (if any) in recognizing how church involvement can shape research.

July 27, 2016

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## 1.0 Framing the Issues

### 1.1 Some Essential Questions

One of the subtler challenges faced by scholars of religion are the ways that their research impacts the subjects of their study. In light of this recognized impact, do scholars have a responsibility to address this in their writing? Do academics have a responsibility to present a religious group in a *positive* light? Do they have an obligation to defend religious groups against negative, unfounded stereotypes, whether they appear in media or scholarship? Is there a requirement to construct clear lines of demarcation between ‘orthodox’ Christianity and other so-called ‘heterodox’ groups such as Mormonism? These will be the framing questions for this project.

Another project which addressed these questions was a 2012 issue of the journal *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*<sup>1</sup>. The articles were all responding to an essay by Aaron Hughes titled “The Study of Islam Before and After September 11: A Provocation”. Hughes’ essay challenged the lack of critical study in the field of Islamic studies. The author’s main criticism of scholars in the field is that they create a normative conception of Islam and then dismiss all other appearances of Islam (such as the ideologies held by violent terrorists) as ‘inauthentic’<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Russell McCutcheon explains in the introduction to this series of articles, that the idea for such an issue emerged when Aaron Hughes’s essay was rejected for publication in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. McCutcheon explains that he, as one of the three blind reviewers of Hughes’ essay, was approached by Matt Day, then-editor of *MTSR*. Day’s idea was to print the original essay, McCutcheon’s review, and the other two scathing reviews, along with additional commentary. The two other reviewers refused to participate and remain anonymous, but McCutcheon eagerly supported the project as it “would allow readers to consider for themselves not only the state of Islamic studies within the academic study of religion but also how the so-called blind peer review process in our field functions, i.e., to consider the (often unstated but always policed) standards that determine what counts as scholarship (and what... is dismissed as, say, journalism)” (McCutcheon, Russell T., “The State of Islamic Studies in the Study of Religion: An Introduction” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 24 2012: 309-310).

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, Aaron W., “The Study of Islam Before and After September 11: A Provocation” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 24 2012: 316-17.

Although this discussion centred around the work conducted in the field of Islamic studies, I found the discussion to be applicable to religious studies more broadly. The issues which Hughes claims are presently plaguing the field are many of the same issues with which the field of Mormon Studies is wrestling. Hughes argues that scholars have been hesitant to critically evaluate the *Qur'an* and the life of Muhammad, and that only certain research topics are perceived as permissible. Although Mormon Studies does not share the same resistance to interrogating the text or prophet figure of the group, there have been issues over which research projects receive support. In the case of Mormon Studies, certain topics have historically been ignored and at other times scholars have been dismissed from universities for views which were deemed controversial.

The issue of essentialism, is much more prominent in Islamic studies in light of recent global events, (as suggested by Hughes' title), yet Mormonism also faces concerns regarding which 'Mormonism' is seen as 'normative'. Scholars who write about Mormons are most commonly discussing members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church for short). The LDS Church is the largest body in Mormonism, but it is hardly the only face of the religion. When news breaks about police breaking up a polygamous cult (such as Warren Jeffs, former President of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [FLDS Church] or the polygamist group in Bountiful, British Columbia) LDS Church officials are quick to remind the media that the church officially renounced the practice of plural marriage more than a century ago<sup>3</sup>. The Church's website

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<sup>3</sup> The entry on polygamy in the LDS Church's *Newsroom* outlines their stance that groups such as the FLDS and other polygamous sects are not affiliated with Mormonism. "Polygamous groups and individuals in and around Utah often cause confusion for casual observers and for visiting news media. The polygamists and polygamist organizations in parts of the western United States and Canada have no affiliation whatsoever with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, despite the fact that the term

has a style guide for writers on how to refer to the group which outlines the sharp distinctions they have attempted to draw. “When referring to people or organizations that practice polygamy, the terms ‘Mormons,’ ‘Mormon fundamentalist,’ ‘Mormon dissidents,’ etc. are incorrect”<sup>4</sup>. What are *scholars* to make of such groups however – are they Mormons or non-Mormons?<sup>5</sup> If a group asserts that it is Mormon, do scholars in Mormon have an obligation to fit this presentation of the group into a broader definition of ‘Mormonism’ and validate this claim?

Outlining the specific tensions of diversity within Mormonism, Mormon Studies scholar Robert Flanders writes: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has done its best to ignore and even deny the existence of any devotees...who are not in its own fellowship, while the Reorganized Church [the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or RLDS Church for short] has achieved its traditional identity by the affirmation, ‘we are not Mormons’”<sup>6</sup>. Flanders here adds an additional layer to the confusion. How does a scholar separate two or more groups who claim to share many of the same texts and figures, yet have radically different interpretations of their meaning?<sup>7</sup>

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"Mormon" — widely understood to be a nickname for Latter-day Saints — is sometimes incorrectly applied to them” (“Polygamy” *Newsroom* The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Last updated February 27 2012 (<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/topic/polygamy>).

<sup>4</sup> “Style Guide, The Name of the Church” *Newsroom* Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints last updated: February 21, 2012 (<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/style-guide>)

<sup>5</sup> Providing a comparison in Islamic studies, Hughes writes: “when certain actors who call themselves Muslims ‘misinterpret’ their own religion in ways that do not follow liberal norms it becomes a ‘travesty,’ an aberration of an authentic and presumably original teaching” (Hughes, 325).

<sup>6</sup> Flanders, Robert “Some Reflections on the New Mormon History” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 9 (1974): 39. The RLDS is one of the numerous splinter groups who broke off from the LDS Church.

<sup>7</sup> Jan Shipps comments on these tensions referring to an incident at one meeting of the Mormon History Association when she recommended that the conclusion to the meeting include a paper on worship in Nauvoo, Illinois (an early settlement of the LDS Church). Shipps comments: “The very mixed response this suggestion received made it evident to me that there was a lot more to the distinction between Latter-day Saints and Latter Day Saints than the belief of the ‘Brighamites’ that Joseph Smith introduced polygamy

Outlining how this diversity manifests itself in scholarship, prominent Mormon historian Jan Shipps refers to the Mormon History Association, where RLDS, LDS and non-Mormon scholars co-exist. This requires LDS members to evaluate the scholarship of RLDS members; non-Mormons to evaluate the work of LDS members; and all other combinations of interplay between perspectives<sup>8</sup>.

Aaron Hughes expands on the questions scholars must often ask themselves when studying religious groups. For example, should it matter if a scholar is an insider or an outsider? What must an outsider do in order to be accepted by insiders? Do these outsiders hold any authority? Hughes adds: “What is the primary responsibility of the professional Islamicist in the contemporary university...Is it to show the human face of Islam in the classroom? Is it to mediate tensions...? Is it to be a resource for the local media?”<sup>9</sup>. Scholars often represent the ultimate authority in how religions are presented in the media, based on their positioning at public universities and their claims of maintaining complete objectivity. This is an authority which has only recently been removed from church officials.

Questions surrounding the struggle for authority fascinated me as I began my research for this thesis project. I was first drawn to the study of Mormonism as it seemed to be the group with the most interesting blends of in- and out-group classifications separating what is and is not Mormonism. Philip Barlow notes that this complicated relationship with Christianity is a reason why many scholars are drawn to study Mormonism in the first

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and the belief of the ‘Josephites’ that Brigham Young did” (Shipps, Jan “An ‘Inside-Outsider’ in Zion” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (1982): 156).

<sup>8</sup> Shipps (1982): 155.

<sup>9</sup> (Hughes, 320).



place. “The movement is sufficiently alien for comparative interpretation to be necessary, sufficiently familiar for comparative interpretation to be possible, and sufficiently complex to challenge most able historical minds”<sup>10</sup>. In addition to Mormonism offering scholars a religious group that represents the construction of *other*, they are also a group with a tremendous amount of literature for the scholar to examine. Martin Marty explains: “Mormon events...occurred inside a history chronicled by small-town newspaper editors, diarists, hostile letter writers, contemporary historians”<sup>11</sup>. The abundance of primary source material tracing Mormonism’s early history (whether hostile or supportive of the group) demonstrate the ways insiders and outsiders perceived of the group throughout history and allows for investigations of issues central to Christianity and American history and is therefore an attractive case study for many Western scholars.

Much like the 2012 issue of *MTSR*, my thesis will attempt to address the most pressing concerns in the field of Mormon Studies, and analyze what this can reveal about how scholars study religion in general. Religious studies scholars must be self-reflective in order to be aware of the tensions which affects the work produced in their field. Scholars now play a major role in identity construction and legitimization for religious groups. Aware of the desires of religious groups to be presented in the best way possible, scholars must act as critical caretakers, so that their research is not unduly distorted. Further, scholars must be aware of their own motivations for classifying groups in the way they do, whether to defend their own faith community or boost the apparent relevance of their work.

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<sup>10</sup> Barlow, Philip “Jan Shipps and the Mainstreaming of Mormon Studies” *Church History* 73.2 (2004): 424-425.

<sup>11</sup> Marty, Martin E., “Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography” in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* ed. George D. Smith (Signature Books: Salt Lake City, 1992): 5.

Scholars must continually re-visit the development of their respective fields in order to be critically aware of the way these tensions have shaped the research produced.

I am borrowing the term critical caretaker from Atalia Omer and her response to Russell McCutcheon's 2001 book *Critics Not Caretakers*. McCutcheon argues that Religious Studies scholars should act as critics, and not privilege the beliefs and truth claims of the religious groups in question. He places *critics* in distinction to *caretakers*, who are scholars he labels as "naïve, well-meaning hermeneuts"<sup>12</sup>. He argues that scholars should have complete 'ownership of meanings' in the identity construction of religious groups<sup>13</sup>. Omer, in the title of her response to McCutcheon asks: "Can a Critic Be a Caretaker too?"<sup>14</sup>. Classifying the scholar's role as a critical caretaker allows for a recognition of the tensions caused by balancing the desires of faith communities and academic rigor. This is an important role for the scholar to serve because taxonomic theorizing is a very abstract process on the surface, but the consequences of the conclusions are very real. Religious groups being considered either mainstream or marginal can impact the way a group is treated. These consequences can be informal (such as certain groups being generally disparaged in popular media) or formal (such as the way governments classify groups as either worthy or unworthy of charitable tax status).

Recognizing the real-life consequences of public perception underscores why the scholar's role as critical caretaker is a significant one. If groups can either gain or lose benefits, there will understandably be competition among groups for the most rewards.

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<sup>12</sup> McCutcheon, Russell T., *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001): 17.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, xi.

<sup>14</sup> Omer, Atalia "Can a Critic Be a Caretaker too? Religion, Conflict, and Conflict Transformation" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79.2 (2011): 459-496.

Scholars need to at times be caretakers, to ensure that a group who is being denounced or punished have advocates to argue for equal treatment. Scholars must be critical at the same time however, in recognition of the desire religious groups have to appear mainstream. They must be critical to ensure that their work is not being distorted to serve the purposes of said group. An important part of being a critical caretaker is that scholars continually revisit the motivations behind the fundamental assumptions so often taken for granted in their field.

### **1.1.1 A Brief History of Mormonism<sup>15</sup>**

Rather than tracing the history of Mormonism, my thesis will attempt to trace the history of Mormon Studies, and in particular, the way scholars have written about Mormonism, and how this has contributed to the perception of a ‘normative’ Mormonism. In order to trace these developments, however, a brief history of the group is required<sup>16</sup>. The phases of Mormonism’s development are roughly divided into a period of movement, followed by a period of consolidation. After the initial revelations were announced by Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon was published in 1830, the group moved to increasingly less-developed parts of the country seeking peaceful settlement<sup>17</sup>. The proselytizing impulse was present in Mormonism from its earliest days, and missionaries were sent throughout the United States and Canada, and to England to attract converts to

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<sup>15</sup> This section covers the most salient features of Mormon history for the purpose of my thesis. For a more in-depth chronology of Mormon history, please refer to the timeline in Appendix A.

<sup>16</sup> For a more comprehensive history of the LDS Church, I recommend *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* by Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton (New York: Knopf, 1979).

<sup>17</sup> Smith continued to receive a number of visions from various heavenly figures. In one of these visions, he was instructed to translate a new testament from God (the Book of Mormon) and was charged with founding a new church. The translation process began in 1827, and took a number of years. Smith was aided by Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris, who would count themselves among the first converts, after Smith’s wife and family.

the new church. When the group arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in the 1850s, a second period, of consolidation developed which saw the group formalize its leadership structure and develop a distinctly ‘Mormon cultural region’ in Utah<sup>18</sup>.

Mormons found their isolation from Gentiles (the term Mormons use to refer to non-Mormons) in Utah interrupted in the latter part of the nineteenth century. As non-Mormons came into more frequent contact with Mormon communities, charges such as polygamy and theocracy ruling Utah were amplified. Mormons were forced to abandon the practice of polygamy as a result of federal legislation and raids on Mormon households<sup>19</sup>. After Utah gained statehood in 1896, Mormons engaged in the gradual process of integration with mainstream America. The missions established abroad which initially encouraged all new converts to travel to Utah and settle in ‘Zion’, shifted their policy to encourage Mormons to build up the church in whichever community they already lived.

It is obviously difficult to gauge when a group has gained ‘mainstream’ status, but in the field of Mormon Studies, a common example most scholars refer to is the Presidential campaign of Mitt Romney in 2012<sup>20</sup>. His success late into the Republican primary season

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<sup>18</sup> This is a term commonly used to define Utah and the surrounding states. Early in Mormon history, the cultural region translated to church involvement in city planning and politics. The term is still used, but now instead defines a region of the country where Mormons make up a majority of the population (Meinig, D.W., “The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55.2 1965: 201). Meinig also points out that early Mormon settlements reached as far north as Canada, as far south as Mexico and as far west as the Pacific Ocean (ibid, 198).

<sup>19</sup> For a more thorough understanding of how this saga played out, I recommend Sarah Barringer Gordon’s comprehensive analysis in her book *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Other conditions that Utah needed to meet in order to gain the status of statehood were to cede all the church’s assets to the federal government and to repeal women’s suffrage.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of more recent developments in the church, (including the 2012 Presidential campaign of Mitt Romney and the Broadway play *Book of Mormon*) I recommend *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* by J.B. Haws (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

in 2008 and his nomination as candidate in 2012 are looked on by many as a sign that a religion which was once cast as a devious cult was now a suitable background for a Presidential candidate. This transformation from periphery to centre is never permanent however, as shows such as *Sister Wives*<sup>21</sup> or *Big Love*<sup>22</sup> demonstrate that one can easily be pushed back to the periphery in the popular imagination.

## 1.2 Mormon Studies as a Field

A popular subject of discussion in scholarship concerns whether Mormonism is an American religious tradition, a unique Christian denomination, a new world religion, or a dangerous sect, among other possible designations. Mormonism's current complicated placement is analogous to the study of religion in the field's earliest days. Tomoko Masuzawa, in *The Invention of World Religions*, refers to a 'fundamental question' that defined the field. Masuzawa writes: "Where is the line of demarcation between Christianity and other religions? In other words, what groups and nations are denominations within Christianity, and which ones are religions external to it?"<sup>23</sup>. One of the most important observations made by Masuzawa is that as each new group was classified under the banner of *religionwissenschaft* it was interpreted as a validation of that group's success in the world. This is a major factor which has motivated much of the LDS Church's involvement in Mormon Studies scholarship. When universities emerged as the place where religious identities are studied and constructed, and the locus of

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<sup>21</sup> *Sister Wives* Executive prod. Bill Hayes. The Learning Channel, Nevada: 2010. Television.

<sup>22</sup> *Big Love* Executive prod. Mark V. Olsen and Will Scheffer. Home Box Office, California: 2006. Television.

<sup>23</sup> Masuzawa, Tomoko *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005): 57.

authority shifted from religious official to scholar, officials attempted to find as many ways as possible to continue take part in their own group's identity construction. In regards to Mormonism's relationship with Christianity, the 'lines of demarcation' are not yet clear. When the language of NRMs are applied to the study of Mormonism, the lines between Mormonism and Christianity become even more blurred. Depending on the classification, one either validates or denies a status as Christian.

The lines of demarcation *within* Mormonism are also unclear. As mentioned, although members of the of 'Reorganized' or RLDS Church at times assert that they are not Mormon, such splinter groups are often treated under the umbrella of Mormon Studies<sup>24</sup>. The inclusion of such groups under the banner of Mormonism in scholarship represents a truth claim on behalf of scholars. Such tensions raise the question of who has, (or who should have), the authority to make these declarations.

Wiles argues that the LDS Church, as the largest body within Mormonism, has the most to lose when bodies such as the FLDS, who continue to practice polygamy, are included in scholarship under the banner of Mormonism.

If Mormonism were to be accepted more widely as a world religion, its diversity would assuredly be a more prominent aspect of its presentation within textbooks and dictionaries of religion. The LDS Church and some of its academic functionaries...might not be eager to lose their designation as the sole important face of Mormonism<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Jan Shipps offers an example of how this shared history played a role in the field "The archives of the RLDS Church in Independence, Missouri, were also opened up to historians working on Mormon history. This was important since some of the critical documentary resources on early Mormonism are in the RLDS Church Archives (Shipps, Jan "Review: Richard Lyman Bushman, the Story of Joseph Smith and Mormonism, and the New Mormon History" *The Journal of American History* 94.2 2007: 502).

<sup>25</sup> Wiles, Lee "Mormonism and the World Religions Discourse: Contesting the Boundaries of Comparative Religion's Prevailing Taxonomy" *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 27 (2015): 21-22.

Scholars employed at BYU or other academic ‘functionaries’ have attempted to present the LDS Church as the monolithic face of Mormonism. As more scholars weigh in on whether they classify non-LDS groups as Mormons or not, they participate in a shift of authority, from the church to scholars.

### **1.2.1 What is Mormon Studies?**

For a definition of what constitutes Mormon Studies, I turn to Ann Taves who describes it as the “range of ways in which the study of Mormonism could be position[ed] within various subfields within the academy”<sup>26</sup>. As in other fields within religious studies, Mormon Studies refers to an array of scholarship across disciplines (such as history, anthropology, textual studies, gender studies, etc.), all focusing on the same religious group<sup>27</sup>.

Examining the various schools which offer programs or courses in Mormon Studies reveals that the group is studied in very different ways throughout the United States. At some schools, such as Claremont Graduate University, Chairs of Mormon Studies have been established. Claremont, and the handful of other schools which have Chairs in Mormon Studies, represent unique cases, but there are still a broader variety of schools that place an emphasis on Mormon Studies through courses offered. Some of these courses examine Mormonism explicitly (such as the ‘Anthropology of Mormonism’, offered briefly at the University of Alabama) while others devote a portion of the semester to the

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<sup>26</sup> Fluhman, Spencer J. and Ann Taves “Mormon Studies in the Academy: A Conversation between Ann Taves and Spencer Fluhman” *Mormon Studies Review* (2014): 10.

<sup>27</sup> As mentioned, the definition of which groups specifically the term ‘Mormonism’ includes is unclear and contested. For the purposes of this thesis, I apply the term Mormon Studies to refer to studies of the LDS, RLDS, or the many smaller sects that make up the broad umbrella of ‘Mormondom’.

group (such as courses on ‘Religion in America’). Such courses are offered through Religious Studies, History or Anthropology departments, depending on the university. Different approaches to Mormonism can produce different perceptions of what ‘Mormonism’ represents.

### **1.2.2 Mormon Identity in Scholarship**

The way in which scholars validate Mormon truth claims largely concern whether or not it is ‘Christian’. Due to the historical dominance of Christianity in Western thought, this claim is often contested through the language of the ‘other’. Mormonism holds some doctrines which separate it from Christianity, normatively defined, and it is therefore understandable that it is often classified as *other*. There is nothing to suggest, however, that Mormonism should be seen as any more *other* as opposed to Buddhism or Hinduism. Jonathan Z. Smith contextualizes Mormonism’s difference, writing:

[R]ather than the remote ‘other’, being perceived as problematic or dangerous, it is the proximate ‘other’, the near neighbor, who is most troublesome. That is to say, while difference or ‘otherness’ may be perceived as being either LIKE-US or NOT-LIKE-US, it becomes most problematic when it is TOO-MUCH-LIKE-US or when it claims to BE-US. It is here that the real urgency of theories of the ‘other’ emerges, called forth not so much by a requirement to place difference, but rather by an effort to situate ourselves<sup>28</sup>.

Mormonism’s unique historical relationship with Christianity (looking TOO-MUCH-LIKE-US) as well as the repeated claims by Mormon officials of their connection to Christianity (claims to BE-US), places Mormonism as the proximate *other* and has made its categorization a hotly contested topic.

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<sup>28</sup> Smith, Jonathan Z., “Differential Equations: On Construction of the Other” in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 245.



Concerning construction of the ‘other’, Smith also writes, “the focus of the ‘other’ as unintelligible has led, necessarily, to ‘their’ silence and ‘our’ speech”<sup>29</sup>. The fact that Mormons are such active participants in the discourse surrounding Mormon Studies places them as an exception to this rule. In addition to Mormons valuing (and at times canonizing) their own history, another contributing factor behind their extensive participation stems from the group’s many decades spent seeking legitimacy amongst fellow Americans. The church has made extensive efforts to shape the way in which it is represented in scholarship, which suggests that their academic participation has been used as an instrument of legitimization and an attempt to play an active role in shaping how they are perceived<sup>30</sup>.

### **1.3 Methodology**

My approach in this thesis is inspired in part by Paul Bowlby’s 2001 book *Religious Studies in Atlantic Canada: A State-of-the-Art Review*. This book was one in a series undertaken by Canadian Society for the Study of Religion including volumes on all provinces<sup>31</sup>. My most recent year of study at St. Mary’s University meant that the volume on Atlantic Canada covered the religious studies departments with which I was most familiar. This book was influential in the development of my project because of the important observations Bowlby makes regarding the field of religious studies, such as the

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<sup>29</sup> Smith, 241.

<sup>30</sup> Perry, Seth “An Outsider Looks in at Mormonism” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 52.22 (2006): 4.

<sup>31</sup> Bowlby, W.R. *Religious Studies in Atlantic Canada: A State-of-the-Art Review* with Tom Faulkner Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001. Provinces such as Ontario and Alberta received individual volumes, while Manitoba and Saskatchewan, like Atlantic Canada, were treated in regional volumes.

importance of the religious communities surrounding schools and general shifts in focus over time.

In regards to the development of Mormon Studies, schools in Utah such as Brigham Young University (BYU) and Utah State University, have played a major role, because of the large number of Mormons who live in the surrounding area. Due to the interests of students (and in the case of BYU, agendas set forth by the church), these schools were among the first in the country to offer courses in Mormon history or theology. Referring to the influence a local religious community can have, Bowlby writes: “it is, then, a historical fact that the vast majority of religious studies departments in the Atlantic region are heir...to the significance of Christianity in their respective universities”<sup>32</sup>. Of particular relevance in Bowlby’s examination is the case of The Memorial University of Newfoundland. In 2001, Memorial was the largest religious studies program in the region, and the only one to offer a graduate degree in religious studies. Bowlby explains that this growth was due in part to the nature of religion and education in the province<sup>33</sup>. Schools in the region required teachers that could teach religion, and therefore many students needed to take courses in religious studies, even if this was not their major. These particular motivations for the study of religion led to Memorial becoming one of the largest religious studies programs in the region.

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<sup>32</sup> (Bowlby, W.R. *Religious Studies in Atlantic Canada: A State-of-the-Art Review* with Tom Faulkner Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001, 10). Bowlby expands: “the state of the art of the field is affected by four principal(*sic*) factors: the founding heritage of the institutions...; the fate of that founding heritage as universities became publicly funded institutions...; the location of religious studies in the degree requirements of the institutions; and the evolution of its relation to the national and international state of the study of religion” (ibid, 14-15).

<sup>33</sup> Bowlby adds: “Memorial University was not...a religious...university. The public university existed, however, in the midst of an education system that was run by churches. The demand from the various religious denominations was for teachers trained in Christian scripture and tradition to teach religion in the schools” (Bowlby, 49).

Parallels can be drawn between the situation of Memorial and schools in Utah. When Jan Shipps, (who was obtaining her degree in Education at Utah State University) began her first placement, (teaching nineteenth century Utah history at a local secondary school), she discovered that she required at least a familiarity with Mormon history<sup>34</sup>. BYU and other schools in Utah are the most prominent in Mormon Studies due to their roots, and even continuing ties, with the religious communities of their surrounding population<sup>35</sup>.

Another important observation made by Bowlby is that individual scholars can often be the driving force behind widespread shifts at the departmental level. Bowlby explains, for example, that for the most part schools only offered courses on Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism after specialists were hired in these fields. In Mormon Studies, an analogy can be found in the case of Jan Shipps. Despite the fact that she worked outside of the Mormon culture region at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), Shipps managed to build up the resources of the school in the area of Mormon Studies<sup>36</sup>. University of Illinois Press, who published Shipps' first book, also became a prominent publishing house in the field of Mormon Studies.

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<sup>34</sup> Shipps, (1982): 147.

<sup>35</sup> The development of Brigham Young University, which is "founded, supported, and guided by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" will be dealt with in detail below ("BYU Mission Statement" [http://aims.byu.edu/mission\\_statement](http://aims.byu.edu/mission_statement)). Church officials have certain desires as to what they would like to students to learn, and from what view data should be approached. Similarly, students who grew up in a particular religious group have particular desires in their academic investigations.

<sup>36</sup> In a 1982 essay, reflecting on her academic career, Shipps writes: "In Bloomington, [I] made so many library requests for LDS book purchases that once when Mike Quinn came through and I took him over to see the Mormon section at the Indiana University Library, he said that it was better than the general Mormon collection at Yale" (Shipps, (1982): 152). Although Yale lies outside the Mormon sphere as well, this example demonstrates how a single scholar can transform a department based on their individual research, output and prestige.

My project was also guided by Harold Coward's more recent book *Fifty Years of Religious Studies in Canada*<sup>37</sup>. Coward highlights a number of developments which are useful in examining Mormon Studies. Firstly, Coward notes that before religious studies departments were established, many schools housed scholars of religion in a variety of departments, which affected the approach each school took to religion<sup>38</sup>. Secondly, many of the scholars whom Coward discusses as important figures in the field were often affiliated with one another through either McMaster University or the University of Calgary. One reason for the prominence of McMaster and Calgary is that such schools promoted a broader and more rigorous training for graduate students, better preparing them for careers as professors in the field<sup>39</sup>. It is common for fields in scholarship to have a small number of schools (or publishing houses) which represent a majority of work in the field. In the case of Mormon Studies, these prominent centres are best represented by schools such as Brigham Young University, Utah State University, or the University of Illinois Press. My thesis will demonstrate that the concerted efforts made by these institutions placed them as influential actors in the shaping of the field. The growth of schools and

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<sup>37</sup> Coward, Harold *Fifty Years of Religious Studies in Canada: A Personal Retrospective* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014). Coward first received a Bachelor of Divinity degree followed by a Master of Arts degree from the University of Alberta in the late 1960s. In the early 1970s, Coward earned his doctorate degree in Philosophy from McMaster University. Coward's first position was at the University of Calgary, where he played a major role in the growth of the religious studies department there. Coward later moved to the University of Victoria where he helped to establish the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society. This book reflects on these experiences and places them in the broader context of the field in Canada.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Coward explains that the reason he chose to travel to McMaster for his Ph.D. was because McMaster offered the best training in East Asian philosophy at a time when most schools were devoted to Christian theology. McMaster's greater focus in this area was largely a result of one important faculty member.

<sup>39</sup> Coward, 202. The conscious choices, to combine course requirements in Eastern and Western traditions made its graduates well-rounded and highly sought after job candidates.

publishing houses supporting the field of religious studies led to an increased role for the scholar to play in defining and describing religious groups.

In his examination, Coward relies primarily on the departments formed and courses offered as his data to measure the growth and development of religious studies at Canadian universities. In a similar fashion, my thesis will examine university chairs, professorships, departments, and courses to trace the development of Mormon Studies. Since I am dealing with a broader field, there will not be as much detail as Coward devotes to individual schools, but I will analyze the broad trends in Mormon Studies. In addition to these data sets, I will also examine academic books, associations, journals, conferences and other publications and analyze what they reveal about the development of academic ‘authority’ in Mormon Studies. As Mormon Studies became a more prominent field in academia, there was a resultant shift in authority, from church officials to scholars.

Another scholar informing my research has been Leonard Arrington<sup>40</sup>. In 1967, Arrington published the essay “The Founding of the L.D.S. Institutes of Religion”, which detailed an educational program that the church began in 1926. In 1983, he published an essay titled, “Reflections on the Founding of and Purpose of the Mormon History Association, 1965-1983”, which provides an excellent insider perspective of what is now one of the major associations in the field of Mormon Studies. It is reflective papers such as those that are of the most direct relevance for my project. Most relevant, is Arrington’s

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<sup>40</sup> Arrington first worked as a professor of economic history at the University of Utah from 1946 until 1972. He then served until 1987 as professor of American History at Brigham Young University. Arrington was the founding President of the Mormon History Association starting in 1965 and was appointed official LDS Church Historian in 1972 (Mauss, Armand L., “Sociological Perspectives on the Mormon Subculture” *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984): 443). Noting the significance of this appointment, Armand Mauss writes that Arrington was “the first professional scholar ever to hold that post in the Mormon Church” (ibid).

1969 essay “The Intellectual Tradition of the Latter-Day Saints”, in which he outlines four stages in Mormonism’s intellectual tradition. He termed these “the formative stage, the stage of elaboration, the purification stage, and the stage of creative adaptation”<sup>41</sup>.

Since Arrington’s *phases* differ slightly from the *periods* of my project, a brief explanation is necessary. The first period in Mormon academic development that I identify spans from 1830-1890. This span of 60 years encapsulates the *formative, elaboration and purification stages* proposed in Arrington’s paper. Arrington’s fourth *stage, creative adaptation*, begins with the granting of statehood to Utah in 1896 and continued to the time of Arrington’s writing in 1969. This coincides with the second period which I identify. The third period of Mormon scholarship which I identify (1950-present) begins only two decades before Arrington first proposed his stages, and continues long after the publication of Arrington’s essay. Noting that Arrington denotes his spans of time as *stages* while my thesis uses the term *periods* should avoid any confusion.

### **1.3.1 Insiders and Outsiders and the Struggle for Objectivity**

My treatment of the history and development of Mormon Studies serves as just one example of how a field can evolve in religious studies. David Chidester’s book *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion*, offers another example. Chidester traces the unique development of comparative religion and the way religious groups from Africa (and specifically South Africa) were treated in scholarship. Chidester provides an extensive description of the emic and etic approaches to the field and the subsequent struggle over

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<sup>41</sup> Arrington, Leonard J., “The Intellectual Tradition of the Latter-Day Saints” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4.1 (1969): 16.

authority. Similar to Mormon Studies, both fields witnessed transformations as insiders started to participate in the academic discourse rather than simply being its subjects<sup>42</sup>.

My thesis focusses on the ongoing academic discussion surrounding Mormonism, but the implications of such discussions do not involve only scholars. Members of the LDS Church and other Mormons have also played a significant role. The church has had an influence over the academic discourse through funding students to study abroad, the establishment of centres of education, and, at times, the dismissal or excommunication of Mormon scholars who have challenged official church doctrines in their teaching or research.

The LDS Church's active involvement in Mormon Studies has also influenced which work was approved for publication<sup>43</sup>. One significant episode in the history of Mormon Studies was a sixteen-volume history of the LDS Church that Arrington had proposed to church officials. This project was initially approved for publication by the Deseret Book Company, the church's official publishing press. Arrington reached out to a number of scholars and proceeded, "signing contracts with sixteen Mormon scholars and authors located at various universities throughout the nation"<sup>44</sup>. This project, initiated and funded by the church, represented a publishing opportunity for numerous scholars. The project

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<sup>42</sup> Chidester, David *Empire of Religion: Imperialism & Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). Chidester writes: "Henri-Alexandre Junod interacted with imperial theorists, both British and French, and engaged with indigenous Africans who were undergoing dramatic social change...the African political leaders...in 1909 were emblematic of emerging intellectuals *refusing to be data* and seeking to *alter the terms of engagement* in producing knowledge about African life" (Chidester, 190, italics added).

<sup>43</sup> Davis Bitton, who worked under Leonard Arrington when he was Church Historian explained that both scholars were instructed to leave a chapter on polygamy out of a book, even after reworking their original draft (Bitton, Davis "Ten Years in Camelot: A Personal Memoir" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 1983: 13).

<sup>44</sup> Arrington, Leonard J., "Historian as Entrepreneur: A Personal Essay" *BYU Studies* 17 (1977): 12.

was ultimately shut down however, when church officials decided that the work, because of its academic approach, did not accurately reflect the sacred history of the church<sup>45</sup>. This example encapsulates the back-and-forth relationship that Mormon officials have had with scholarship. Scholarly writing to some degree served as an instrument of legitimization for the church. The more that church officials find Mormonism exposed to critical claims in scholarship however, there is a reluctance to participate.

In addition to the direct influence church officials have had on the field, members of the church have also played an important role<sup>46</sup>. As with all academic fields, research does not take place in a vacuum, and the general public often responds to the work produced by scholars. Particularly in religious studies, where scholars examine the beliefs that others hold sacred, the claims made by scholars are at times rejected by believers, who feel their universal truth claims are immune to such base academic inquiries<sup>47</sup>. Although Mormons, like many other religious subjects, at times disagree with the work produced by scholars of religion, their rejection of these claims does not always influence which academic material is published. Through church publications or the work at BYU, however, the church is able to shape in how Mormonism is presented in scholarship.

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<sup>45</sup> Shipps, Jan “Review: Richard Lyman Bushman, the Story of Joseph Smith and Mormonism, and the New Mormon History” *The Journal of American History* 94.2 (2007): 505. Shipps adds: “because they were too professional, something about the new accounts of Mormon history kept them from promoting faith” (ibid, 506).

<sup>46</sup> Since the Mormon church has a lay ministry, and all ‘active’ Mormon males are ordained members of the priesthood, it is difficult to make the distinction between clergy and laity. Throughout this thesis, I use the term Mormon officials to refer to members of the various arms of church hierarchy, including administrative positions in the school system. I use the term Mormon scholars to refer to members of a Mormon church who do not fill such positions.

<sup>47</sup> Marty, Martin E., “Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography” in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* ed. George D. Smith (Signature Books: Salt Lake City, 1992): 2.



#### **1.4 Overview of Historical Periods**

In order to divide the large span of my research, I point to three key periods that aid in understanding how the dominant perception scholars have held of Mormons has shifted. The first period begins with the founding of Mormonism in the 1830s and continues until the 1890s, when the perception of Mormons (both inside and outside the group) is that they were different from other Christians. The second period I have traced from the 1890s until the 1950s, when Mormons began to move from the periphery to the centre in popular perception. The third period starts in the 1950s and continues through the present. This represents the most complex period when perceptions of Mormons were split between mainstream and marginal. This thesis will examine how Mormons were able to achieve this transformation from ‘crazy outsiders’ to the insider religion. There were numerous factors that contributed to this shift, but my thesis will focus on the role played by university scholarship, as an instrument of legitimization.

These periods are obviously more fluid than their start and end dates suggest. For example, the LDS Church officially renounced polygamy in 1890 and was granted statehood in 1896. Both of these events are representative of a conscious effort on the part of Mormons to start integrating within mainstream America and suggests that the transition between periods was gradual. Similarly, the final period, which is marked by general shifts in how scholars began to study religions, has no singular event which separates a ‘before’ and ‘after’ stage. For this reason, I have distinguished this period as roughly beginning in the 1950s.

Historian Grant Underwood acknowledges that many scholars point to the renunciation of polygamy as a watershed moment in Mormonism's transition to the mainstream<sup>48</sup>. Underwood points out however, that this transition is more nuanced than a start and end date<sup>49</sup>. Scholars who adopt the 1890s as a line that separates 'Mormons as strange' on one side and 'Mormons as mainstream' on the other fail to consider the diversity of the individuals who make up Mormonism<sup>50</sup>. Aware of Underwood's challenges to such a demarcation, I assert that since many of the academic developments involved the church hierarchy directly, this demarcation is a reasonable choice.

#### **1.4.1 First Period (1830-1890)**

This period solidified the perception among insiders and outsiders that Mormons were a separate group. Mormon contributions to scholarship in this period were largely made up of periodicals established in the various towns Mormons occupied as they travelled to the Intermountain West and settled in the Salt Lake Valley<sup>51</sup>. Mormon officials had considerable control over how their group identity was constructed. Literature in this period was not wholly supportive of Mormonism, as the group faced dissent from within the group and opposition from the rest of the country. Towards the close of the nineteenth century, as more Americans became aware of the Mormon practice of polygamy, it became

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<sup>48</sup> Underwood, Grant "Re-Visioning Mormon History" *Pacific Historical Review* 35.3 (1986): 405.

<sup>49</sup> Specifically, in regards to the renunciation of polygamy representing a change in all Mormons' lives, Underwood writes: "Mormons 'voted with their feet' and declined to enter polygamous relations in significant numbers" (ibid, 408). Clearly the renunciation of this practice had no direct effect on Mormons who were monogamous at the time, yet many scholars still label the 1890s as a watershed moment in Mormon history.

<sup>50</sup> Underwood provides an analogy to the Civil War-era South (ibid, 417). Just as it is wrong for scholars to assume all southern whites owned slaves and all northern whites were abolitionists, one cannot assume that *every* Mormon man had multiple wives one day and then only one after the renunciation. In spite of such defects, dividing spans of history are necessary in order to trace the *general* trends which dominate each period.

<sup>51</sup> I use the term Inter-Mountain West here to refer to the Mormon cultural region between the Rocky and the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

amplified as an issue. Dissent from outside groups however, was largely a means of reinforcing their own group identity.

Jan Shipps, referring to the development of Mormons in the nineteenth century, wrote: “By the time the Kirtland temple was finished and dedicated [1833], the identity of those who worshipped in that imposing structure as *other* (in the anthropological sense) was as settled as was the identity of the Jews”<sup>52</sup>. Non-Mormons continually asserted that Mormons were not Christian, and Mormons held the belief that there was no salvation outside of their new church.

#### **1.4.2 Second Period (1890-1950)**

This period is marked by a broader trend which saw Mormons actively trying to integrate within mainstream society. This section will examine the very specific generation of scholars who were involved in the establishment of a ‘normative’ Mormonism or what it means to be Mormon. This period witnessed students traveling outside of the Mormon cultural region to attend university. Americans in university towns throughout the country interacted with Mormons to a greater degree than in past decades and such interactions shifted the stark views that Mormons and non-Mormons had previously formed of one another. As a result, Mormons began to look less like a distinct *other* and more like typical American Christians.

One risk inherent in traveling abroad was that students faced the potential of abandoning their religious devotion. This fear among officials, students and their families created two separate forms of reaction. The first reaction was to attempt to increase the

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<sup>52</sup> Shipps, (2007): 250.

stature of the schools in Utah. The second reaction was the creation of the LDS Institutes of Religion. The Institutes provided a Mormon presence on campuses outside the cultural sphere and more importantly offered courses in religion which were approved university credit. This period introduced the idea that ‘Mormonism’ could be a potential area of study at universities.

#### **1.4.3 Third Period (1950-present)**

This period saw an explosion in the number of Mormons participating in scholarship, and particularly in scholarship which directly engaged Mormon religion and culture. The general shift which took place in the field of religious studies (when a scholar’s subject of study was no longer necessarily related to their religious beliefs) meant that non-Mormons were now involved in Mormon Studies as well. The shift in authority from church official to scholar was pushed even further in favour of scholars. During this period, conflicts occurred when scholars made claims which disrupted insider self-perceptions.

#### **1.5 NRMs and What it Means to be ‘New’**

Associated with the most recent changes in how Mormonism was studied was the rise of a field which studies ‘New Religious Movements’ or NRMs. This field, which rose to prominence in the 1970s, examines groups commonly labelled ‘cults’ and which exist on the cultural margins, such as Scientology, the Unification Church and others<sup>53</sup>. Mormonism was also studied using this terminology, as scholars who had always grappled with how to

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<sup>53</sup> Explaining the purpose of the term NRM, Wiles writes: “It is not a category that exists simply for the convenience of having a classification for the youngest religious movements. Rather, it exists, in part, to separate those movements that are acceptable manifestations of the essences of their parent religions from those that are not. Pentecostalism (20<sup>th</sup> century) is, in most world religions texts, of the former type while Mormonism (19<sup>th</sup> century) is one among several of the latter type” (Wiles, 18-19).

classify Mormonism now had a set of tools and language, as well as other similar groups in the world, with which Mormonism could be compared.

### **1.5.1 A Brief History of the Field**

The sub-field of NRMs is a particularly complicated one, since there is continual debate surrounding what a new religious movement or world religion truly is. The term and concept of a world religion is a relatively recent concept in scholarship, not even dating as far back as the founding of Mormonism<sup>54</sup>. With this in mind, it is understandable why such terms only came to be applied to Mormonism from the 1970s onwards.

There was much debate in the field over what qualities or quantities specifically a tradition must possess in order to be considered a ‘world religion’ or a ‘new religion’. Douglas Cowan and David Bromley demonstrate how complicated such discussions can be, asking: “When has a group been around long enough to stop being considered ‘new’? To what is it ‘alternative’? What about groups that are both new and alternative, but relatively uncontroversial?”<sup>55</sup>. Although Mormonism could be considered marginal, alternative, and controversial, how long must it be around before it is no longer considered new?

Historically, the term *new religious movement* or NRM was used by scholars as an attempt to objectively describe groups which are often derisively referred to as ‘cults’. Wiles provides a helpful explanation for the practical purposes of such a term for scholars. “The category of New Religious Movements is one into which the world religions discourse can place groups that are properly religious, yet do not have the approval of the

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid*, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Cowan, Douglas E., and David G. Bromley, *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History* Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., (2015): 4-5.

dominant nodes of power within the world religions”<sup>56</sup>. Terms such as cult or NRM can therefore challenge the way insiders perceive themselves, when they are identified as being outside the ‘dominant nodes of power’.

### **1.5.2 Mormonism and NRM Theory**

In what ways are scholars involved in evaluating the truth claims of Mormons? Mormonism is often studied in scholarship using the terminology of new religious movements. Despite the fact Mormonism is now close to two hundred years old, the early development of the group shares similarities with other NRMs, making this classification justifiable<sup>57</sup>. The characteristics generally associated with NRMs show that there are many parallels which can be drawn to Mormonism. As described by Cowan and Bromley:

The movements are often led by charismatic figures whose revelations self-consciously challenge the established social order...Typically, controversy ensues...when the experiments they conduct challenged established social arrangements... [C]onflicts...can lead to powerful oppositional coalitions that bring dominant institutions into direct conflict with new religious movements<sup>58</sup>

Since many of these observations also applied to the development of Mormonism, the group is often studied alongside other NRMs.

Even in the denominationally diverse upstate New York of the 1830s, the revelations Smith claimed to receive were deemed highly controversial by surrounding religious groups. Smith’s revelations, which announced a new book of Scripture on golden tablets, the founding of a new Church, and various ordinances which organized the new Church

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<sup>56</sup> Wiles, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Cowan and Bromley, 6. Cowan and Bromley explain that Mormonism is not the only group with older roots to be lumped in with this classification as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Spiritualist, and New Thought movements were also associated with this sub-field.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, 10.

into a highly communitarian society, were strongly opposed by surrounding groups, and reactions ranged from written denouncements to violent confrontations. Smith claimed that he was visited by the embodied figures of God, Jesus, John the Baptist and others. His claims to be visited by these figures, as well as his claims that they all appeared as physical, material bodies were far removed from what was deemed 'traditional' Christianity in Smith's time and place. The belief that Smith was propagating falsehoods and duping innocent followers served as justification for mainline Protestant groups to root out the so-called 'Mormon problem'. In their critics' eyes, Mormons were so obviously heretical that it was only reasonable that this group should be discriminated against in formal and informal ways<sup>59</sup>.

Mormons were not the only group in the region to emphasize communitarian and utopian ideals. The Oneida community, begun in 1847, established a commune in New York state, and Robert Matthews (also known as the Prophet Matthias) established a tight-knit religious group in New York City in the 1830s<sup>60</sup>. These groups, as well as others such as Mormons and Shakers faced considerable scrutiny from 'mainstream' Christian denominations of the time. All groups were perceived as un-Christian, and were seen as posing a threat to the safety of women, children, and traditional family values<sup>61</sup>. The leaders of these groups, much like Joseph Smith, were all charged as blasphemers or swindlers.

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<sup>59</sup> Jenkins adds: "the Protestant ethos of this time saw few difficulties in using the law to enforce public morality...Despite the rhetoric of religious freedom, toleration was extended only grudgingly to groups outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition" (Jenkins, Philip "False Prophets and Deluded Subjects: The Nineteenth Century" *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader* ed. Lorne L. Dawson (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003): 78). Mormon beliefs were deemed heretical by Protestants, who placed them outside their conception of acceptable 'Judaeo-Christian' traditions.

<sup>60</sup> Jenkins, 77.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

As with the growth of many religious groups, the period after the Joseph Smith's death was a major turning point that offered a number of possibilities for the trajectory of the group. The decisions made by Mormon leaders during this period, (to consolidate the office of Prophet and President with Brigham Young), were key in shaping the future development of the group<sup>62</sup>. Cowan and Bromley explain that groups either consolidate their leadership structure and teachings or leave interpretation open to all members<sup>63</sup>. This is a process which Rodney Stark also recognizes as key in the future success of a group, writing "the capacity to reveal new truths may be associated with the leadership role – the charisma of the prophet is replaced by charisma of office"<sup>64</sup>. The way this episode in Mormon history has been contextualized by scholars such as Stark, Cowan, and Bromley demonstrate how NRM theory is often used to contextualize findings in Mormon Studies.

Stark offers another example, specifically in regards to cultural capital<sup>65</sup>. Stark uses this concept as a predictor of which religious groups one is *most likely* to join. He supplies the proposition: "People will be more willing to join a religious group to the degree that doing so minimizes their expenditure of cultural capital"<sup>66</sup>. Stark uses the case of a Mormon

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<sup>62</sup> The various groups that broke off from the main body of the Mormon church all generally ascribe to a belief in the Book of Mormon, but have vastly diverse interpretations of other events in Mormon history. The major differences between these groups often stem from issues with the practice of polygamy, disputes over leadership succession, and the debated prophetic status of church leaders after Joseph Smith.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*, 194.

<sup>64</sup> Stark, Rodney "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model" *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader* ed. Lorne L. Dawson (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003): 264-265. Stark is here using the terminology from Max Weber's, "Three Types of Legitimate Domination", in order to trace how Mormonism transitioned from one form to the next. As a note, Weber's third category is legal authority (Weber, Max "The Types of Legitimate Domination" *Economy and Society* trans. Guenther Roth, Berkley: University of California Press, 1922).

<sup>65</sup> Stark defines cultural capital as "the result of socialization and education. When we are socialized into a particular culture, we are also investing in it – expending time and effort in learning, understanding and remembering cultural material" (Stark, 2003: 261).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*.



missionary to explain how Mormonism's connection to Christianity is a factor which maximizes its cultural capital.

A young person from a Christian background and living in a Christian society is deciding whether to join the Mormons or the Hare Krishnas. By becoming a Mormon, this person retains his or her entire Christian culture and simply adds to it. The Mormon missionaries...suggest that an additional scripture, The Book of Mormon, is needed to complete the set<sup>67</sup>.

Stark here identifies Mormonism's claim to be a restoration of Christianity, as its strongest connection to cultural capital, at least in an American environment. This observation is significant in identifying why, especially in American universities, there is a resistance among some Mormons to being presented as an NRM.

Another reason why Mormons may reject a designation of NRM can be found in the statement offered by sociologist James A. Beckford, who observes that such groups are "often perceived as the serious problem of 'so-called sects,' 'destructive cults,' or 'psychogroups'. Levels of anxiety, at least among some citizens and public officials are high".<sup>68</sup> Observing the generalizations that are made about NRMs, (not by scholars so much as their use in popular media and their conception in the popular imagination) Mormon officials may desire presentations of Mormonism as distinct from NRMs. NRM, as a classification, may be interpreted as an affirming portrayal for a three-year-old group with several hundred members, but what implications does it hold for a nearly two-hundred-year-old group with several million members?

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<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* Stark goes on to note that if this scenario took place in a Hindu context, and the potential convert possessed the Bhagavad Gita rather than a Bible, the balance of cultural capital would be reversed.

<sup>68</sup> Beckford, James A., "The Continuum Between 'Cults' and 'Normal' Religion" *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader* ed. Lorne L. Dawson (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003): 26.

Highly publicized events such as the Jonestown Massacre in 1978 in Guyana or the standoff between the Branch Davidians and the ATF in Waco, Texas in 1993 brought sensationalized media and NRM scholarship together<sup>69</sup>. While religious studies scholars were frequently consulted to objectively contextualize events, media outlets often reached out to members of the anti-cult movement as well<sup>70</sup>. Eileen Barker describes how events can become distorted depending on the time a media outlet devotes to a story and who is consulted as an ‘authority’ on the issue<sup>71</sup>. Media outlets, often seeking no more than a flashy story often choose to only depict the most extreme events associated with NRMs.

Despite the best efforts of scholars, it must be recognized, that such appearances have a broader reach than many peer-reviewed journals. Barker has acknowledged the wider scope of the mass media, but notes that the styles of reporting in media and in scholarship are often incompatible. “As we have seen, their main objective is a gripping story. How do we collaborate? On their terms or ours? There is a limit to the number of ‘one the one hand...’, ‘however’s’, or ‘nonetheless’s’ they can accommodate”<sup>72</sup>. Even when scholars try to cooperate with the media through appearances, it can be difficult to negate decades’ worth of stereotypes in a short news segment.

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<sup>69</sup> Cowan and Bromley (2015) discuss the issue of violence and NRMs extensively. I recommend Chapter 7 specifically for a discussion of the Branch Davidians and the standoff at Waco.

<sup>70</sup> For a definition of the ‘anti-cult movement’ (ACM), I turn to sociologist of religion Eileen Barker who writes: “The ACM includes a wide variety of organizations with members as diverse as anxious parents, ex-members, professional deprogrammers, and ‘exit counselors’. In some ways, the ACM can be seen as a mirror image of the NRM. Both tend to want a clear, unambiguous division between ‘us’ and ‘them’; but while the NRM will select only good aspects, the ACM selects only bad aspects” (Barker, Eileen “The Scientific Study of Religion? You Must Be Joking!” in *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader* ed. Lorne L. Dawson Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003: 15).

<sup>71</sup> (ibid, 17).

<sup>72</sup> ibid, 20.

Scholars who classify Mormonism as a Christian body are affirming a Mormon conclusion; it is not a value-free statement. When one says for example, that Mormons represent the fourth largest Christian denomination in America, we validate the Mormon self-perception as a Christian Restoration group (and notably, the most successful among such groups)<sup>73</sup>. Such a statement simultaneously refutes claims from evangelical Protestants who denounce Mormonism as ‘un-Christian’. As members within Christianity, Protestants self-perceptions are impacted by which groups are included alongside them in scholarship. For this reason, many vocally denounce Mormonism as un-Christian or heretical.

If Mormonism is classified as an NRM, scholars implicitly reject the truth claim held by Mormons. Radically different interpretations demonstrate why the search for definition is so significant. Regardless of whether or not the scholar who approaches Mormonism alters his approach (after all, a scholar studying in a public university is under no obligation to do so), he must be aware of the impact his work has on the truth claims of the group they examine.

Understanding the reasons why Mormons reject an academic classification of being an NRM is important in contextualizing Mormon Studies. The classification of NRM tends to refer to groups that are considered strange or marginal. Establishing chairs, professorships and courses in Mormon Studies rewards the study of the group to a level not generally

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<sup>73</sup> This ‘ranking’ of fourth largest is based on “Christians decline as Share of U.S. Population; Other faiths and the Unaffiliated are Growing” *Pew Research Centre* May 17, 2015 ([http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/pr\\_15-05-12\\_rls-00/](http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/pr_15-05-12_rls-00/)). This chart reports Mormons as 1.6% of the US population, larger than the percentage of Jehovah’s Witness or Orthodox Christians, and behind Catholics, Evangelical and Mainline Protestants.

afforded to ‘Moonies’ or Scientologists. Declaring Mormonism to be a new religious tradition can be interpreted as an attempt to move Mormons away from a marginal status, and are therefore more favoured by some officials. Although there have been shifts over time in the way Mormonism is viewed, the way that it is currently presented in scholarship is as a group that is ‘Christian, but not Christian’<sup>74</sup>. Church members and church officials (who simultaneously assume roles as scholars at times), have challenged the presentation of Mormonism as NRM and have tried to claim its *sui generis* status.

Scholars must also continually remind themselves that they do not work in a vacuum. Religious devotees as the subject matter have stakes in how scholars describe their group. Church administration, in the way that it controls access to research materials, establishes schools, and funds departments, journals, and conferences also influences the way a group is presented. The discourses between church officials, church members, and scholars continue to shape the way that religions are approached in scholarship.

Recognizing the potential disadvantages for Mormonism being considered as either Christian or an NRM, John-Charles Duffy labeled this dynamic the “status politics of novelty”<sup>75</sup>. This term describes “what a religious group perceives itself to gain or lose in terms of its cultural location (mainstream or marginal) when it is designated ‘new’”<sup>76</sup>. The LDS Church recognized that the classification as NRM negated Mormon truth claims to be Christian and also has the potential to locate Mormonism as a marginal religious group.

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<sup>74</sup> To use another phrase, Mormons have an ‘also/and’ relationship with Christianity, as opposed to the much starker classification of ‘either/or’. Lee Wiles expands “Mormonism is described as a ‘Christian body’...and as ‘Christian-based’...yet it is neither frequently nor extensively discussed within the chapters of ‘Christianity’ in world religions textbooks and dictionaries, nor is it categorized as exclusively Christian” (Wiles, 18).

<sup>75</sup> Duffy, John-Charles, “Is it Good to be a ‘New Religion’? Mormonism and the Status Politics of Novelty” *Crosscurrents* (2014): 180-201.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid*, 181.

To combat this marginalizing designation, some scholars have instead attempted to align Mormonism more closely with Christianity.

Lee Wiles points to the ways that scholars may also have a stake in the process of categorization<sup>77</sup>. In order to understand how a scholar can boost the seeming importance of their work, one only needs to look at one of the most popularly quoted excerpts from Stark's essay "Rise of a New World Faith". Stark declared that Mormonism stood "on the threshold of becoming the first major faith to appear on earth since the Prophet Mohammed rode out of the desert"<sup>78</sup>. Scholars can present religious groups in particular ways to make their work seem more important or relevant, but this can also often disturb insider perceptions<sup>79</sup>. Mormonism has been classified in scholarship as an NRM because scholars have made a choice that this is the best way for it to be studied, using a set of tools, theories and comparisons. In classifying Mormonism as an NRM, however, scholars are explicitly rejecting a truth claims that Mormons make.

Conversely, scholars who classify Mormonism in a closer relationship to Christianity as a way of consciously avoiding the negative stereotypes associated with NRMs, reveal another way in which scholars participate in identity construction. There is validity in applying the theories of NRMs to Mormonism, and avoiding this label *purely* because of

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<sup>77</sup> It is worth noting that both Duffy and Wiles are among the youngest of all scholars on which I rely. Duffy, (who earned his Ph.D. in Religious Studies from UNC-Chapel Hill in 2011), and Wiles (currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Ohio State University) are representative of the most recent generation of scholars to enter the field of Mormon Studies. Their relatively recent entrance into the field means they are not regarded on a status as that of other scholars who I rely on extensively, but they represent the most recent approaches that scholars have taken to Mormonism.

<sup>78</sup> Stark, Rodney. "The Rise of a New World Faith" *Review of Religious Research* Special Issue Co-Sponsored by the Society for the Sociological Study of Mormon Life and the Family and Demographic Institute of Brigham Young University 26.1 (1984): 19. The academic rigor with which Stark conducted his analysis is unquestioned, however one must also acknowledge that his language and title were carefully selected. Classifying Mormonism in this way was perhaps more appealing than had he referred 'The Rise of a New Christian Denomination'.

<sup>79</sup> Wiles, 25.

the negative public perception can be interpreted as an attempt to defend a religious claim. In either case, scholars play an active role as authorities in adjudicating religious truth claims. The development of tensions between Mormons and their presentation in scholarship point to the ways that scholars have only recently become authorities in evaluating religious truth claims.

## **2.0 The First Phase of Mormon ‘Scholarship’ – Mormon Construction in Writing**

With exceptions, neither side generally showed interest in the mundane fabric of daily life for its own sake nor in social, political, economic, or psychological influence on events. Their intent was to vilify and dismiss or to exhort, indoctrinate and proselytize<sup>1</sup>

### **2.1 Introduction: How Mormons Became ‘Other’**

The first phase of Mormon scholarship can be traced from the founding of the group in the 1830s to roughly the 1890s<sup>2</sup>. Since religious studies was not yet a field of study in academia, ‘Mormon Studies’ in its present conception was not yet a field. This gave Mormon leadership considerable freedom and control to define their own identity and to present the new Church as the unique restoration of Christianity. Church matters especially dominated the very earliest part of the period until Mormons settled in Utah in the 1850s, since Mormonism was new and continually developing. Much of the teaching in this period did not take place in formal schools, but rather consisted of Mormons explaining newly revealed doctrines and texts to converts.

This period was dominated almost entirely by writers who can best be termed ‘caretakers’. Mormon officials of the time had complete authority over shaping their group’s identity. Mormon writers sought to explain their church’s revelations to new converts or to defend their new beliefs and practices against outside criticism. The writers who were ‘critics’ of Mormons during this period were often serving as ‘caretakers’ for their respective traditions. Critics of Mormon practices such as polygamy were often attempting to reinforcing their own group identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Barlow, 2004: 416.

<sup>2</sup> Scholarship in this period did not exist as contemporary scholars would envision it, but rather consisted of a small group of writers inside and outside the tradition. Their writing was not published in peer-reviewed journals, but rather through novels and periodical presses.

This section will trace the ways in which Mormonism was initially framed in writing by insiders and outsiders. Firstly, this period produced a number of writers within the tradition who shaped the perceptions of Mormonism for some time afterwards. Secondly, this section will also examine writing about the Mormons from outside the tradition which reinforced these perceptions. Finally, this period witnessed the creation of schools which would eventually be transformed into the institutions of higher education in Utah today.

During this period, Mormonism was considered unworthy as a subject of academic study, as evidenced by the lack of scholarly material produced. In lieu of formal academic institutions or scholarly publications in the present sense of the term, my data in this period will largely rely on periodical publications and novels. This approach is in part inspired by the work of Benedict Anderson. In his book *Imagined Communities* he writes: “the birth of the imagined community...can best be seen if we consider the basic structure of two forms of imaging which first flowered in Europe in the eighteenth century: the novel and the newspaper”<sup>3</sup>. By changing the date to the nineteenth century and shifting the location to America, examining the way that insiders and outsiders wrote about Mormons in novels and newspapers reveals the way that Americans perceived Mormonism.

During this period, most of the literature published by Mormons targeted a Mormon audience. In publications in the rest of the country, little if any mention was made of Mormons, except in specific genres of literature which treated the group as a threat to American or Christian values. Philip Barlow explains: “at its crudest, hostile literature facilely cast the complex Joseph Smith as fraudulent, crazy, or both... The contrived Book

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<sup>3</sup> Anderson, Benedict *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* New York: Verso, 1983 (2006): 24-25.



of Mormon appealed to the lowest of our passions'; its followers were duped or wicked"<sup>4</sup>. The so-called 'Mormon question' was largely a concern over whether such a group should be allowed to exist within the United States. Such writings most often appeared in political or sensationalist sectarian literature. To counterbalance these negative portrayals, when Mormons wrote in this period, they were defenders of their faith. As the theological (and geographical) gap between Mormons and non-Mormons expanded over time, writing from both sides expressed the sentiment that Mormons were a wholly separate group.

Frederick Jackson Turner, in his *Frontier Thesis*, made it clear that the Mormons were not the only religious group who had developed unique and alternative forms of cultural expression in remote areas during this period. Turner identifies Mormons alongside much smaller groups such as Dunkards, Icarians and Fourierists as "band[s] of social reformers, anxious to put into practice their ideals, in vacant land, far removed from the checks of a settled form of social organization"<sup>5</sup>. As Mormons developed the remote region surrounding Utah, they were given complete control over defining the identity of their members, religiously and culturally.

Non-Mormons cast this 'otherness' in a negative light, by asserting that Mormons were strange and dangerous. Mormons interpreted their uniqueness more positively, and their writing expressed the belief that their distinction from the rest of America was a sign of their elect status. This chapter points to the existence of tensions between Mormons and non-Mormons in published writings. At least for Mormon communities however, the publications of Mormon officials were given complete authority in shaping self-

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<sup>4</sup> Barlow, 2004: 416.

<sup>5</sup> Turner, Frederick Jackson "Chapter IX: Contributions of the West to American Democracy" *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920).

perceptions. In the broad scope of Mormon Studies, this period entrenched the authority of religious officials and the presentation of Mormonism with which subsequent periods had to wrestle.

## 2.2 Earliest Mormon Scholars

### 2.2.1 Mormonism's Early Intellectual History

Arrington identifies a number of prominent Mormon scholars from this period, and explains that most of their writing consisted of biographies of important Mormon figures or explanations of theological issues. Figures such as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, who were viewed by the rest of America as vile and wicked, had their actions re-interpreted by Mormon writers. Arrington's *formative stage* of Mormon intellectuality spans the period from the birth of the Church in 1830 to the murder of Smith in 1844. With respect to the intellectual activity during this stage, Arrington points to four individuals: Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Parley Pratt and Orson Pratt<sup>6</sup>. Not only were these figures formative in the Mormon *intellectual* tradition, they were also all highly placed officials of the Church. Such writers could not properly be considered scholars, but rather defenders and shapers of their own group identity.

The second stage which Arrington identifies (*stage of elaboration*), begins with the death of Smith and "continue[s] to the organization of the School of the Prophets in 1867"<sup>7</sup>. Brigham Young, who had recently taken up the mantle of leadership, was now the foremost

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<sup>6</sup> Arrington, (1969): 16. Arrington expands on some of these figures and their publications: "Sidney Rigdon contributed most of the 'Lectures on Faith' and many sermons which relate to...early principles and ...Parley Pratt wrote *Voice of Warning* (1837), *Key to Theology* (1855), *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (1874) and founded the Latter-day Saint's *Millennial Star* (Liverpool, 1840-date) ...Orson...wrote a series of pamphlets for distribution in England" (ibid, 17).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 18. A rudimentary School of the Prophets was established much earlier in Mormonism's history, but Arrington is here referring to the school that was established after settling in Utah which was run by church officials and provided education in secular and religious subjects.

figure, while Orson and Parley Pratt continued to be prominent writers in the Mormon community<sup>8</sup>.

Arrington also identifies a new group of figures during the elaboration stage, namely the “editors of and writers for *The Deseret News*, *Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star*, *The Seer*, *The Frontier Guardian*, *The Mormon* and other publications of the Church. These included Willard Richards, Orson Pratt, Orson Hyde, Franklin D Richards, and John Taylor”<sup>9</sup>. As Mormons spread throughout Utah and established towns and cities, newspapers became important as the communication network between Mormon communities. *The Millennial Star* for example, operated out of Liverpool and served as a way to keep British missionaries informed of developments in the United States.

These periodicals also served the role of keeping communities apprised of local news. George Q. Cannon, in the Prospectus of the first issue of the *Western Standard* writes: “Its columns will also contain...the current news of the day, both foreign and domestic, which from our position, situated in the Queen City of the Pacific [San Francisco], we will be able to obtain at the earliest dates and in ample detail”<sup>10</sup>. Much like the *Standard*, many other Mormon periodicals attempted to serve a dual purpose and support members in temporal *and* spiritual matters, and contributed to the idea that Mormons were a group that was distinct religiously *and* culturally.

## 2.2.2 The Importance of Periodicals

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<sup>8</sup> Sidney Rigdon, who by this point had broken off from the Mormon church, is no longer listed by Arrington as an active Mormon intellectual. It must be noted however, that during this time he was the leader of a number of new sects, most of which quickly faded away

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Cannon, George Q., “Prospectus” *Western Standard* (January 1, 1856): 1.

This section will highlight the ways in which periodicals were a key tool in constructing the Mormon imaginary. The prominence of church officials as writers and editors highlights the link between church hierarchy and ‘scholarship’ during this earliest period. As Rick Phillips explains: “Invested with political, judicial and ecclesiastical authority, Brigham Young and the Mormon hierarchy managed both the spiritual *and* temporal affairs of Mormon pioneers in Salt Lake City.”<sup>11</sup>. The church was able to shape the earliest Mormon intellectual discourses through the direct involvement of Mormon officials<sup>12</sup>.

Many Mormons in this period were recent converts and although they may have been brought up within a Christian environment, their conversion meant that they were now being introduced to a multitude of new beliefs<sup>13</sup>. An editor for *The Evening and Morning Star*, outlining the role that it would play in disseminating new beliefs, announced in the first issue: “for the benefit of the Church of Christ... I subjoin a few extracts from the Revelations on this subject, that all may know and understand, and so conduct themselves”<sup>14</sup>. Periodicals were therefore important in shaping early Mormon

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<sup>11</sup> Phillips, Rick “The ‘Secularization’ of Utah and Religious Competition” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38.1 (1999): 73. He also points out that legislators and community officials in Utah were primarily church leaders, who had been nominated by the Mormon hierarchy and “‘elected’ unopposed” (ibid).

<sup>12</sup> Historian Virgil P. Peterson, highlighting church involvement in the early newspaper industry, explains that one of the earliest periodicals, *The Elders’ Journal*, (formed in Kirtland in 1837), saw Joseph Smith serve as editor (Peterson, Virgil V., “Early Mormon Journalism” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 35.4 1949: 629).

<sup>13</sup> The Book of Mormon was closed as scripture, but new revelations were continually revealed and added to the broader Mormon scriptural Canon. The Mormon scriptural canon includes the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. The Pearl of Great Price is made up of revelations delivered to Joseph Smith. Doctrine and Covenants is continually (although infrequently) expanding as new revelations are revealed to the Church president, the most recent revelation being added in 1978.

<sup>14</sup> Edward “To the Saints of Christ Jesus, Scattered Abroad” *The Evening and Morning Star* 1.1 (June 1832): 2.

understandings of what the group's core doctrines were, and how these fit in with established beliefs.

Many Mormon periodicals were founded as a defensive reaction against the negative portrayals of outsiders. Appearing on the top banner of the very first issue of the *Western Standard* was the phrase "To correct mis-representation we adopt self-representation"<sup>15</sup>. Mormon writers wrote about their own group with the goal of defending it against specific criticisms, using their periodicals as their arsenal in the 'war of words' against antipolygamy fiction<sup>16</sup>. More importantly, such positive portrayals also served to reinforce the convictions of members within the church.

The third stage of Mormon intellectuality that Arrington points to, namely the *stage of purification*, began with the introduction of the 'Protective Movement' in 1867 and ended with Utah achieving statehood in 1896<sup>17</sup>. The 'protective movement' can be broadly defined as a trend in Mormon activity of withdrawing into themselves in order to protect their unique community. The migration of non-Mormons through Utah was one of the major contributing factors behind this protective movement.

As a result of intermingling with non-Mormons, church officials consciously attempted to curb the effects of outsiders<sup>18</sup>. This period witnessed the creation of a number of

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<sup>15</sup> *Western Standard* 1.1 February 23, 1856.

<sup>16</sup> Addressing the Mormon awareness of how they were portrayed by outsiders, Gordon writes: "the Latter-day Saints condemned the religious and social confusion, the 'war of words' they saw everywhere around them. The Saints insisted theirs was the true Christian church, that the Protestants who opposed them were apostates, and the Catholic Church the 'Mother of Harlots'" (Gordon, 11).

<sup>17</sup> Arrington, (1969): 19.

<sup>18</sup> Arrington writes: "Brigham Young and his associates saw this as a time for the Saints to band together to preserve their unique way of life" (ibid, 19).

periodicals to defend Mormonism against charges such as polygamy<sup>19</sup>. New periodicals represented a larger shift, where Mormon scholarship started to not only explain Mormon beliefs to followers, but to defend these beliefs against outside criticism as well.

## 2.3 Mormon and Non-Mormon Tensions

### 2.3.1 Anti-Mormon Literature

Commencing around the 1850s, the works which non-Mormons produced about Mormon life began to have an increased emphasis on the practice of polygamy<sup>20</sup>. This highly controversial practice, (purportedly announced by Smith in Illinois but greatly expanded upon arrival in Utah), drew considerable attention from outsiders<sup>21</sup>. Regarding the origins of the anti-Mormon genre, Sarah Barringer Gordon writes:

Metta Victor's *Mormon Wives*, Maria Ward's *Female Life among the Mormons*, Orvilla Belisle's *Mormonism Unveiled* and Alfreda Eva Bell's *Boadicea* were the genre's cornerstones. Almost 100 novels and many hundreds of magazine and newspaper stories...built on the market for antipolygamy fiction over the next half century<sup>22</sup>.

This literature treated Mormons as a civilizational 'other'. Barlow explains: "Victorian observers often wrote as if reporting on pygmies 'from darkest Africa' or on 'the wild men of Borneo'. Such accounts began soon after Mormonism's founding and peaked, though by no means ended, in the last decades of the nineteenth century"<sup>23</sup>. Some authors used

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<sup>19</sup> Peterson explains: "In the middle 1850's four newspapers were established specifically to advocate and defend Mormonism, including the doctrine of plurality in marriage". (Peterson, 632). The editors of these four papers included Orson Pratt, Erastus Snow, John Taylor and George Q. Cannon

<sup>20</sup> Barlow adds: "They number in the hundreds and their authors include intriguing and famous sojourners: Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, Henry Ward Beecher, Rudyard Kipling, [and] Horace Greeley" (Barlow, (2004): 416).

<sup>21</sup> Referring to the writing style of these numerous stories, Gordon writes: "The work of these popular writers captured the drama of the conflict, painting vivid pictures of the disintegration of marriages in a far western territory" (Gordon, 29-30).

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, 416.

Mormon communities as the backdrop for thrilling adventure stories while other authors produced works resembling ethnographical studies of foreign peoples.

Maria Ward's *Female Life Among the Mormons* is an example of the former. Published in 1885, this novel was authored by an ex-Mormon who told her tale of conversion to the group in New York, discovery of the practice of polygamy, her own experiences in a polygamous household, and her ultimate escape. The author portrays her continued shock as she discovers new practices of the Mormons, such as at her first Mormon meeting, where she claims to witness Joseph Smith raising a girl from the dead<sup>24</sup>.

This novel offered readers at the time unprecedented, publically available insights into what Mormons believed, and how they acted 'behind closed doors'. Ward relates another incident where a church leader (identified only as B-----m) led a service defending the practice of polygamy. "His reasoning was...that the purpose of marriage being the perpetuation of the human species, it followed that when the wife ceased bearing...it became the husband's duty to take another wife. This he proved by the example of Abraham and Jacob"<sup>25</sup>. The fact the protagonist begins the story as a non-Mormon reinforced for readers how powerful this group could be in gaining and ultimately keeping unsuspecting converts.

E.D. Howe's 1834 book *Mormonism Unveiled* represents the other style of anti-Mormon literature which was popular at the time. These books were not written in a narrative format, but rather laid out as point-by-point refutations of various Mormon beliefs. Announcing his purpose at the start, Howe announced that he would conduct "a

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<sup>24</sup> Ward, Maria *Female Life Among the Mormons; A narrative of Many Years' Personal Experience* (New York: J.C. Derby, 1885): 20-23.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, 283.

detailed account of the more recent, more absurd...delusion of MORMONISM. It will present...the depths of folly, degradation and superstition, to which human nature can be carried”<sup>26</sup>. Howe’s main critique was based on the Book of Mormon, which he saw as a false book filled with “ludicrous events, of wars and church schisms”<sup>27</sup>. Howe denounced the beliefs and founders of the groups, and denounced all followers as “the vilest wretch on earth, disregarding all that is sacred”<sup>28</sup>. Both of these ‘sub-genres’ in anti-Mormon literature (narrative and non-narrative) played a key role in establishing the belief among outsiders that Mormons were religiously, politically, and culturally alien to most Americans.

It is worth noting that Mormons were not the only religious group who found themselves as the target of polemics during this period<sup>29</sup>. Mormonism, (whose hierarchical leadership and use of ritual practices distanced it from mainstream Protestantism), was placed alongside Catholicism and Freemasonry as a common target of criticism<sup>30</sup>. Protestant critics, seeking to reinforce their own group identity lumped all three groups together as people who “belonged to a sinister false religion with clandestine methods and secret goals of secular power”<sup>31</sup>. Just as Mormonism was often portrayed negatively in

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<sup>26</sup> Howe, E.D., *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville: Printed and Published by the Author, 1834): ix.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, 67.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, 74.

<sup>29</sup> Jenkins, 76.

<sup>30</sup> Lorne Dawson draws the important comparison between the charges against these groups and the modern anti-cult movement (Dawson, Lorne L., “New Religious Movements in Historical and Social Context” *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader* ed. Lorne L. Dawson Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003: 71).

<sup>31</sup> Jenkins, 76.



outsider literature, there were a number of periodicals devoted to denouncing Catholicism<sup>32</sup>.

There were also books which outlined the ‘depraved lifestyle’ of Catholics. One book, *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* was a collection of experiences at a convent before the woman in question escaped. A quote from the introduction reads: “I solemnly believe it is necessary to inform parents at least...Many an innocent girl may this year be exposed to the dangers of which I was ignorant. I am resolved, that...not one more victim shall fall into the hands of those enemies”<sup>33</sup>. This passage bears striking resemblance to the antipolygamy literature written by former Mormon plural wives. Compare Monk’s warning with that offered by Ward in *Female Life Among the Mormons*: “Knowing as I do know, the evils and horrors and abominations of the Mormon system, the degradation it imposes on females...a sense of duty to the world has induced me to prepare the following narrative, for the public eye”<sup>34</sup>. Both authors (who had to escape the clutches of their respective churches) cite a degradation of females which they feel a duty to uncover for an oblivious audience.

Another common form of denouncing Mormonism at the time was through comparisons to Islam. Critics drew direct comparisons between Joseph Smith and the Prophet Muhammad, the latter of which represented the ‘prototypical religious impostor’

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<sup>32</sup> Philip Jenkins explains that periodicals such as the *Converted Catholic Magazine* “recounted horror stories of Catholic misdeeds, which included sinister associations with every dictatorship and massacre in modern history” (ibid, 76).

<sup>33</sup> Monk, *Awful Disclosures by Maria Monk, of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal: containing, also, many incidents never before published* New York: Published by Maria Monk, (1836): 2.

<sup>34</sup> Ward, iii-iv.

of the time<sup>35</sup>. These comparisons only increased with the Mormon introduction of polygamy, allowing opponents to further rely on Orientalist stereotypes.

The construction of the ‘imperilled woman’ suffering at the hands of religious infidels is another feature which connects the perceptions of Mormonism with Orientalist stereotypes. The way that Mormons and Catholics were discriminated against at the time in writing, was justified based on the belief that this was only done in order to protect the helpless women who found themselves ensnared in the traps of deviant religious leaders<sup>36</sup>. These actions have parallels with the way Muslims have been treated in Orientalist perspectives. Sherene Razack writes: “Her imperilled body has provided a rationale for engaging in the surveillance and disciplining of the Muslim man and communities”<sup>37</sup>. In all cases, selecting a religious group that could be easily identified as *other* was a way of deflecting attention from injustices within mainstream America. In the case of anti-Islamic charges, Razack explains: “the clash is cultural in origin; Islam is everything the West is not”<sup>38</sup>. In the case of antipolygamy polemics against Mormons, they were used as a scapegoat which could deflect criticisms of ‘imperilled women’ living in the rest of the country. Gordon explains: “by attacking plural marriage in Utah, one could pretend that

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<sup>35</sup> Jenkins, 76. It is crucial to remember the contexts of such comparisons. Stark’s later comparison’s, announcing Mormonism as the newest world religion since Islam, were meant to be an objective comparison to a group with a similar new book of Scripture and growing body of followers. Nineteenth century comparisons to Islam likened Muhammad to a false prophet whose “divine messages opened a new age of sexual excess, allowing the leader and his key followers sexual access to any woman follower” (Jenkins, 76).

<sup>36</sup> Nathan Oman in his essay “Natural Law and the Rhetoric of Empire” analyzes the case of George Reynolds, the first Mormon who was tried by the Supreme Court for bigamy. This essay provides an excellent description of how civilizational language was used to justify intervention in the ‘Mormon problem’. Oman, Nathan B. “Natural Law and the Rhetoric of Empire: *Reynolds v. United States*, Polygamy and Imperialism” *William & Mary Law School Research Paper* 9.43 (2011): 1-43.

<sup>37</sup> Razack, Sherene “Imperilled Muslim Women, Dangerous Muslim Men and Civilised Europeans: Legal and Social Responses to Forced Marriages” *Feminist Legal Studies* 12 (2004): 169.

<sup>38</sup> Razack, Sherene  *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008): 84.

the legal experience of husbands and wives in the rest of the country was more uniform – more monogamous – than it really was”<sup>39</sup>. Protestant writers who treated Mormonism, Catholicism or Islam in their work all approached these groups as a way to define their own identity.

Sarah Barringer Gordon importantly adds that such literature did not necessarily *accurately* depict the realities of Mormon life. However, Gordon explains: “the fact that they were ‘wrong’ does not mean that they were ineffective. Although Metta Victor probably knew little about the real experience of women in Utah, the world she described reveals the assumptions and strategies that antipolygamists employed”<sup>40</sup>. Once published, these assumptions became reality for the non-Mormons who read these stories.

### **2.3.2 Internal Dissent**

During this period, attacks on the Mormon faith also came from inside the community. Dissatisfaction among insiders was largely a result of the protective movement that dominated the later nineteenth century in Mormon life. Arrington explains: “this movement of indoctrination for purposes of protecting the Mormon way of life involved a certain surrendering of free thought – or at least, of the freedom to propagate heretical and hostile thought”<sup>41</sup>. The costs of presenting *only* the church-approved writing about Mormonism was vocal dissatisfaction among a number of liberal-minded intellectuals. Citing one example of vocal dissent, Gordon writes: “in 1880...non-Mormon women in Utah began publishing the *Anti-Polygamy Standard*, a newspaper dedicated to ‘every happy wife and mother’ and asking for ‘sympathy, prayers and efforts to free her sisters from this degrading

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<sup>39</sup> Gordon, 129-130.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Arrington, (1969): 20.

bondage”<sup>42</sup>. The writers of these dissenting periodicals show that there were some members within the church that were actively and vocally critical of Mormonism.

It is important to recall that in the years following the death of Joseph Smith, numerous individuals attempted (and at times succeeded) in forming splinter churches and bringing other Mormons with them as new converts. In addition to these most extreme responses of open rupture, there was also a group of liberal Mormons who reacted by publishing the ‘liberal’ journal titled *Utah Magazine*<sup>43</sup>. Members of this group included William S. Godbe, E.L.T. Harrison, Edward W. Tullidge, Henry W. Lawrence, and others. Regarding the fates of the publishers, Arrington explains that they, “were brought before a church tribunal and excommunicated. Several other ‘liberals’ left the church in sympathy”<sup>44</sup>. By excommunicating writers who produced what the church deemed heretical, church officials tightly managed Mormon identity construction in this period.

The fact that writers were excommunicated helped to solidify the perception to outsiders that Mormons were monolithic. Regardless of how accurate this perception was, it became the dominant perception of Mormons. More importantly, Mormons were aware that writers were often excommunicated or disciplined based on their work. Memories of such episodes were likely to have an effect on an approach taken by a writer, even one publishing at an independent periodical.

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<sup>42</sup> Gordon, 170.

<sup>43</sup>Arrington, 1969: 20.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## 2.4 The Earliest Mormon Schools

### 2.4.1 Primary and Secondary Schools

While there are relatively few examples during this earliest period, schools attempted to replicate the approach of periodicals; to insulate their members from Gentile corruption. The first example comes in the form of the LDS School of the Prophets, which started in 1833 and offered courses “in such varied subjects as Hebrew, geography, government, literature, and Christian history”<sup>45</sup>. This trend, of combining religious and secular topics in education continued once Mormons settled in Utah. Education was considered important for every member of the church<sup>46</sup>.

In an evaluation of the earliest Mormon schools, it must be stated that most Mormon children did not attend school until the 1890s<sup>47</sup>. Mormon children who did attend the very earliest (largely privately financed) schools in Utah therefore represent a small percentage of the population<sup>48</sup>. Offering one example of an early school, Gordon refers to George Q. Cannon, a prominent Mormon official, who built a school for his forty-three children<sup>49</sup>. A polygamous household provided an environment similar to a small community. It is also important to consider that church officials made up a high percentage of those in Utah who practiced polygamy<sup>50</sup>. The concentration of elite church officials as the Mormons with the

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<sup>45</sup> Arrington, (1967): 138. As mentioned, the 1833 School of Prophets operated only for a short time before being shut down. The program was restored again in Utah in 1867.

<sup>46</sup> Mormon theology provided an imperative to pursue secular and religious education. (ibid, 137-138). Doctrine and Covenants, Section 130:18-19 reads: “Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection; and if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 130:18-19 <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/130?lang=eng>).

<sup>47</sup> Gordon, 198.

<sup>48</sup> ibid, 199.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Grant Underwood provides a helpful reminder about *which* Mormons were involved in this practice. “most polygamists were church leaders or otherwise prominent Latter-day Saint – individuals classified as ‘elites’ by the social historians” (Underwood, 409).

*most wealth* and as the Mormons with the *largest families* meant that most Mormon schools in this period were connected to church officials.

As the education system continued to develop in the Utah territory, the church remained directly involved, through a Church Board of Education<sup>51</sup>. Education was recognized as valuable in strengthening the Mormon church and community, and church officials set out to shape the earliest scholarship in Utah.

#### **2.4.2 Colleges and Universities**

The educational institutions which Mormons established became more sophisticated, which led to the creation of the first colleges and universities in Utah. Arrington points to Brigham Young Academy, or BYA (in Provo), Brigham Young College, or BYC (in Logan), as well as the Latter-day Saints College and the University of Deseret (both in Salt Lake City)<sup>52</sup>. In order to build up a strong Mormon community, there was a need for intelligent and well-trained farmers, doctors, lawyers and scientists. These were academic pursuits which could no longer be satisfied by local primary schools. More importantly, as church officials emphasized, Mormon professional citizens needed to remain strong in their religious convictions, something that universities and colleges outside of Utah could not guarantee. By combining religious and secular education, they served as places where Mormon students could maintain their isolation within their community, but still pursue post-secondary education. They also provided church officials control over the earliest scholars in Utah.

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<sup>51</sup> Arrington, (1967): 139.

<sup>52</sup> Arrington, (1969): 20.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This earliest period of Mormon ‘scholarship’ entrenched the view, (among insiders and outsiders alike), that Mormons were a group entirely separate from other Americans and Christians. The writings funded by the church consciously defended Mormonism against outsiders, but also allowed church officials considerable control in defining Mormon identity. Mormons attempted to construct their identity in this period as one that was ‘separate but equal’ in comparison to other Christian bodies. In their minds, their separateness was interpreted as a sign of their ‘elect-ness’. Gordon explains: “Mormons in the 1850s and 1860s pleaded for acceptance as equals in a tolerant federal republic, and in the next breath asserted their essential superiority and fundamental separateness and concomitant disdain for all who spurned the New Dispensation”<sup>53</sup>. By the 1890s, despite their different interpretations, insiders and outsiders agreed that Mormons were religiously, culturally, and anthropologically ‘other’.

The schools and periodicals that emerged in this period are a result of the Mormon cultural sphere which developed in Utah and surrounding states. Confirming Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis,” the Mormon journey across America and the settlement of a barren landscape helped to shape their identity. By the time this period was over, Turner had announced that “the free lands that made the American pioneer have gone”<sup>54</sup>. This signals the end of the period where the Mormon frontier experience and the writing supported by church officials defined Mormon perceptions. In the next period, Mormon identity became a question *scholars* began to investigate.

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<sup>53</sup> Gordon, 90.

<sup>54</sup> Turner, “Chapter IX”.

### **3.0 Mormon Scholarship and Mainstream America**

As education turned into the main battleground in the twentieth-century war to define Mormon identity, patriarchal scrutiny would often make Mormon scholars rebel or cower. In the tumultuous late nineteenth century, however, Utah's Mormons needed their intellectuals – and American universities – to show them that becoming American would be neither humiliating nor irrational<sup>1</sup>

#### **3.1 Introduction: A Hesitant Move to the Mainstream**

A second era in the development of Mormon scholarship can be traced from the 1890s to the 1950s. This period witnessed two significant developments which shaped the perception of Mormonism in academia. The first development, which was largely a result of Mormons intermingling with Gentiles (non-Mormons) after a long period of separation, was that Mormons were no longer seen as wholly distinct from other Americans. Although Mormons were still in some ways considered 'peculiar', they were no longer perceived as the threat to Christian values they had previously represented. The second development was that Mormonism, for the very first time, was approved of for academic investigation within the secular university. Although many of the earliest investigations of Mormonism were conducted by insiders, this period witnessed the introduction of the role scholarship would play in shaping perceptions of Mormonism. Scholars gradually assumed increased authority in the identity construction of religious groups, but this period was also shaped by a reluctance from church officials to cede this authority to scholars.

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<sup>1</sup> Simpson, Thomas W., "The Death of Mormon Separatism in American Universities" *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 22.2 (2012): 184-185.



This period can be interpreted as a partial transition from the roles of caretakers to critics in the academic study of religion. Universities were increasingly associated with legitimacy and mainstream status, particularly for religious groups. Recognizing the significance of these institutions, Mormon officials sponsored students to travel outside of Utah for their education. Mormon officials also established universities and colleges within Utah in order to actively participate in Mormon identity construction. The study of religion also began to be seen as a distinct field of study at university, although many students still directed their investigations towards their own faith community. As Mormon officials recognized that universities were becoming the place where religious identities were constructed, they wanted their students to play an active role in these discussions. The scholars of this period were increasingly attempting to act as critics, as the authority in religious identity construction shifted from church officials to scholars. These scholars often acted as caretakers however, to the degree that that they studied their own faith or worked at church-affiliated institutions. This period therefore represents an incomplete shift in authority from official to scholar, and many scholars either acted as critics *or* caretakers.

The beginning of this period roughly coincides with the official Mormon renunciation of polygamy in 1890, which is representative of a conscious attempt from Mormon officials to integrate with mainstream American society<sup>2</sup>. Mormon Studies scholar Rick Phillips writes: “In 1890, facing considerable political, and economic pressure, Mormon leaders

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<sup>2</sup> In 1890, then-President of the Church Wilford Woodruff announced *The Manifesto*, a statement which officially renounced the practice of plural marriage and was subsequently added to Mormon canon in *Doctrine and Covenants* as “Official Declaration 1” (<https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/od/1?lang=eng>)

removed remaining church-state ties in Utah, disavowed polygamy, and dismantled their political party”<sup>3</sup>. This renunciation is seen as one of the contributing factors that qualified Utah, in the eyes of other Americans, as worthy of statehood.

The LDS Church was no longer directly involved in the local government, but high ranking officials still held various political posts. The shift from a territorial governor in Utah to a state governor was a significant shift in status, however, there was still much work to be done in order to shed the negative perceptions which had built up around Mormons and to craft their mainstream Christian American identity.

One attempt in this period to integrate with America saw Mormons travel outside of Utah for school<sup>4</sup>. The desire of Mormons to leave their cultural sphere in Utah and the Intermountain West stood in contrast with earlier philosophies of the church, which called for a gathering of the Mormon population into Utah. Jan Shipps explains how this belief changed post-1890. “The perception that the Intermountain region was quite literally Israel in the New World started to fade. As it did so, the notion of being culturally but not especially religiously Mormon expanded”<sup>5</sup>. The ‘scattering’ of Mormons also demanded adjustments in the church’s administrative organization<sup>6</sup>. Outside the cultural sphere, Mormon communities were much less formally administered than in Utah, and Mormon students leaving home for the first time were considered to be especially vulnerable to

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<sup>3</sup> Phillips, 75.

<sup>4</sup> Mauss, 440.

<sup>5</sup> Shipps, (2007): 256. It was during this period that language such as ‘active’ and ‘inactive’ members entered Mormon vocabulary, roughly translated to Jews who are respectively ‘religiously’ or just ‘culturally’ Jewish.

<sup>6</sup> Shipps offers an added description of the shift. “In a movement that LDS scholar Douglas D Alder first described as a ‘scattering of the gathering’, large numbers of Saints settled outside the Mormon culture region, with LDS concentrations in large cities and in university towns. As soon as these concentrations gained sufficient size, there was a ‘gathering of the scattered’ that reassembled local groups of Saints creating what I have elsewhere described as ‘Mini Zions’” (Shipps, 2007: 258).

abandoning their faith. The Manifesto [the LDS Church's official renunciation of polygamy], because of the ideological shifts which followed, represents a watershed moment which led to Mormons spreading throughout the United States, which in turn led to the establishment of 'wards' and 'stakes' throughout American cities<sup>7</sup>. This chapter points to the partial shift in identity construction and the resultant tensions caused by the struggle for authority between scholars and church officials.

### **3.1.1 Competing Factions – How to Educate Mormon Students**

The way in which churches attempt to educate the next generation of followers is a factor which scholars of religion point to as important in continued growth. Religious groups generally try to educate their youth in an insular fashion so that the claims of the group do not have to contend with any opposing philosophies. Stark notes however, that groups which are overly insular can witness their membership rates fall after a short period of time. Stark explains: "many religious movements...are doomed because of internal networks that are too all-embracing, thus making it difficult...for members to maintain or form attachments with outsiders"<sup>8</sup>. Sustained growth is possible only through a combination of insularity and integration<sup>9</sup>. This period witnessed much deliberation amongst Mormon officials of *how much* integration was acceptable.

Competing views were expressed in debates over the best way to educate members of Mormon society. Some Mormon officials such as Brigham Young and Karl Maeser argued

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<sup>7</sup> The notion of 'scattering' was also promoted by the church. Lee Wiles explains: "In 1911, members were urged by the First Presidency to build the Church wherever in the world they already resided rather than to move to Utah"<sup>7</sup>. (Wiles, 5.) Wards and stakes are Mormon ecclesiastical divisions analogous to parishes and diocese respectively.

<sup>8</sup> Stark, (2003): 267. Stark adds to this his observation of "the ability of the Mormons to maintain open networks" (ibid)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Stark sums up his observations with the proposition "New religious movements will succeed to the extent that they sustain strong internal attachments, while remaining an open social network, able to maintain and form ties to outsiders" (ibid).

for the spread of students to undertake post-secondary education at Eastern, non-Mormon institutions. Brigham Young, before his death in 1877 began the practice of church sponsorship for students leaving Utah. The mechanisms put in place and the positive experiences of returning students meant this practice continued after Young's death and Mormons started to integrate into the communities surrounding campuses at universities such as Michigan and Harvard. It was assumed that upon completion of their studies, students would return to Utah and apply their knowledge to advancing Mormon society. Church officials supported this experience for students, since one could attain a high-quality education, and get a 'taste' of non-Mormon society. Officials believed that scholars returning to Utah with education in science, law and medicine would be the best possible leaders for a Mormon church entering the twentieth century.

One such scholar was Romania Pratt, who pursued her education in medicine. She provided her reasoning for this choice in the church magazine *Women's Exponent*.

It is neither safe nor right for any one with a smattering [of] knowledge picked up promiscuously to undertake the practice of medicine, and go forth to hold the balance of life and death in their unskillful hands, too often unnecessarily resulting in the desolation of hearts and homes" adding "True knowledge... should only broaden our reason and strengthen our belief...in the existence of God<sup>10</sup>.

Upon completing her Ph.D., Pratt returned to Utah and became a vocal advocate for students studying abroad.

Given the relatively unorganized structure in which Mormons lived when they attended university, there was reluctance from some church hierarchy to support the migration out of Utah. Students engaged in academic investigations often challenged their faith in ways

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<sup>10</sup> Romania B. Pratt, M.D., "Work for Women" *Woman's Exponent* 7.21 (April 1, 1879): 217.

not experienced when students studied at home. Thomas W. Simpson writes: “Specters of treason and idolatry thus accompanied any Saint who ventured into ‘Babylon’ on an educational quest. Departing Mormon students often pledged to remain true to the church, but their experiences would change them in unforeseen ways, even if they kept the faith”<sup>11</sup>. These fears resulted in a reluctance from church officials to expose students to the scholarship taking place in the rest of the country.

Simpson relays one instance when President John Taylor acted on this concern by forcing a student to remain at home “out of fear that education abroad would corrupt him spiritually”<sup>12</sup>. The next year, Taylor granted permission for two other students, James Talmage and James Moyle to leave Utah. The church therefore had a direct influence over which scholars received support and which did not. Interestingly, the student who Taylor forced to stay at home was Horace Hall Cummings, who would later become head of the church’s educational system. Simpson explains that Cummings “would become powerfully suspicious of university-trained Mormon faculty, whom Cummings perceived to be too liberal in their embrace of scientific evolution and modern biblical scholarship”<sup>13</sup>. While the reasons why Cummings was not granted permission to leave are unclear, it is clear that divisions between supporters and opponents of ‘Gentile’ education remained strong.

There was a view held by some Mormon officials, who argued that the community should try to keep its students at home. This view was held by John Taylor (who succeeded Young as Church President) and Joseph F. Smith (another highly placed official and later President of the church). Even Karl Maeser, who was an early proponent of traveling East,

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<sup>11</sup> Simpson, (2012): 169.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, 168.

<sup>13</sup> Simpson, 190.

“did not want educational missions to become a permanent practice”<sup>14</sup>. Some felt that the costs of integrating into American society (and losing one’s unique Mormon status) posed too great a risk to allow students to study ‘abroad’. Officials who opposed leaving Utah recognized the importance of university education and advocated instead for the creation of prestigious institutions within the Mormon cultural region.

### **3.1.2 The LDS Institutes – A Compromise in Education**

One final development of this period was the creation of LDS Institutes of Religion. First established adjacent to the University of Idaho, the Institute offered a Mormon space on campus and offered courses in religion, taught by Mormon professors. The Institutes represent the first time when courses on Mormonism (which were offered through the church, and were approved for credit by the school with which they were connected) were offered outside of Utah. These Institutes signify a compromise between scholarship and traditional religious authorities.

The disruption in faith while attending school is a fear that persisted throughout Mormon history, and perhaps even to the present day<sup>15</sup>. A 1983 study was conducted by Gary E. Madsen and Glenn M. Vernon, who researched the religious participation of students, primarily at the University of Utah. While not all participants in the study were Mormon, the study found that as a general trend “as level of education increased, the level of religiosity tended to decrease”<sup>16</sup>. The findings of this 1983 study echo the fears that church officials had in the early 1900s.

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<sup>14</sup> Simpson (2012): 176. Significantly, Maeser would later shape higher education in Utah as Principal at Brigham Young Academy (later BYU).

<sup>15</sup> Madsen, Gary E., and Glenn M. Vernon “Maintaining the Faith during College: A Study of Campus Religious Group Participation” *Review of Religious Research* 25.2 (1983).

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, 128.

Mormons recognized that a secularly educated church membership was associated with acceptance in the American mainstream. Since Utah was now an equal participant in the American government, being popularly perceived as mainstream was integral for Utah's continued success. Mormon involvement in scholarship in this period emerged out of attempts to balance these tensions between church and academy.

### **3.2 'Sojourns' to the East**

The spread of Mormons from their cultural region resulted in the exposure of Mormon students to different perspectives. The rest of America was also introduced to a growing Mormon presence. Simpson refers to a 'Mormon underground' at Michigan and a 'colony of Mormon students' at Harvard<sup>17</sup>. While populations in Idaho, California and surrounding states may have had some interaction with Mormons, they were a relatively foreign presence to communities surrounding Eastern universities. On campuses throughout the country, Mormons and non-Mormons were re-introducing themselves to one another after several decades of geographic separation.

Having to face challenges to their faith, (in science or sociology courses as well as through informal discussions with their non-Mormon peers), meant that in some cases conceptual accommodations were made<sup>18</sup>. This process offered solutions for how Mormons could better integrate within broader American society. Like many religious students at the time, Mormons were confronted with new theories such as the age of the universe which forced them to reconcile scientific proof with their beliefs. These

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<sup>17</sup> Simpson, 2012: 172; 179.

<sup>18</sup> Simpson adds: "In the non-sectarian modern university, students were free to retain their faith, but they were also free to privatize, reform, and reject it" (Simpson (2012): 172).

conceptual accommodations were one of the ways that students managed to mitigate the effects of disruption in faith.

Another way that the potential for defection from the church was managed, Mauss explains, was by simply choosing subjects other than sociology or similar fields which challenged self-perceptions. Although Romania Pratt (who returned to Utah from Philadelphia with her MD), may represent a success story of a Mormon student returning, there were enough cases to justify the fears that students studying abroad would struggle with their faith<sup>19</sup>. Fields such as medicine and law forced students to confront their faith less frequently in the classroom, and, in the eyes of church officials also provided more useful skills to be used upon returning to the Mormon cultural region, making them the fields which most officials supported<sup>20</sup>.

### **3.2.1 Support for Mormons Studying Outside Utah**

Recognizing the dangers posed to one's faith, Mormons attempted to provide support for students who travelled outside of the cultural region. Arrington refers to university wards and stakes as well as the Institutes, as places where "LDS students are able to attain spiritual, social, and intellectual maturity under the most favorable conditions"<sup>21</sup>. In addition, there were other forms of support which were less formal.

The least formal type of support, but by far the most common, was through correspondence with friends and family members at home. This allowed students to voice

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<sup>19</sup> Mauss writes: "Those few early Mormons who did undertake social science-oriented investigations...of their religion soon encountered difficulties in their relationships with their co-religionists, ranging from perpetual uneasiness...to open rupture" (Mauss, 441).

<sup>20</sup> Two students previously mentioned, James Moyle and James Talmage, who were given support to travel East for their education, chose to study in the fields of law and the sciences respectively (Simpson (2012): 168).

<sup>21</sup> Arrington, (1969): 26.



their struggles to a sympathetic ear. Correspondence also gave people living in Utah a view into the world outside the Mormon cultural region, when they were published in church periodicals<sup>22</sup>. Such letters give the modern scholar insights into the dominant concerns of Mormon officials and students at the time.

One glowing description of education abroad comes from Ellis Reynolds Shipp, who described her experience at the University of Michigan. Shipp writes: “woman is everywhere received with the greatest consideration and respect and in all the numerous avenues of learning, stands on an equal footing with her brother man”<sup>23</sup>. Expanding on the acceptance of women at universities, Shipp also reported that women made up one third of the medical department in which she was studying and as much as two thirds of the literary department<sup>24</sup>.

The publication of personal correspondence led to entire articles highlighting various universities throughout the United States<sup>25</sup>. Testimonials from past or current Mormon students attempted to assure prospective students (and parents) that Mormon beliefs could stay strong at non-Mormon institutions. Such articles, published in church-sponsored periodicals, amounted to *de facto* church support for students studying abroad. In an article published in the *Juvenile Instructor*, referring to the University of Michigan, Richard Lyman writes: “Ann Arbor is a model college town. It is most clean and beautiful...The rain, though disagreeable at times, makes our city a perfect little Garden of Eden”<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Simpson (2012): 165.

<sup>23</sup> Ellis Reynolds Shipp, “Woman’s Progress” *Woman’s Exponent* 21.13 (January 1, 1893): 102.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Simpson (2012): 183. Explaining their format, Simpson writes: “The articles contained large photographs and ample descriptions of each school’s distinctive strengths, religious milieu, entrance requirements, daily routine” (*ibid.*, 183).

<sup>26</sup> Richard Lyman “Student Life at The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor” *Juvenile Instructor* 29.14 (July 15 1894): 428.

Correspondences often focused on particular schools, suggesting which schools were deemed ‘most suitable’ for Mormon students.

Some letters were particularly damning of the different cultures the students witnessed. One such example was published in the magazine the *Woman’s Exponent*. In this 1885 article written by a young Mormon attending West Point military academy, the student condemned his experience, writing: “for one thoroughly educated man a college turns out...there...are a dozen numbskulls ground through, and full as many young men unsettled and unfitted for life by, lack of discipline, and by the acquisition of vices”<sup>27</sup>. Although this student affirms he was able to ‘remain pure’, he felt the risks of straying from one’s faith were too great. West Point, a school with Protestant ties, is here identified as a school that would be particularly ‘dangerous’ for a Mormon student<sup>28</sup>.

### **3.2.2 Rehearsal for American Citizenship**

Mormons formed one perception in their mind about the evils of secular universities and the students who went there. There was also a general uneasiness towards Mormons from non-Mormon students. Shipps explains: “Mormons were still considered as an ethnic people who like Mennonites or the Amish were somehow quaint or even weird”<sup>29</sup>. Romania Pratt describes some of her earliest encounters with non-Mormons while she attended school. Upon saying she was from Salt Lake City, Pratt wrote, “I was thereafter received with freezing calmness, arched eyebrows, and threefourths angle of shoulder”<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Wandering Boy “College Evils” *Woman’s Exponent* 13.15 (January 1, 1885): 118.

<sup>28</sup> Simpson (2012): 191.

<sup>29</sup> Shipps, (2007): 257.

<sup>30</sup> Romania B. Pratt, M.D., “Correspondence” *Woman’s Exponent* 6.4 (July 15, 1877): 30.

Gradually, personal interactions with Mormons replaced the old stereotypes based in the printed word.

Suggesting how Mormon students helped to break down such views, Pratt writes: “I did not come east to preach the Gospel but I [k]now I have in many times and in many ways broken down prejudices against my people”<sup>31</sup>. Simply by their presence at schools in the East, Mormon students showed other Americans that not all Mormons were ‘backwards polygamists’<sup>32</sup>. Church officials, recognizing how these students played a role in crafting a mainstream identity for Mormons, continued to send students abroad.

Despite some negative experiences, students reported mostly positive moments in their integration at Eastern universities. Simpson relays a letter from another student at the University of Michigan, Henry Rolapp. Rolapp, as quoted in Simpson, writes: “after we determinedly let them understand, that while we were not on a preaching mission, we were nevertheless proud of our religion, and could not be converted by ridicule – they let us alone”<sup>33</sup>. Simpson labelled this and other instances as chances to ‘rehearse for American citizenship’<sup>34</sup>. Challenges integrating into universities can be viewed as a microcosm of the Mormon attempt to fit in to the broader American mainstream.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that Pratt, who attended university in the late 1870s was in fact a plural wife, although she did not share this fact with all her peers. In this way, even for Mormons who were polygamists, Pratt was able to convince her peers that such people were not necessarily backwards or depraved.

<sup>33</sup> Simpson (2012): 171.

<sup>34</sup> Simpson expands: “The experiences of Moyle and Rolapp [two University of Michigan students] indicated how universities could transform Mormon-Gentile relations, allowing mutual respect to replace entrenched hostility” (Simpson, 2012: 171).

### 3.3 Academia in Utah

#### 3.3.1 First Chartered Universities

As mentioned, this period witnessed a concurrent development of higher education within Utah, motivated by the fears about young students traveling East. Many colleges and universities that already existed witnessed transformations reflecting shifts in the broader academic world. The first institution of higher learning founded in Utah was the University of Deseret, but this was a relatively short-lived project<sup>35</sup>. The school was closed only a few years after its founding in 1850 and not reopened until 1894, when it became the University of Utah. The most prominent university in the region is Brigham Young University, which traces its roots back to 1874<sup>36</sup>. The founding of universities in this period is noteworthy, not because higher education had not existed in Utah before, but rather because this period now saw a focus on trying to align Mormon educational goals with the goals of the broader American society.

As the first universities in Utah were chartered, Mormons were making a concerted effort to participate in academia and compete with ‘Gentile’ institutions. Karl Maeser, head of the church’s General Board of Education and charged with overseeing Brigham Young Academy [currently Brigham Young University] expressed that he wished to create a school which could entice intelligent young students to stay in Utah rather than ‘study abroad’<sup>37</sup>. If Mormons could model local institutions to mirror those outside Utah, and replicate the status of degree conferred, they would stand a greater chance of attracting

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<sup>35</sup> Newell, Jackson and Takeyuki Ueyama “Higher Education in Utah” *Utah History Encyclopedia* ([http://www.uen.org/utah\\_history\\_encyclopedia/uheindex.html](http://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/uheindex.html)) 1994: 1.

<sup>36</sup> (ibid, 1).

<sup>37</sup> Simpson (2012): 176. Maeser expanded on this belief, as quoted in Simpson: “‘It is better to have our young people pursue their university course at our home institution instead of going abroad for that purpose away from our control and influences” (ibid, 182).

students<sup>38</sup>. These schools were more importantly an attempt by officials to balance the desires of prospective students while maintaining some control over what students learned.

Many of the schools, such as Brigham Young Academy and Brigham Young College (BYA and BYC for short, located in Provo and Logan, Utah respectively), were a result of what Arrington calls the ‘purification period’ in Mormon intellectual history. In regards to how this affected universities, Arrington explains their growth as attempts to compete with newer denominational schools established in the surrounding region<sup>39</sup>. In 1891, Joseph Marin Tanner, the principal at BYC, appealed to the church President for support for the school. As quoted in Simpson: ““Now there is the Agricultural College at Logan...gaining in influence and power in ever increasing ratio. The B.Y. College must not be...swamped by that Gentile Institution”<sup>40</sup>. Early universities in Utah saw themselves in competition with local non-Mormon universities and made conscious shifts to attract Mormon students.

### **3.3.2 Controversy at Utah Universities**

The Mormon church established early universities so as to have a direct influence over their students<sup>41</sup>. However, there have been a number of incidents when faculty came into

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<sup>38</sup> The church attempted to accomplish this in a number of ways. Seeking to elevate the status of Utah schools, officials designated three Mormon schools as ‘colleges’: The Brigham Young Academy (BYA) in Provo, the Latter-day Saints College in Salt Lake City, and the Brigham Young College (BYC) in Logan (ibid, 176). The designation of these schools as colleges can be interpreted as attempts to align Utah’s institutes of higher education with those in the rest of America.

<sup>39</sup> Arrington (1969): 20.

<sup>40</sup> Simpson (2012): 177.

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that despite the founding of some secular universities in Utah, (such as University of Utah or Utah State University) BYU, and the other satellite campuses under its umbrella, still have explicit ties to the church. In regards to BYU, these ties are explicit in their Educational Honor Code: “Brigham Young University, Brigham Young University-Hawaii, Brigham Young University-Idaho, and LDS Business College exist to provide an education in an atmosphere consistent with the ideals and principles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That atmosphere is created and preserved through commitment to conduct that reflects those ideals and principles. Members of the faculty, administration, staff, and student body at BYU, BYU-H, BYU-I, and LDSBC are selected and retained from among individuals who voluntarily live the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (“Church Educational System Honor Code” Brigham Young University, November 9 2015 {<https://policy.byu.edu/view/index.php?p=26>}).

conflict with school administration<sup>42</sup>. Arrington points to the resignation in 1911 of three BYU staff members “who were warned about their advanced views on evolution and Higher Criticism...[as well as] a number of excommunications, releases, displacements, and demotions” as episodes that have shaped the way BYU is viewed as a school<sup>43</sup>. Such controversies point to the challenges in attempting to balance roles as a faith-promoting institution and an academic research centre<sup>44</sup>.

### **3.4 The LDS Institutes of Religion**

One final example of Mormon involvement in scholarship during this period can be seen in the forming of the LDS Institutes of Religion. Since its establishment, the program has continued to grow, both in the size of the individual Institutes and the number of locations. As of 2009, the program consisted of over five hundred locations supporting 150,000 students<sup>45</sup>. This program represents an attempt to harmonize higher education with religious devotion. The Institutes were established by the church, adjacent to universities, to house students, classes, and worship services for Mormon students outside the cultural sphere. A student could leave Utah for their education and still live in a Mormon community, however small<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> In 1915, the President of the University of Utah, Joseph L Kinsbury, told four professors of the school that “‘for the good of the University’ they would not be reappointed the following year” (Newell and Ueyama, 3) Faculty clashed with administration and seventeen professors left in support of the four.

<sup>43</sup> Arrington, (1969): 21.

<sup>44</sup> Specifically, in regards to BYU, their “Academic Freedom” policy asserts a distinction between Individual and Institutional Academic Integrity, both of which are protected by the school. Individual freedom is defined as the ability for a scholar to “research and teach without interference”. Institutional Freedom is defined as the “privilege of universities to pursue their distinctive missions” (“Academic Freedom” Brigham Young University, April 1 1993 {<https://policy.byu.edu/view/index.php?p=9>}). The balance between both of these commitments has led to a number of intellectual clashes over the school’s history.

<sup>45</sup> Wright, Dennis A., “The Beginnings of the First LDS Institute of Religion at Moscow, Idaho” *Mormon Historical Studies* 10.1 (2009): 79.

<sup>46</sup> Dennis Wright provides a detailed description of the first Institute in Moscow. “The building consisted of a full basement, a main floor, and a third floor living area. The basement contained a large recreation room,

### 3.4.1 The First Institute at Moscow, Idaho

In the case of the University of Idaho, the need for such a space was addressed because there was a growing population of Mormon students, yet no centres of worship<sup>47</sup>. After a building was constructed adjacent to the campus, Church officials also established a curriculum of courses for Mormon students which were approved by the university for credit<sup>48</sup>. The goal of these courses, in the words of LDS Church Education Commissioner Joseph F. Merrill, (as quoted in an LDS history of the program), was “to enable our young people attending the colleges to make the necessary adjustments between the things they have been taught in the Church and the things they are learning in the university, to enable them to become firmly settled in their faith as members of the Church”<sup>49</sup>. The University of Idaho, after some deliberation, agreed to eight credit courses in religious education, provided that they complied with certain State Board of Education regulations<sup>50</sup>. In 1928, Sessions began instructing the first courses for around fifty Mormon students<sup>51</sup>.

Offering courses is perhaps one of the most lasting effects of the Institutes, offering young intellectuals the opportunity to study their own faith in a university environment. In

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baptismal font, small kitchen and several small multi-purpose rooms. The main level contained a large chapel with seating capacity for 225 people, an office, a library and three large classrooms. The third floor contained eleven well-equipped apartments for twenty-two LDS male students” (ibid, 76).

<sup>47</sup> ibid, 68-70. Wright explains that many Mormon came from towns surrounding the university in order to major in agriculture. Early students attended Protestant services before a Mormon church was established (ibid, 68). A church branch was established in 1921, but they still lacked a formal building and rented out spaces for their services. A Mormon father of two daughters attending the university was appalled by the facilities in which they were meeting and appealed to the Church President for a clear Mormon presence on campus.

<sup>48</sup> ibid, 70.

<sup>49</sup> “Fifty Years of Institute” *Ensign* (December 1976).

<sup>50</sup> Arrington provides examples of these stipulations: “The courses must conform to University standards in library requirements and in method and rigor of their conduct. They must also conform to the University Calendar and to University standards as to length of period” (Arrington, 1967: 142). The full list of requirements is listed in Arrington, (1967): 142.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, 79.

addition to theology, courses were offered in comparative religion and history of religion. These courses allowed for some of the earliest investigations of Mormonism from a perspective that contemporary scholars would recognize as religious studies. The fact that these courses were approved for University credit represented the beginning of academic approval, as Mormon Studies became a viable field of study at universities. More importantly, church officials, by designing the courses and program, and appointing teachers, were able to play a direct role in scholarship and influence the direction of these investigations.

### **3.4.2 Expansion of the Program**

After the establishment of the first Institute, similar plans were put in place on other campuses. The second institute was established in 1928 at Utah State Agricultural College in Logan (now Utah State University)<sup>52</sup>. Another Institute was created in 1929 at what is now Idaho State University and in 1934 at the University of Utah. The first Institute established outside of the Intermountain West was at the University of Southern California in 1935. As the program spread throughout the country, Institutes offered more and more schools that Mormons could attend while still being able to benefit from a supportive Mormon community<sup>53</sup>.

### **3.5 Conclusion and the Legacy of the Institutes**

This period represents the introduction of the tensions between scholarship and faith in the shaping of Mormon Studies. These tensions largely played out in the ways that officials

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<sup>52</sup> Arrington (1967): 143.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 144. Arrington adds: “Other Institutes founded before WWII were situated at four locations in Utah, one in Wyoming, and three in Arizona” (Ibid, 144).



influenced (and at times controlled) which scholars received support and where they chose to study. The issues surrounding academic freedom at the earliest Utah universities also points to the way that the church discovered and reacted to the developing authority of the academy regarding religion. Scientists who dismissed theories of Creationism in favour of Darwinian evolution were a tangential example of this, but scholars at universities who engaged in biblical criticism represented a direct intervention by scholars into the truth claims of believers. By dismissing scholars for their views on Biblical criticism, church officials attempted to establish their authority in scholarship, and demonstrated their reluctance to lose their authority in identity construction.

## **4.0 The Present State of Mormon Studies**

For some, new religions epitomize all that is dangerous and deviant in the compass of religious belief and practice. For others, they represent fascinating glimpses into the way human beings organize their lives to construct religious meaning and give shape to religious experience. Such differences, however, are only exacerbated by the different agendas that motivate various interest groups<sup>1</sup>

### **4.1 Introduction: The Major Shifts in Scholarship**

#### **4.1.1 The Field of Religious Studies**

Commencing in the 1950s, the approach of scholars at universities to the study of religion underwent a number of important transformations. In the past, authority regarding a charismatic institute such as a church may have rested entirely with church leadership. Outside groups may have at times commented on other groups, but insiders were generally afforded the authority in defining who was ‘in’ and who was ‘out’. In the modern world, church authority is no longer the only opinion which matters. Governments have authority in the sense that they determine which groups receive ‘church’ status. Scholars also play a role in such discussions as they produce constructions and are at times consulted by courts, governments and the popular media. The way that scholars participate as authorities is often also unaccountable. Practitioners have to suffer the consequences of what a scholar publishes even when such statements contradict their church authority or their personal beliefs.

In this period, the locus of authority in identity constructed shifted even further in favour of scholars over church officials. Religious studies departments at public universities increasingly became the place where scholars attempted to objectively define and describe religious groups. This shift has periodically been marked by conflict as

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<sup>1</sup> Cowan and Bromley, 1.

scholars make claims about religious groups that conflict with insider self-perceptions. As seen in the development of Mormon studies, religious groups are aware of this shift, and have attempted to maintain their authority in scholarship by sponsoring scholars, schools, departments, chairs, and publications.

Due to active church involvement in academia, scholars in the twenty-first century may want to consider acting as critical caretakers, to ensure that a balance is maintained between all perspectives. Chairs of Mormon Studies funded by the LDS Church, or other Chairs established by independent wealthy donors, can raise questions regarding the objectivity of the scholars who fill these positions. Such scholars can be accused by some as acting as caretakers or apologists. By remaining critically self-reflective of the external (or even their own internal) motivations for their research, and by periodically revisiting the history of their respective academic fields, religious studies scholars can operate as critical caretakers and ensure that their work is not unduly distorted.

Mormon Studies as a field was dramatically changed in this period as scholars (non-Mormons and Mormons alike) reacted to the work of Rodney Stark and Jan Shipps. In 1985, Shipps published *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* wherein she posited that Mormonism represented the rise of a new, unique religious tradition<sup>2</sup>. Stark, one year before, in 1984, published *The Rise of a New World Faith* in which he argued that the growth of Mormonism represented a unique chance for sociologists to see the rise of a new world religion on a scale not seen since the birth of Islam<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Shipps, Jan. *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Stark, Rodney. "The Rise of a New World Faith" *Review of Religious Research* 26.1 (1984): 18-27.

This chapter will examine the three main trends which have influenced Mormon Studies from the 1950s onwards, and will conclude by examining the Mormon reactions to this most recent phase of scholarship. The most important shifts were the general growth of religious studies in universities, the dynamics of what is often termed the ‘insider/outsider’ problem, and the ever-changing field and terminology of new-religious movements or NRMs. The importance of these shifts is that the authority of defining religions now rested with scholars. As scholars were placed as the main authority in providing religious groups with legitimacy, there was a concomitant recognition by church officials to be well-represented in scholarship. Due to the desire of religious groups to be presented in the best possible light, scholars, (who now possess the authority in defining and describing religious groups), must act as critical caretakers, in order to ensure that their work is not distorted by pressure from the groups they are presenting. Acting as a critical caretaker involves being sensitive to the truth claims that a religious groups make, while still maintaining the critical rigors of scholarship.

In the 1950’s, religious studies, as a discipline within universities, began to be influenced by social sciences such as anthropology, history, and sociology. There was a shift from a theological approach, to attempts at social-scientific investigations<sup>4</sup>. Bowlby corroborates that the shifts to interdisciplinary perspectives were occurring throughout North American universities. He notes that while in 1972 there were no courses in Atlantic Canada examining women and religion, by 1994 there were fifteen such

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Barlow, pointing to possible contributing factors for this shift, writes: “In 1963, the Supreme Court ruled on ‘Abington vs Schempp’, outlawing instruction in religion in the public schools while allowing teaching *about* religion. The decision accelerated the rise of an incipient discipline, marked in that same decade by the formation of the American Academy of Religion” (emphasis mine). (Barlow, 2004: 417).

offerings at schools throughout the region<sup>5</sup>. He also notes a sharp increase during this same period in the number of courses which examined traditions other than Christianity<sup>6</sup>.

In Mormon Studies, this led to new areas of focus for Mormon scholars, from descriptive historical treatments of Mormon figures to examinations of Mormon life through the lenses of the social sciences. This resulted in a number of well-respected Mormon scholars who have turned their academic investigations directly onto their own church, such as Armand Mauss, Leonard Arrington, J. Spencer Fluhman, Philip Barlow, Terry Givens and others. Mauss adds, “it would be fair to say that as much as 80% of all the scholarly literature ever written on the Mormons has appeared in the last quarter century”<sup>7</sup>. Although the field of Mormon Studies had been developing in scholarship for some time, this period witnessed an unprecedented number of books, journal articles, and academic associations devoted to Mormon Studies. This chapter supports my contention that scholars, who at present play a major role in identity construction, should remain aware of church desires to be presented in the best way possible. In order to ensure that their work is not biased, based either on external pressures or their own motivations, scholars should act as critical caretakers to balance the tensions between academic rigor and the religious groups which are examined in scholarship.

#### **4.1.2 Insiders and Outsiders**

Another trend which has shaped the field of Mormon Studies is the presence of the insider/outsider problem. The insider/outsider problem refers to competing ideas of who should have the authority to make claims in scholarship about religious groups. Questions

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<sup>5</sup> Bowlby, 117.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, 95.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, 441.

often arise regarding whether outsiders to a tradition can be authoritative or if insiders to the tradition can remain objective enough to produce valuable work.

While so-called ‘objectivity’ is at the core of the insider/outsider problem, Martin Marty explains how this term has been complicated in recent decades.

People used to say they [historians] should be ‘objective’, but objectivity seems to be a dream denied. This means that historians have to be reasonably aware of their assumptions, the viewpoints they bring, the thought worlds of the people they are representing at second hand. What results, all thoughtful historians agree, is not a reproduction of reality...but a social construction of reality the historian invents<sup>8</sup>.

Scholars’ best attempts at objective presentations are nonetheless distorted by their personal biases. Marty encourages all scholars to recognize the biases they possess and acknowledge how this may distort their presentations.

#### **4.1.3 The Status Politics of a ‘New Religion’**

Another factor shaping Mormon Studies was a very particular reaction to the work of Stark and Shipps. Just as Stark and Shipps offered a new classification for Mormonism, the study of new religious groups saw a simultaneous rise as a field of study. The growth of this field has been a complicated process marked by disagreement over the proper terminology, and to whom it should be applied. Noting why such new terms have been applied to Mormonism by scholars, Lee Wiles writes: “they have done so in large part...because of contestation over the extent to which Mormonism can be considered properly Christian”<sup>9</sup>. Although scholars may not intend it when they use the term, labelling

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<sup>8</sup> Marty, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Wiles, 3. Wiles adds: “Mormonism’s relegation to the agglomerated New Religious Movements category seems unlikely to change until its relationship with Christianity can be satisfactorily resolved” (ibid, 14)

Mormonism as an NRM negates the group's connection with Christianity, at least in the eyes of Mormons.

In this chapter I shall demonstrate how these trends have variously shaped the field of Mormon Studies from the 1950s onwards. The research goals of each association, department and journal can reveal much about how a group of scholars desired to classify Mormonism. There are also questions regarding the motivations for scholars who engage in Mormon Studies and schools that fund chairs or offer courses examining Mormonism<sup>10</sup>. Ann Taves refers to the “different audiences” that Mormon Studies scholars might be engaging, including LDS and RLDS officials and members as well as academic audiences. Taves adds: “Different questions are going to come up depending on the audience that scholars are addressing”<sup>11</sup>. Mormon Studies has been shaped by the clashes between scholars and church officials regarding how Mormonism should be classified in scholarship.

## **4.2 The Impact of Stark and Shipps**

### **4.2.1 Their Work**

As mentioned, an important watershed moment in Mormon Studies can be seen in the respective works of Rodney Stark and Jan Shipps. Although the works in question were published in the 1980s, the perspectives they offered were a result of the trends already operating within religious studies scholarship. Stark is a sociologist and Shipps an historian, meaning both outsiders applied their separate methodologies to the same

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<sup>10</sup> Taves explains: “behind each of these endowed chairs is a community that wants to be present in the academy. How and why they want to be positioned in the academy varies somewhat” (Fluhman and Taves, 12). Some chairs of Mormon Studies are in history and others are in religious studies. This suggests a different approach that each chair would take to the group.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, 12.

religious group. The particular ways in which both scholars looked at the group introduced a new classification of Mormonism in scholarship<sup>12</sup>.

Rodney Stark is a sociologist by trade, and much of his work has focused on the sociology of religion<sup>13</sup>. Although my focus in this section is on Stark's *The Rise of a New World Religion*, Stark showed an interest in the group throughout his academic career<sup>14</sup>. The fact that Stark is a widely respected sociologist of religion and decided to continually direct his gaze to Mormonism (and that he was supported in publishing such efforts) was interpreted as a sign of the group's growing legitimacy in scholarship.

Much like Stark, Shippo continually revisited Mormonism in her research. In addition to Shippo's book *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*, she also published numerous papers in the field of Mormon Studies, and some decades later, her book *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons*<sup>15</sup>. Shippo is widely regarded as one of the most important scholars in the field<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Philip Barlow, referring to the work of Shippo writes: "Her interpretation of who the Mormons are, how Mormonism happened, how it functions as a religion ...has become the dominant paradigm through which outsiders, and many insiders, view the movement" (Barlow, 2004: 413).

<sup>13</sup> After earning his Bachelor's degree in Journalism from the University of Denver, Stark obtained his Master's and Ph.D. degrees in Sociology, both at the University of California, Berkeley. Beginning in the 1970s, he served as Professor of Sociology and Comparative Religion at the University of Washington. He maintained this post until 2004, when he moved to Baylor University. In his current post at Baylor, Stark is the Co-Director of the Institute for Studies of Religion. This shift in title also represents changes in academia. During his first post at the University of Washington, Stark was a Sociologist who conducted studies of religion. In the twenty-first century, he has a dedicated post as a scholar of religion.

<sup>14</sup> Pointing to Stark's introduction to the group, Reid L Nelson writes: "Sociologist Armand L. Mauss introduced Stark to Mormonism when they were both Berkeley graduate students in the 1960s". (Nelson, Reid L., "Introduction" in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism* New York: Columbia University Press, 2005: 1). The fact that Stark was first introduced to the group by a fellow sociologist, may have presented him with a very particular view of the group.

<sup>15</sup> This book was a collection of essays and personal commentary from Shippo on her time spent in the field.

<sup>16</sup> Shippo received her undergraduate education from Utah State University and obtained her master's and doctoral degrees from Colorado State University, all in history. She served for most of her career as Professor of History and Religious Studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). Shippo is a non-Mormon, and, despite brief periods studying in Colorado and Utah, worked outside of the



Stark looked at the growing population as evidence that Mormonism marked the rise of a new world faith, and went so far as to offer concrete predictions of growth rates, that would see Mormonism's membership number between 60 and 265 million members by 2080<sup>17</sup>. Modern scholars who were not present when Islam, Christianity or other world traditions were formed, had a unique opportunity to be 'in the lab' so to speak, as a new religion was developing. Shippy largely made reference to the history and theology of Mormons as markers of its distinctiveness<sup>18</sup>. Its proximity to the modern Western scholar, (in time and space), both argued, made Mormonism an unprecedented case study for the religious studies scholar.

Both scholars invoked the basic argument that Mormonism emerged out of Christianity just as Christianity itself had once emerged out of Judaism. Due to the extent of this split, Mormonism constituted a new religion<sup>19</sup>. Mormon officials, who perceived their group as a unique restoration of Christianity, saw much in this analogy that affirmed their beliefs. Just as early Christians faced suffering and persecution, Mormons saw the persecution in their own history as further proof that Mormonism, like Christianity, would blossom into a worldwide religion.

The main difference between their respective works was simply their choice in terminology. Shippy explains that she used the term *religious tradition* "as an umbrella

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Mormon cultural sphere. The respect Shippy nonetheless earned from her peers is evidenced by the fact she was the first non-Mormon president of the MHA.

<sup>17</sup> Stark (1984): 22.

<sup>18</sup> Shippy also differed from Stark in that rather than comparing Mormonism to other world religions such as Islam, she limited her comparisons to other American religious traditions of the period. Mormonism was distinct enough from these groups, Shippy argued, that Mormonism constituted a new religious tradition.

<sup>19</sup> This has since become a popular analogy to explain the situation of Mormons. In many ways this is an obvious analogy, as each group simply added a new testament to an existing canon. There are however, a number of issues that this comparison fails to address. For example, early Christian communities did not live in a society dominated by the tradition from which they had just broken off.

category that will cover (1) all the corporate bodies and (2) individuals unattached to corporate bodies in whose systems of belief a particular story is central”<sup>20</sup>. In some ways, Shipps’ choice of tradition allowed for more flexibility in the positioning of Mormonism, since it could be applied to differentiate Christianity from Judaism, but equally to note the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism<sup>21</sup>.

#### 4.2.2 Reactions

Duffy explains that due to their positive presentation of the group: “Mormon reactions to Stark’s and Shipps’ work were basically positive. Both scholars were perceived by church leadership as friends of the movement and were therefore allowed privileged access to controlled sociological data or historical records”<sup>22</sup>. It is possible that some of this praise and privileged access however, was a result of the favourable presentation their work gave of Mormonism<sup>23</sup>.

In addition to her favourable representation, Shipps’ work also actively defended Mormonism against some of the unfavourable labels applied to the group, writing, “*Church, denomination, sect, and cult* are the other widely used technical terms that refer to communities of faith...Yet these are vexing terms in which subjective ranking stubbornly inhere”<sup>24</sup>. Shipps expressed awareness of how such terms, however neutrally in intent, could be used to denounce the group.

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<sup>20</sup> Shipps, 1985: 46. By using this umbrella term, Shipps’ definition is able to incorporate groups that adhere to the Book of Mormon but exist outside the LDS Church. This potentially posed problems for the church since it allowed for groups like the FLDS to be labelled ‘Mormon’.

<sup>21</sup> The significance of this flexibility will be examined later, since it allowed Mormons to make the ‘hermeneutic move’ of claiming to be like other denominations, but also different enough to be separate.

<sup>22</sup> Duffy, 191.

<sup>23</sup> Barlow writes: “‘That celebrated Mormon-watcher’ and ‘that beloved Gentile’ are how high officials of the church have referred to her [Shipps]” (Barlow, 2004: 412).

<sup>24</sup> Shipps, 1985: 47.

Stark also expressed empathy towards Mormons as a group for the ways that they had been harshly treated in scholarship, and attempted to defend the group against unwarranted criticism<sup>25</sup>. Both argued that it should be approached with the same respect religious scholars gave to Judaism, Christianity and other religions. The positive reception by Mormon officials to the work of Stark and Shipps may have been because they were seen as defenders of Mormonism, who elevated Mormonism to the level of other groups who receive widespread academic treatment<sup>26</sup>.

#### **4.3 The Insider/Outsider Problem**

This section will examine some of the ways that the insider/outsider problem has shaped the development of Mormon Studies. At times, the research of non-Mormon scholars has clashed with Mormon insider perspectives. In other instances, as in the case of Stark and Shipps, non-Mormon scholars were accepted with open arms. Their acceptance however, can lead to further questions regarding why some outsider perspectives are accepted, while others are not.

Mormons were previously the only scholars involved in the earliest phases of Mormon Studies, and to some degree they still dominate the field<sup>27</sup>. Insiders can face conflicts

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<sup>25</sup> In Stark's 2005 book, *The Rise of Mormonism*, he closes his introduction writing, "I continue to be astonished at the extent to which colleagues who would *never* utter anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, or even anti-Muslim remarks, unself-consciously and self-righteously condemn Mormons. It is time we did better" (Stark, 2005: 29).

<sup>26</sup> Duffy, 192.

<sup>27</sup> Expanding on the historical context of the insider/outsider problem within Mormon Studies, Bradford writes: "Until recently, most scholarly work on Mormonism has been done by Latter-day Saints. Their primary audience has been other interested Latter-day Saints. This is bound to change as study of the tradition moves into other venues and as outsider scholars join in on the conversation...LDS academics will need to come to terms with how best to incorporate their scholarship with that which is being produced by colleagues who are not insiders" (Bradford, Gerald M., "The Study of Mormonism: A Growing Interest in Academia" *FARMS Review* 19.1 (2007):163).

amongst themselves, as one's faith can clash with research findings or when institutional standards clash with ecclesiastical loyalties. Arrington explains:

On the one hand, virtually all of us are loyal, believing, practicing Latter-day Saints...On the other hand, we are seekers and writers of historical truth, and are therefore loyal to the best ideals of our profession. We would be ashamed if we, consciously or unconsciously, distorted events as they actually happened to fit the demands of denominational or political prejudice<sup>28</sup>.

Mormon scholars are therefore aware of their insider biases, but there is an acknowledged struggle in putting these concerns completely aside. Due to these concerns, Mormon scholars may have historically shied away from certain topics that were more likely to challenge their faith. As trends in scholarship changed, and religious studies became a more popular area of research, Mormon scholars adapted their research interests to fit in line with those of non-Mormon scholars

#### **4.3.1 Insiders and Outsiders in the MHA**

Leonard Arrington provides an example of new research interests with reference to the Mormon History Association (MHA). One member, Klaus Hansen, argued that Mormon historians needed to conduct their research using the same methods and rigor as non-Mormon scholars<sup>29</sup>. Their faith or status in the church should not allow Mormon scholars to make unsubstantiated claims. Researching primary source materials in the LDS Church archives was another early goal the group addressed<sup>30</sup>. Along with this recognition of the importance of church documents however, there was a concern expressed regarding the

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<sup>28</sup> Arrington, Leonard J., "Reflections on the Founding and Purpose of the Mormon History Association, 1965-1983" *Journal of Mormon History* 10 (1983): 100.

<sup>29</sup> Arrington writes, "Klaus Hansen suggested that many non-Mormons are now taking Mormon history very seriously and that Mormons ought therefore to take themselves a little *less* seriously. By this he implied that Mormons ought not to write their history with the idea of regulating the future... We need to clarify our criticism, and evaluate the past critically, but we should not see ourselves in the role of priest and prophet. That is, we should not assume that our history gives us all the answers" (Arrington, 1983: 98).

<sup>30</sup> (ibid, 98).

balance between church ties and academic integrity, since church approval was necessary for gaining access to the archives.

#### **4.3.2 Outsiders in Moron Studies**

In the founding meeting of the MHA, among the initial fifty-two members present, there was a diversity of scholars<sup>31</sup>. The presence of church officials as well as Mormon and non-Mormon scholars points to different perspectives of Mormon Studies<sup>32</sup>. The presence of members of the Reorganized Church (RLDS) points to how this association would need to recognize the varieties of ‘Mormonisms’ present in the world, suggesting ‘levels’ of insiders and outsiders in Mormon Studies. Mormons from LDS backgrounds needed to acknowledge and validate the existence of other Mormon churches in order to participate in the MHA. The MHA represents just one of the academic associations dedicated to Mormon Studies, but it is a helpful example since it has a very well-documented development. By the 1980s there were a number of associations dedicated to different disciplines<sup>33</sup>.

In the field of Mormon Studies, outsiders also face a different set of challenges. One contemporary perspective on the outsider’s position in Mormon Studies is provided by Seth Perry, who observed that a non-Mormon can also be an ‘outsider’ in the field of religious studies<sup>34</sup>. Perry writes: “Non-Mormons often become conspiratorial, ready to get answers to everything they’ve always wanted to know...but were afraid to ask. Mormons

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<sup>31</sup> Arrington writes: “Among those present were representatives of the Church Historian’s Office, major western universities, L.D.S. Institutes of Religion, the Idaho Historical Society, and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. At least one prominent non-Mormon was present” (Arrington, 1983: 95).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>33</sup> Other journals founded during the 1970s and 80s include *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* and *Exponent II*. Both supported interdisciplinary perspectives.

<sup>34</sup> Perry, Seth “An Outsider Looks in at Mormonism” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 52.22 (2006).

assume that I have a leaning toward conversion...Rare is the interlocutor who assumes an unvarnished academic interest”<sup>35</sup>. According to Perry, when fellow scholars find out his area of study, rather than inquire what theories and methods he uses, they are generally concerned with finding out all the ‘strange’ things in Mormonism they could never get ‘straight’ answers to.

The way in which non-Mormon scholars are ‘doubly-outsiders’ can also be seen in the case of Jan Shipps, who has at times been accused of being too friendly or un-critical towards Mormons. Barlow writes: “More than one non-Mormon reviewer...has intimated that Professor Shipps, too gentle on the Saints has either gone soft or gone native”<sup>36</sup>. Ralph Frammolino in a 2001 Los Angeles Times review of Shipps’ book *Sojourner in a Promised Land*, accuses her of being “too forgiving of Mormonism’s double-speak, social control and contradictions – some might say hypocrisies”<sup>37</sup>. Such comments have continually hounded Shipps throughout her academic career, and show that in addition to being an outsider to the Mormon tradition, scholars of Mormon Studies can at times be cast as outsiders by fellow scholars, who see her continued examination of the same group as a sign of poor methodology.

Eileen Barker, a scholar of NRMs, has expressed that she has also experienced a certain stigma in her career. As a scholar who studies a fringe religious group yet does not subscribe to its beliefs, Barker faces accusations of becoming ‘too close’ to her area of study. Barker writes: “I found myself being labeled a Moonie, a Scientologist, a

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Barlow, 2004: 413.

<sup>37</sup> Frammolino, Ralph “Mormon’s Long, Strange Trip to the Mainstream” *Los Angeles Times* March 17 2001 (<http://articles.latimes.com/2001/mar/17/local/me-39078>).

fundamentalist Christian, or cult-lover – or, by the more benign, an innocent who was being deceived by the movements”<sup>38</sup>. Due to their subject matter (and the stereotypes which surround them), scholars of NRMs and Mormon Studies continually have their objectivity questioned, and they are often cast as apologists rather than academics.

#### **4.4 Explosive Growth of Mormon Studies**

##### **4.4.1 Shifts in Perspective**

This section will track the quantitative growth of Mormon Studies by looking at the academic journals, associations, departments and courses that were created during this period. An important aspect of the growth in scholarship is the qualitative shift in perspectives and disciplines that scholars brought to their research<sup>39</sup>. As each new journal, department, association or dissertation was created, scholars made significant choices regarding how they believed others should look at Mormonism.

Martin Marty explains the qualitative shifts that took place within Mormon Studies during this period:

historians cannot prove that the Book of Mormon was translated from golden plates and have not proven that it was simply a fiction of Joseph Smith. Instead they seek to understand...why it discloses modes of being and of believing that millions of Saints would otherwise not entertain<sup>40</sup>.

During this period, reflecting broader shifts in religious studies, scholars began to look past the initial truth claims that Mormonism makes and instead investigated how religions (or religious people) behave.

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<sup>38</sup> Barker, 10.

<sup>39</sup> Mauss explains how the focus of research shifted in the 1950s. “Both Mormon and non-Mormon scholars in religious studies now understand that religious experiences, myths and commitments should be taken seriously as data, rather than explained away as pathological” (Mauss, 441). This can be difficult to do but to take someone else’s claims ‘seriously’ is now recognized as a crucially important task.

<sup>40</sup> Marty, 12.

In Mormon Studies, this entailed a shift from historical studies, to social-scientific investigations. Taves explains: “history does dominate. But I think there is a growing presence of scholars from literature and sociology. I’m thinking of the more literary approaches ...done by Terryl Givens, Philip Barlow, Mark Thomas, Grant Hardy...and of the sociological work of Armand Mauss and Gary and Gordon Shepherd”<sup>41</sup>. The field has only seen a recent shift to interdisciplinary investigations. Mauss points out that previously when scholars before this period studied cultural expressions of Mormons, they rarely engaged the beliefs of Mormons<sup>42</sup>.

Bradford, in his 2007 paper “The Study of Mormonism: A Growing Interest in Academia”, traces the recent changes in Mormon Studies, both in size and area of focus. He writes: “At least thirty-eight dissertations...and sixteen theses written since 1994 have focused directly on issues central to Mormonism.”<sup>43</sup>. The growth in books, articles, dissertations and degrees which examined Mormonism through a variety of interdisciplinary lenses attest to the recent shifts in the field.

Bradford assesses the growth of Mormon Studies based in part on the 1971 Welch report. This report assessed religious education in the United States and Canada and noted that a number of non-sectarian private and public universities had begun to offer graduate

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<sup>41</sup> Fluhman and Taves, 15. With the exception of Armand Mauss, born 1928, most of the scholars listed by Taves were born around the 1950s and earned their university degrees in the 1970s and 80s. They are therefore representative of the shifts in research, and the time when such shifts took place.

<sup>42</sup> Mauss’ full quotation reads: “Until about the 1950s...the scholarly literature on the Mormons concentrated upon rural economic, community, and family life. What was *not* studied, except for oblique references in passing, was the sociology or anthropology of the Mormon religion itself. There had always been an abundance of partisan, polemical literature on the Mormon religion, from both inside and outside of the Mormon community, but few scholarly works existed”<sup>42</sup>. (Mauss, 439).

<sup>43</sup> Bradford, 122. Barlow expands on this recent growth, writing: “half-a-thousand Ph.D. degrees in Mormon-related topics were granted in the second half of the twentieth century...Almost three thousand books, articles, and related material on Mormon history appeared in the 1980s alone” (Barlow, 2004: 420).



degrees in religious studies<sup>44</sup>. Scholars in religious studies began to borrow the methodologies and theories of other disciplines and to apply them to religious groups. Mormon scholars followed suit and soon applied the same methodologies to Mormonism. Mormon scholars also followed suit in the sense that religious studies scholars were increasingly distancing themselves from their faith (or at least attempting to). For scholars, religion became just another human phenomenon suitable for academic investigation.

Applying new disciplines to Mormon life has revealed previously under-examined features of Mormon societies. As an example, when scholars examined the experiences of Mormon women (past or present), they discovered strategies which have been used to carve out unique areas of expression while existing in a church that does not offer the possibility of priesthood<sup>45</sup>. Gender studies was just one perspective from which Mormon Studies borrowed theories and methods after the 1970s. Others included sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, and family studies. Each new discipline produces new findings about Mormon life.

#### **4.4.2 Growth of Journals, Associations and Publications**

The growth of Mormon Studies can be traced through the journals and associations started in recent decades. These have brought together scholars from across different fields and institutions. Among the most prominent academic journals are *Dialogue: A Journal of*

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<sup>44</sup> Bradford, 137. Bradford writes: “the Welch report found that among institutions surveyed, while 40 private colleges and universities associated with schools of theology or divinity schools...still dominated the field, an increasing number of non-sectarian private universities (26 in total) offered MA and Ph.D. degrees in religious studies. And for the first time, three public universities – The University of Iowa...the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of Wisconsin – also offered comparable degrees” (ibid, 138).

<sup>45</sup> Cornwall, Marie “The Institutional Role of Mormon Women” in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives* ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton and Lawrence A. Young (University of Illinois Press, Chicago: 1994).

*Mormon Thought*, the *Journal of Mormon History* and *Sunstone*, all of which are independent of church ties. Numerous academic associations dedicated to Mormon Studies, such as the MHA have been created<sup>46</sup>. Additionally, starting in 2007, the American Academy of Religion began holding a Mormon Studies subsection at its annual meetings<sup>47</sup>. The University of Durham in England hosted a conference in 1999 titled ‘Mormonism as a World Religion’. Barlow notes that this was “the first conference focusing on the Latter-day Saints to be sponsored by a major university in a nonconfessional setting”<sup>48</sup>. This conference represents the shift in the religious backgrounds and financial support of scholars involved in Mormon Studies.

The growth in the number of publishing houses which publish works on Mormon Studies in this period offered another arena for scholarship detached from the Church. The University of Illinois Press, far removed from the Mormon cultural sphere, quickly became one of the more prominent publishing houses in Mormon Studies, due in no small part to the work of Shippo. Barlow highlights additional publishing houses outside of Utah which began to publish works in Mormon Studies including Oxford University Press, Columbia

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<sup>46</sup> Bradford provides a breakdown of the most prominent publications and when they began. “The quarterly *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* began publication in 1966; the Mormon History Association, formed in 1965, publishes the triennial *Journal of Mormon History* that started in 1974; the Mormon Social Science Association (formerly the Society for the Sociological Study of Mormon Life) was formed in 1976; *Sunstone* a bimonthly magazine first appeared in 1976; the John Whitmer Historical Association, established in 1972, publishes the annual *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* that started in 1980; the Association of Mormon Letters was formed in 1976 and began publication of *Irreantum: A Review of Mormon Literature and Film*, an annual, in 2000; and the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology, formed in 2005, publishes *Element: Journal of the Society of Mormon Philosophy and Theology*” (Bradford, 121).

<sup>47</sup> Haws, J.B., *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013): 188.

<sup>48</sup> Barlow (2004): 421

University Press, Knopf, the University of North Carolina Press, and the University of Oklahoma Press<sup>49</sup>.

This meant that scholars could receive support for projects that may not have been supported by church. The growth of non-Mormon presses willing to publish volumes in Mormon Studies has played a significant role in the development of the field. When the LDS Church discontinued Arrington's proposed sixteen-volume project of Mormon history after scholars had already signed contracts, these presses offered viable avenues to publish research which had already been conducted<sup>50</sup>.

#### **4.4.3 Growth within Universities**

Returning to the presence of Mormon Studies within universities, most of the schools which dominate the field are in Utah. The school outside of Utah which deals with Mormonism most explicitly as an area of study is Claremont Graduate University. At Claremont, the Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies was established in 2008. The position was first held by Richard L. Bushman and it is currently held by Patrick Q. Mason. Utah State University, appointed Philip Barlow to the Leonard J. Arrington Chair of Mormon History and Culture in 2007. The University of Virginia, in 2012, created the Richard Lyman Bushman Chair of Mormon Studies, which is currently held by Kathleen Flake<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Barlow (2004): 421. Not to neglect the publishing houses which dominated Utah, Barlow adds: "Within Utah, Signature Books, the University of Utah Press, Utah State University Press, and various imprints of Brigham Young University have contributed significant works" (ibid).

<sup>50</sup> Shipps adds: "notwithstanding this warning from their ecclesiastical superior, several authors of the volumes originally intended for publication by Deseret Book Company sought publication elsewhere" (Shipps, Jan "Review: Richard Lyman Bushman, the Story of Joseph Smith and Mormonism, and the New Mormon History" *The Journal of American History* 94.2 (2007): 506).

<sup>51</sup> Haws, 278. This position is currently held by Dr. Kathleen Flake.

Barlow, writing in 2004 pointed to other institutions which were potentially establishing chairs in Mormon Studies. “Talks are underway for an analogous position at the University of Wyoming...The University of Utah, is searching to hire in its history department a professor of Mormon as well as Utah history”<sup>52</sup>. Since the writing of Barlow’s essay, there have been a number of changes regarding schools that offer a focus in Mormon Studies.

In 2010, the Tanner Humanities Center at the University of Utah created the Mormon Studies Initiative. The purpose of the initiative, as outlined on its website is to “support the study of Mormonism on campus and in the wider community. This initiative encourages vibrant, intellectual exploration of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, its people, values, history, culture, and institutions”<sup>53</sup>. At present, the initiative functions mostly by supporting students through scholarships, awards and other funding opportunities. The Initiative has not yet created a Professor in Mormon Studies but Brian Birch was very recently announced as the first Marlin K. Jensen Scholar and Artist in Residence in the Mormon Studies Initiative<sup>54</sup>. During the fall 2016 semester, Birch will increase the presence of Mormon Studies at the university by offering public lectures, serving as a research advisor for students and teaching a course in Mormon Studies.

Despite an announcement in 2007 that an initiative in Mormon Studies had begun at the University of Wyoming, Mormonism does not appear to be the explicit focus of any

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<sup>52</sup> Barlow (2004): 421.

<sup>53</sup> “The Mormon Studies Initiative at the University of Utah” <http://thc.utah.edu/lectures-programs/mormon-studies-initiative/>.

<sup>54</sup> “Mormon Studies initiative at U names Brian Birch as first scholar in residence” *UNews* June 1, 2016, accessed July 3, 2016 <http://unews.utah.edu/mormon-studies-initiative-at-u-names-brian-birch-as-first-scholar-in-residence/>.

course or program<sup>55</sup>. Finally, the most recent development is the establishment of the John A. Widtsoe Chair of Mormon Studies at the University of Southern California, created in 2015, where a professor has yet to be appointed<sup>56</sup>.

These examples show the variety of approaches that Mormon Studies scholars engage in at universities. The placement of chairs also points to the departments and courses where students are most likely to encounter Mormonism. Bradford explains that two courses ('Religion in the American West' and 'Religion in America') were offered at the University of Wyoming which examined Mormonism<sup>57</sup>. Laurie F. Mafly-Kipp offered a course titled 'Mormonism and the American Experience' at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill<sup>58</sup>. The diversity of approaches these courses offer suggest that different presentations of what Mormonism 'is' can be produced at different schools. Examining the group historically as opposed to in direct comparison with other religious groups can lead to different presentations of the group.

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<sup>55</sup> Stephenson, Shauna "Mormon Studies starts at the University of Wyo." *Wyoming News* March 1, 2007, accessed July 3, 2016 ([http://www.wyomingnews.com/news/mormon-studies-starts-at-university-of-wyo/article\\_12dee12b-f52e-59bc-ae5c-eda3e1cecddc.html](http://www.wyomingnews.com/news/mormon-studies-starts-at-university-of-wyo/article_12dee12b-f52e-59bc-ae5c-eda3e1cecddc.html)) In this article, Stephenson reports that Paul Flesher and Kevin Larsen were appointed co-chairs of the Mormon Studies Initiative. A recent search of the University of Wyoming's website shows that Larsen (an adjunct professor at the time of the article) is no longer listed as a faculty member. Additionally, the title of chair or co-chair of a Mormon Studies initiative is not connected anywhere with Flesher's name, although he is still head of the department. Finally, a search of the religious studies course listings bear no mention of Mormonism, although it is entirely possible that some courses on American religion deal with the group in passing.

<sup>56</sup>An article published by the LDS *Newsroom* reported: "The chair includes a tenured professor (faculty position) within the USC School of Religion with responsibilities that include curriculum development, seminars and other programs. The recipient of the chair will be named at a later date" ("President Uchtdorf Speaks at Religious Symposium at USC: John A. Widtsoe Symposium and Chair Established on California Campus" *Newsroom* April 24 2015, accessed July 3 2016 <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/president-uchtdorf-speaks-at-religious-symposium-at-usc>).

While there is still no professor appointed, the announcement was still recent enough that it is unreasonable to assume USC's chair will witness the same fate as the University of Wyoming's Initiative.

<sup>57</sup> Bradford, 12. Bradford adds: "it may be dealt with in general survey courses at Arizona state" (ibid, 12).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.4.4 Mormon Studies at BYU

As mentioned, Mormonism has been explicitly dealt with in institutions throughout Utah for much longer than it has been treated in Religious Studies departments in other parts of the country. Historical studies were long a popular subject of study within Utah. The particular motivations for research promoted by the church has therefore influenced the way in which the schools within Utah study Mormonism<sup>59</sup>.

The background of BYU means it differs even from other schools in Utah in the way it studies Mormonism. Bradford writes: “At BYU the subject is approached from a perspective of institutional and individual commitment. While BYU does offer a few courses on other religions, it does not maintain a religious studies program. It is devoted...to teaching students the ‘language of faith’ more than the ‘language about faith’”<sup>60</sup>. In a similar fashion, BYU contributes to the field of Mormon Studies, but does not have a religious studies department.

BYU witnessed a number of incidents in the early 1900s of administration clashing with faculty, which has raised questions over the academic freedom afforded to scholars at BYU<sup>61</sup>. Barlow explains that even several decades after the notable dismissals from BYU,

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<sup>59</sup> Seeking to highlight how dominant the theological/historical approach to the study of religion in the state of Utah, Bradford points to the seemingly anomalous Utah Valley State College who offer the only undergraduate religious studies program in Utah’s public system of higher education (Bradford, 124).

<sup>60</sup> Bradford, 125 (emphasis mine). Seth Perry echoes these sentiments, drawing comparisons to other denominational schools in the country. He writes: “It is important to understand that BYU...is not Mormon the way that Georgetown University, or even the University of Notre Dame, is Roman Catholic; it is explicitly a faith-promoting endeavor of the church.” (Perry, 4).

<sup>61</sup> Expanding on the impact of the now-distant 1911 shake-up, Barlow, (writing eighty years later), adds: “Lowell L. Bennion, among Mormonism’s two or three preeminent religious educators of the twentieth century refused employment from BYU because he did not feel he would have sufficient intellectual freedom to teach religion there” (Barlow, Philip L. *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* New York: Oxford University Press, 1991: 139).

school officials “remained keenly aware that the growth of the university’s stature had been stunted by the loss...and was still feeling the effects”<sup>62</sup>. Although there have been relatively few dismissals over BYU’s long history, they have impacted the way the school is viewed.

BYU (as well as its satellite campuses and sister-schools BYU-Hawaii and BYU-Idaho) represents the ways that the Mormon church has an influence over the way that Mormonism is treated in scholarship; certain scholars and projects are funded while others are not. Further, while they are not the only institutions to publish Mormon Studies scholarship, their output represents a significant portion of the field and can serve to reinforce church beliefs. Referring to the 1911 resignation of Ralph Chamberlin, Barlow writes: “countless Latter-day Saints were led to infer that his views were not legitimate in the context of Mormon faith and that conservative views, because they were allowed to dominate the teaching of religion at Brigham Young University, represented ‘real Mormonism’”<sup>63</sup>. Mormons who are not engaged in scholarship are still aware of the activities of the school, and view it as another arm of the church.

Lawrence A. Young assesses the complicated institutional affiliation between BYU and the church in the book of collected essays, *Contemporary Mormonism*. In the conclusion, Young asks:

Does the institutional affiliation of BYU scholars shape the direction that research takes? Undoubtedly it does, especially to the degree that these scholars represent a significant cadre of those who carry out the social scientific analysis of contemporary Mormonism...Does this institutional affiliation undermine the quality of the research by producing blind spots? Hopefully not. Nevertheless, if the effects of institutional loyalty and control shape the

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<sup>62</sup> Barlow (1991): 139.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 138.

direction that research takes, these forces could help explain some of the gaps in this volume – including its limited critical analysis<sup>64</sup>.

Although valuable scholarship is produced at BYU, its institutional affiliations have shaped the scholarship that is produced and ultimately the Mormon identity which is constructed.

#### 4.4.5 New Perspectives in Mormon Studies

Recent shifts in religious studies have seen social scientific investigations become more widespread than theological approaches. Mauss suggests however, that important areas of Mormon life are still being explored through the lens of theology<sup>65</sup>. While there was a shift away from theology in this period, there are still important investigations made using this perspective<sup>66</sup>.

Terryl Givens argues that since the 1890s, the group has entered new geographic arenas, and this growing role as an international church has been under-analyzed<sup>67</sup>. International investigations are significant for the future of Mormon Studies, since officials announced that as of February 25, 1996, more Mormons lived outside of America than within<sup>68</sup>. The ways in which new converts interpret longstanding doctrines have challenged

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<sup>64</sup>Young, Lawrence A., “Epilogue” *Contemporary Mormonism: A Sociological Analysis of Mormonism* ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton and Lawrence A. Young (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994): 351. Young is here only referring to the lack of critical analysis of Mormons within the volume. The questions raised above however, could also point to the reasons behind a general lack of critical analysis in the field of Mormon Studies. Expanding on the broader field, Young writes: “we know of no scholar who draws explicitly from the neo-Marxist tradition in the social sciences. Postmodern and feminist critiques are also mostly missing” (Young, 350).

<sup>65</sup> Mauss argues for example, that “A unique theology of the family lies behind both the fertility of Mormon couples and the church’s strong commitment to family life” (Mauss, 445).

<sup>66</sup> Mauss also refers to a Mormon ‘diaspora’ (in America or throughout the world), which represents another new area of research.

<sup>67</sup> Givens, Terryl *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* New York: Oxford University Press, (2007): xvi.

<sup>68</sup> Todd, Jay M., “More Mormons Now outside U.S. Than in U.S.” *Ensign* March 1996 (<https://www.lds.org/ensign/1996/03/news-of-the-church?lang=eng>)



the status of the largely white American church leadership, and has resulted from time to time in creative interpretive responses from church officials<sup>69</sup>.

Taves explains this new potential area of studies with reference to Christianity. “We know quite a bit about the difficulties that Bible translators have faced in translating key terms from one cultural context (and web of associated meanings) into another. We don’t know much...about the issues that have arisen with the many translations of the Book of Mormon”<sup>70</sup>. As Mormonism has entered new cultures, there have inevitably been changes in interpretations of doctrine and even the words which make up Mormon scripture.

Citing another new culture Mormonism has entered, David Knowlton focuses on missionary activity in Bolivia<sup>71</sup>. As Mormonism entered South and Central America, Africa, and Europe, local communities responded in unique ways which demand new investigations of what Mormon theology is or can be<sup>72</sup>. As scholars presented new insights about Mormon life, religion and culture, they have shaped the ways that Mormons are now viewed in the world, and more importantly, how Mormons view themselves<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas W. Murphy’s essay “From Racist Stereotype to Ethnic Identity” outlines the development of Mormonism outside of America. Murphy focuses specifically on Mexico, where many native Mexicans identified themselves as the Lamanites from the Book of Mormon. Mexican converts, interpreting their Lamanite heritage as a sign of their superiority over the white Church leadership challenged church authority. Summarizing the church’s handling of development in Mexico, Murphy writes: “leaders employed ethnic imagery for their own instrumental gains and de-emphasized the interpretations of Mexican Mormons to protect their own privilege” (Murphy, Thomas W., “From Racist Stereotype to Ethnic Identity: Instrumental Uses of Mormon Racial Doctrine” *Ethnohistory* 46.3 1999: 468).

<sup>70</sup> Fluhman and Taves, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Knowlton writes: “The Rocky Mountain culture, with its 150 years of missionary tales and sayings has been transported by the missionaries to Bolivia, where it entered into syncretic relations with a similarly rich Bolivian popular culture. Out of this incessant, but structured, interrelationship of two very different expressive cultures has developed a Bolivian Mormonism” (Knowlton, David “Anglo Mormon Missionary Culture in Bolivia” in *Contemporary Mormonism* 21).

<sup>72</sup> Offering a new area of theological inquiry, McDermott proposes research in reference to doctrinal changes *within* America. “Mormonism has an enormous capacity for change. When the LDS gospel got a poor reception in various times and climes, it changed its doctrine about blacks, Jews and the identity of the Lamanites” (McDermott, 8).

<sup>73</sup> Bradford also points to the diversity that exists in theological interpretations among religious believers, even within the same tradition. This, as he sees it, is cause for further theologically-based academic

The result of these new investigations was that Mormons again started to look like a more distinct group, based on the unique behaviours that scholars highlighted<sup>74</sup>. These presentations did not highlight these unique behaviours to deliberately portray Mormons as weird or strange (as non-Mormons had done in their writing about Mormons in the past). In this period, a scholar highlighted characteristics that Mormons tended to exhibit in ways not present in other groups. Grant Underwood offers an example: “The LDS death rate and the low incidence of a variety of diseases appear to be linked to their now strict adherence to the ‘Word of Wisdom’ which...proscribes tobacco and prescribes temperance”<sup>75</sup>. Church officials were responsible for maintaining doctrines such as the Word of Wisdom, but in this period, scholars played the important role of explaining how this shaped Mormon identity. Such studies contributed to the notion that Mormons were ‘not quite the same’ as other Christians. The impact of this shift became more complicated, as the 1970s witnessed a change in how religious studies scholars looked at new and alternative religious groups.

#### **4.5 The Study of NRMs and the Status Politics of Novelty**

The concept of a ‘new religious movement’ or NRM, commencing in the 1970s, offered a new paradigm through which Mormonism could be viewed<sup>76</sup>. This section will examine the complicated development of the field surrounding this new terminology. The most significant factor in the development of Mormon Studies is the way Mormons have reacted

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research of Mormonism. “Just as it is commonplace today to find...religious Jews classifying themselves as either Orthodox or conservative...or as Reformed or liberal...so it is among devout LDS scholars...Some emphasize certain beliefs to the diminution of others, value the ritual dimension of the faith differently, read and interpret the scriptures in different ways” (Bradford, 164).

<sup>74</sup> Mauss points to a number of new research topics in the field including Mormon ‘secularization’, political behaviour, racial and ethnic attitudes, the influence of feminism and many others. (Mauss, 451).

<sup>75</sup> Underwood, 413.

<sup>76</sup> Duffy, 182.

to these classifications. Their complex reactions have been described as demonstrating the ‘status politics of novelty’ by John-Charles Duffy, who uses this term as a way to evaluate the perceived benefits and consequences of being considered a new religion<sup>77</sup>. Although there may have been a time when ‘new religion’ was a flattering portrayal, these classifications, (whether the older ‘cult’ or the more recent term ‘NRM’), are often used by those wishing to denounce certain groups<sup>78</sup>.

#### 4.5.1 Mormonism and the Field of NRMs

When ‘cult’ became a ‘four-letter word’ to refer to devious religious groups, NRM was constructed as a term by scholars and entered standard usage<sup>79</sup>. NRM, however, had the same potential to be co-opted. Duffy explains:

For scholars who use ‘new religion’ in this way, the term is not pejorative. But how is it viewed by groups to whom it is applied? For such groups, the term has potential to be problematic because it locates them, however neutrally in intent, on the cultural fringes. Like its predecessor ‘cult’, ‘new religion’ designates movements that enjoy less social respectability than either churches or sects<sup>80</sup>.

Some believers were not satisfied with the risks such placement posed for their social respectability.

Expanding on why this category affects insider perceptions, J.Z. Smith writes: “New Religions’ comprise the second largest category in the *Dictionary of Religion* after

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<sup>77</sup> Duffy describes this dynamic as “what a religious group perceives itself to gain or lose in terms of its cultural location (mainstream or marginal) when it is designated ‘new’” (Duffy, 181).

<sup>78</sup> Aware of this, Shippo offered the following disclaimer in her use of the terms: “sects or cults are generally thought to be expressions of disrespect, with *cult* being the more pejorative term, but that is not the case here” (Shippo (1985): 47). The fact that Shippo felt the need to offer such a disclaimer suggests she was aware of the negative connotations of these terms.

<sup>79</sup> Here I am borrowing the phrase from an unnamed student of either Cowan or Bromley. In a seminar, after a discussion of how the term cult is often applied, the student in question commented: “‘So Professor, what you’re really saying is that ‘cult’ is just a four-letter word for a religion someone doesn’t like” (Cowan and Bromley, 11).

<sup>80</sup> Duffy, 180.

Christianity, [however] more than a third of its entries are to groups arguably Christian that, nevertheless, received no place in Christianity's more centrist list of entries"<sup>81</sup>. When Mormons reject the NRM classification they are expressing a desire to be included among this more 'centrist list of entries'.

#### 4.5.2 NRMs and Mormon Self-Perceptions

Duffy explains how Mormon self-perceptions were tied up in the larger conversations taking place regarding cults and NRMs.

[A]uthors voiced anxieties about the LDS Church akin to those being voiced about movements such as the Unification church or the Church of Scientology: Its leaders were authoritarian and intolerant of dissent; it wielded shadowy political and economic power; its teachings were bizarre; its members were insular<sup>82</sup>.

The change in perceptions of Mormons were connected to the way that scholars, and the popular media, were starting to treat non-traditional religious groups and NRMs.

When Stark and Shipps placed Mormonism on the religious spectrum alongside the other Abrahamic faiths, there was some degree of acceptance for these comparisons<sup>83</sup>. When the field of NRMs placed Mormonism alongside Scientology and other groups labeled 'cults' in the popular media, there was Mormon ambivalence towards these comparisons because the language associated with NRMs began to complicate the perception of Mormons as mainstream.

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<sup>81</sup> Smith, Jonathan Z., "A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion" *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 171-172.

<sup>82</sup> Duffy, 187. Duffy adds: "Mormonism became one of the primary targets of an increasingly vigorous 'countercult' movement among evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant, who classed Mormonism as a 'cult' because it deviated from their definition of Christian orthodoxy" (ibid, 187).

<sup>83</sup> Stark make a reference to Mormonism in comparison with Scientology and Hare Krishna, regarding the growth of new religious groups in Europe. Significantly, after drawing this comparison, outlining how Mormons differ from these NRMS, Stark adds "But the Mormons are having much greater success than the others" (Stark, 1984: 25).

Mormonism during the latter half of the twentieth century can be seen as moving from out of the multitude of Christian sects and being recognized by scholars as a new, independent, religious tradition. There was a degree of cultural status at stake in this move. This new classification represented acknowledgement of Mormon growth on behalf of scholars. However, if Mormonism was to be recognized as a 'new world religion', this meant that any anti-Mormon group could use similar attacks as those they leveled at Scientologists or members of any other maligned NRM. The many opponents of Mormonism in mainline Christianity found more ammunition with which to attack the group.

This classification also subtly put into question Mormonism's connection to Christianity, which denies one of Mormonism's fundamental truth claims. It could also have serious consequences for American Mormons, and many may favour a cultural acceptance as Christians over an academic recognition as an NRM.

Noting that different definitions are interpreted in particular ways by church officials, Duffy termed these interpretations 'apologetic moves'. One 'apologetic move' Duffy points to is demonstrated in a passage from Eric Eliason's introduction to his book *Mormons and Mormonism: An Introduction to an American World Religion*. Duffy provides an interpretation of Eliason's book, but the title alone is significant in revealing the author's desired presentation of Mormonism. Mormonism is simultaneously able to gain the prominence of being a world religion, but remain a patriotically American religion. Duffy examines a passage which outlines the argument put forward by Eliason that Mormonism is Christian, but not Christian.

'Mormonism', he proposed, could be categorized 'as a new fourth division of Christianity along with Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism' – ergo, as part of the Christian mainstream. 'However' Eliason immediately continued, 'it can be reasonably argued that Mormonism differs more historically, doctrinally, and canonically from the other great divisions of Christianity than these divisions differ from each other'<sup>84</sup>

Duffy highlights the rhetorical moves required by this classification. This 'apologetic move' of insisting that Mormonism is Christian, but not Christian, (just as it is a World religion, *but also* an American religion), allows Mormonism to be presented as one, or sometimes the other, depending on the circumstances. Lee Wiles explains that another popular label for Mormons is 'worldwide' or 'international' church. Wiles explains: "[T]hese terms have the advantage of denoting the global scope of Mormonism without implying that it is a religion unto itself"<sup>85</sup>. Officials may prefer the ambiguity inherent in such classifications.

#### **4.5.3 Self-Perception and the Stakes of Scholarship**

Mormon struggles with self-perception are just as important a part of Mormon Studies as the work of the scholars which led to new classifications. Scholars can construct definitions for phenomena, but they still have to pass the 'test', so to speak, of insider reactions to their claims. Although some scholars see themselves as 'rescuing' Mormonism from criticism by labelling it a new religion, Mormons themselves struggle with this new classification, as they see themselves pushed out of their relationship with Christianity. Givens provides context behind the Mormon desire for this both/and bid. "The cost of their chosen status appears recurrently in the Mormon psyche...fueled by both a longing for

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<sup>84</sup> Duffy, 194.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid*, 6.

inclusion and an imperative to redeem the world”<sup>86</sup>. Duffy interprets Mormonism’s ambivalence to a precise classification in a different way, albeit referring only to the claims made by Eliason.

He did this in order to claim the advantages of both designations. Recognized as a fourth category of Christianity, Mormons could mingle with Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox when they found that association useful. Simultaneously though, Mormons could demand special attention on the grounds that they held the even greater cachet of being one of the world’s three newest world religions, alongside Sikhs and Baha’is<sup>87</sup>.

Wiles questions the motivations of non-Mormon scholars as well, suggesting they have a stake in how their subject of study is viewed more broadly. Wiles elaborates. “Though...some non-Mormon scholars have labeled Mormonism a world religion, thus...increasing the likelihood that their work will be seen as salient to a wide audience, it was far from given that LDS scholars or leaders would appropriate the label themselves”<sup>88</sup>. Classifying Mormonism alongside other world religions (or even a large denomination such as Catholicism) can also be used as an argument for creating Chairs in Mormon Studies, something which may not occur for a singular NRM.

Being regarded as either another sect of Christianity or as a new world religion presents numerous advantages and disadvantages for Mormon officials. Being recognized as a new world religion denotes a status of scholarly acceptance and legitimacy that the movement has struggled to gain for so long, but it also can be seen as ousting Mormons from their comfortable cultural position as an American Christian group. Most NRMs provide examples of how this duality can operate. Although Scientology has been accepted in

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<sup>86</sup> Givens, (2007): xv-xvi.

<sup>87</sup> Duffy, 195.

<sup>88</sup> Wiles, 23.

scholarship as a unique tradition with no ties to other religious bodies, it is very far from being accepted in the cultural sphere.

In addition to Scientology being generally disparaged in popular media, the Church of Scientology has also had its status as a legitimate religious tradition questioned by various national governments. Between the 1990s and early 2000s, the Church of Scientology was placed on lists of groups which posed a ‘danger to society’ in Greece, Germany, and France<sup>89</sup>. In addition to Scientology’s appearance on such lists, its authenticity has also been questioned in countries where it does not receive the tax exempt or charitable status afforded to other religious organizations<sup>90</sup>.

The classification of Mormonism as a new world religion also has potential advantages for scholars of Mormon Studies. Much of Mormonism’s past, present and future can be contextualized and analyzed using theories and methods from the field of NRMs. Scholars who classify Mormonism as an NRM can greatly expand the theorists they rely on or collaborate with and have just as much a stake as Mormons do in where the group is placed. Additionally, Wiles argues that scholars “can rely on the cachet and seeming global significance of the world religion category to boost the salience of their work to a broader audience”<sup>91</sup>. The bold declarations of Stark and Shipps would have seemed far less dramatic were they only proclaiming that Mormonism represented a new Christian denomination.

Most Christian denominations, save perhaps Catholicism, do not have specific departments or chairs devoted to their study, particularly at public universities. Mormon

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<sup>89</sup>Cowan and Bromley, 19-20

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>91</sup> Wiles, 8.



Studies scholars thus reap the benefits of studying a growing group, and can claim it is unlike any other denomination. At the same time, few schools if any, offer entire departments devoted to NRMs. Scholars can therefore rely on Mormonism's connection to the larger Christian body to distinguish it from the many other, smaller groups classified as NRMs. It is therefore important for scholars to be conscious of the sometimes subtle motivations for (and ultimate consequences of) their work.

During all periods throughout the field's history, there have been competing pressures over how to place the group within society, and it is important to acknowledge that such discussions have taken place both inside and outside scholarship. Previously, such discussions took place almost entirely in confessional settings, but this period established the active participation of scholars in adjudicating the truth claims and shaping the perceptions of religious devotees. Although the privilege of this authority has been established for scholars in academia, the case of Mormon Studies demonstrates that religious groups can nonetheless influence their study in scholarship. The stakes of both scholars, (who desire to present their research as meaningful), and religious officials, (who wish to hold the ultimate authority in how their group is presented) bear careful consideration for the impact they have on the research produced in a field.

## **5.0 Final Conclusions**

When I originally began researching for this project, my motivating question revolved around whether or not Mormons were Christian. At first glance, Mormonism seemed to me like a religious group which had deviated considerably from Christian “orthodoxy” with new texts, doctrines and practices. My project was nothing less than to establish concretely that this group was in fact different. What I soon discovered, at least in the more recent publications I consulted, was that this was not a concern with which most scholars were preoccupied. I soon discovered that the flaw was largely with the type of question I was engaging. I discovered that due to the overarching shifts in academia, scholars are not necessarily interested in whether groups are or are not Christian. The answer, if there can be one, simply does not reveal anything fundamental for scholars. Rather, I discovered Mormonism was presented in scholarship under labels such as new religious tradition, new world religion, or American religious tradition and so I became interested with how these constructions of Mormon identity in scholarship had occurred.

To return to the framing question of this thesis, what role do scholars play in the identity construction of the religious groups they study? Although scholars claim to have no interest in adjudicating the truth claims of religions, it is clear that their presentations impact the lives of believers. Scholarship does not only affect the self-perceptions of the group, but the way a religious group is perceived by outsiders as well. Groups are perceived as ‘marginal’ or ‘mainstream’ depending on how scholars classify groups. This can have consequences for groups, such as when governments deny a religious group charitable status. As scholars are consulted by governments or media outlets for information about religious groups, their labels become authoritative in public discourse.

The proliferation of academic posts in religious studies has meant that religious bodies are no longer the only group who construct their identity; scholars contribute to the process as well.

Recognizing the role scholars play in identity construction raises another question: Do scholars have a responsibility to defend the groups they study against negative presentations? Further, do scholars have a responsibility to present *positive* portrayals of the groups they study? Russell McCutcheon, in his book *Critics Not Caretakers* argues that there is no responsibility whatsoever. The role of the scholar is that of objective and exacting critic. This work can only be conducted, McCutcheon argues, if a scholar is distanced from their research, and if they are willing, to some degree, to make claims which challenge insider perceptions<sup>1</sup>.

In my research, the two charges to which Mormons seem most sensitive, are being called polygamists, and being called non-Christians. Should scholars be concerned if they assert such charges? McCutcheon argues that scholars should bear no consideration for Mormon self-perceptions. Accusing Mormons of being polygamists is not as simple as it appears on the surface, however. In scholarship, the discussion of whether Mormons are polygamous extends beyond the LDS Church. Rather, Mormonism is connected to polygamy through the FLDS Church and the other smaller sects which continue the practice of plural marriage. A scholar who classifies such groups as ‘Mormons’ can potentially upset LDS officials since they recognize that the inclusion of polygamists affects the way that all Mormons are perceived. McCutcheon’s reminder to scholars regarding such issues is that “the critic who theorizes on religion must be willing to

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<sup>1</sup> McCutcheon, (2001): 141-142.

entertain that indeed the insider might not have the ‘big picture’ entirely correct”<sup>2</sup>.

Scholars who include such groups as Mormon therefore similarly assume that the LDS Church does not get the ‘big picture entirely correct’ and play the role of critic in an evaluation of Mormonism and polygamy.

Concerning the other accusation with which Mormons are most uncomfortable, that they are not Christian, scholars have largely chosen to side-step this problem through the use of various new labels. Terms such as New Religious Movement or American religion utilize chronological or geographic references to avoid having to label Mormonism as Christian or not-Christian. As demonstrated, the theories surrounding NRMs are sufficiently relevant to make their application to Mormonism understandable. This alone should not negate further interrogation of the motivations for such classifications. I assert that scholars have elected to use such terms to describe Mormonism partly out of a desire to be sensitive to Mormon claims.

McCutcheon has argued that the scholar’s role as critic should be completely detached from religious bodies, but how do the realities of scholarship affect the goals of research? McCutcheon calls for scholars to act as critics, which he places directly in distinction to ‘caretakers’ for religious groups. These are the scholars who McCutcheon and Hughes see as apologists devaluing scholarship, by speaking ‘on behalf’ of religions rather than maintaining critical distance.

As the history of Mormon Studies demonstrates, it can sometimes be impossible to maintain this critical distance from church officials. In the first period of Mormon ‘scholarship’, from the 1830s through the 1890s, Mormon authorities had complete

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<sup>2</sup> McCutcheon, 118.

control over defining their identity. Outsiders who denounced Mormonism were not academics in the modern sense of the term, but other sectarian writers attempting to define their own in-group identity. The kind of scrutiny which a new religious movement would currently face did not exist and Mormons therefore had considerable leeway to define their own identity.

By the second period of Mormon scholarship, church leaders began to recognize the role that scholarship played in the politics of legitimacy. To have a say in how Mormon identity was crafted in this period, officials sent students to prestigious universities and established their own universities and publishing presses. Even from the earliest days of serious religious studies scholarship however, Church archives, (which house the largest depository of primary sources detailing Mormon history), were controlled by church officials. This monopoly on research material alone points to the ways in which scholars need to be perceived as ‘friendly’ to the church in order to even participate in Mormon Studies. When the funding of schools, publications and conferences comes from either a church directly or from wealthy supporters of the faith, this points to the other way in which scholars are connected to their subject of study.

Mormon leaders (like many other religious officials) have attempted to enter the sphere of scholarship and participate in this identity construction project. Insiders are aware that the battle for legitimacy often plays out in scholarship and have therefore attempted to participate in this discourse. They have done this by establishing schools, chairs, conferences and publications. While research is still performed by scholars, ties to their sponsor ensure that they will not be overly critical of the group in question. In the case of Mormon Studies, excommunications and dismissals have been used as the

mechanism to control how one's group is presented. It is largely up to the individual scholar to balance the tensions between their source of funding and the rigors of their profession.

McCutcheon's evaluation of the field of religious studies is an idealized one which fails to consider the realities which scholars often face. My response to McCutcheon's stance in *Critics Not Caretakers* is best summed up by Atalia Omer, who titled her response to McCutcheon "Can a Critic Be a Caretaker too?"<sup>3</sup>. Omer recognizes the fluidity that exists between these two positions, and I agree that one does not necessarily need to be identified as one or the other. The most recent language used to classify Mormonism suggests that scholars in the field subscribe to this belief as well, and demonstrate that one needs to be a 'critical caretaker' in evaluating Mormonism. Classifying Mormonism as an NRM or new world religion allows for one to validate Mormonism in scholarship, yet not have to address one of its most fundamental beliefs. Although Mormons sometimes interpret their designation as NRM as a charge of being non-Christian, scholars are able to claim that this is merely a chronological designation. Scholars validate Mormonism's existence but avoid having to intervene directly in the group's truth claims.

A scholar who is highly critical of Mormons is unlikely to be hired as a Chair in Mormon Studies. No matter how objective such a scholar may be in their investigations, this points to an important reality of religious studies scholarship. Similarly, a scholar who engages in Mormon Studies, but begins all their publications by stating outright that

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<sup>3</sup> Omer, Atalia "Can a Critic Be a Caretaker too? Religion, Conflict, and Conflict Transformation" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79.2 (2011): 459-496.

Mormons are not Christian is unlikely to be hired as a professor at BYU. The history of Mormon Studies demonstrates that many of the prominent centres of Mormon Studies scholarship still maintain ties to the church. The location of institutions and the religious identity of many scholars in the field are other realities which suggest why Mormon Studies scholars need to take the approach of a critical caretaker.

To some extent, there is a back and forth relationship between scholars and officials in the field of Mormon Studies. Religious bodies seeking legitimacy need scholars to produce affirming portrayals in academia. Scholars in the competitive academic world are constantly in need of employment and publication opportunities. This is a relationship which can be found in many academic fields. When religious studies entered universities as a field of study, it prompted a subtle competition between traditions to become counted amongst the groups studied. As more groups become recognized as sub-fields within religious studies, there were concerted efforts by religious officials to have their group presented. Scholars may choose to engage in these sub-fields for any number of motivations, but once they are members of that field, they are soon in need of ways to forge a viable career. Religious groups can offer support for these scholars provided that they are not overly critical.

In regards to the positions which Mormon Studies scholars find themselves taking, it is entirely understandable to be defensive or supportive of a group one studies. Even when one is not ideologically attached to a religious body, scholars are more often than not upset by the spread of *misinformation*. Recognizing the real-life consequences of public perception underscores why the scholar's role as critical caretaker is a significant one. If religious groups can either gain or lose benefits depending on whether they are

perceived as mainstream or marginal, there will understandably be competition among groups for favourable presentations in scholarship. A scholar with an extensive knowledge about a religious group, upon hearing false accusations about said group, will understandably try to correct these misperceptions. Eileen Barker writes: “What if, in the course of our research, we frequently come across misunderstandings, misinformation, and/or gross distortions that appear to cause unnecessary suffering and are related to a subject that we have been investigating by methods that we believe to be superior to those that have given rise to errors?”<sup>4</sup> McCutcheon and Hughes may accuse Barker of displaying signs of a caretaker or apologist in the field. Is it possible however, that a scholar can feel genuine sympathy for a maligned religious group? Is this a defensible motivation for research or the sign of an apologist? Further, as Barker mentions, what if the negative stereotypes are combatted with extensive research? Can the approach be critical, even if one has other motivations?

Scholars may need at times to act as caretakers, to ensure that a group which is being denounced or punished have advocates to argue for equal treatment. Scholars must be critical at the same time however, to ensure that their work is not being distorted to serve the purposes of the religious group. An important part of being a critical caretaker is that scholars continually revisit the motivations behind the fundamental assumptions so often taken for granted in their field.

As mentioned, the 2012 issue of *MTSR* included Hughes’ condemnation of the field as well as several responses. One of these responses in particular is helpful in contextualizing the present state of Mormon Studies. Richard C. Martin, in his response,

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<sup>4</sup> Barker, 19.



writes: “The problem...however, is neither as dire nor as widespread as Hughes would have us believe”<sup>5</sup>. Hughes’ work is helpful in framing several of the issues with which Mormon Studies has wrestled throughout its development. Although the problems which Hughes identifies are present to some degree in the field of Mormon Studies, it is unclear if the close relationship between officials and scholars has *distorted* the image of Mormonism in any discernable way. In other words, just because religious officials, or religious people, are involved in Mormon Studies scholarship, does the quality of work necessarily suffer? Martin adds: “There are problems in the study of Islam, to be sure. But are they really different in kind than the problems that exist with respect to other conversations at the AAR?”<sup>6</sup>. Hughes’ work stands as an important call for scholars to be more critically aware of the way that they are involved in identity construction.

My contention is that the development of Mormon studies presents an extremely helpful test case in evaluating the scholar’s role as critic and caretaker. An evaluation of Mormon Studies shows that church officials are aware of the new role played by scholars and they have made concerted efforts to receive positive presentations in scholarship. The image of Mormons that has been constructed in scholarship however, has not been distorted in any significant way, despite this active church involvement. My research also demonstrates that there were nevertheless periods in scholarship where the Mormon image was tightly managed by the church, whether in the excommunications of certain scholars or the rejection of certain publications. Analyzing the development of Mormon Studies and the ways that ecclesiastical bodies can influence scholars can also lead to a

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<sup>5</sup> Martin, Richard C., “The Uses and Abuses of Criticism in the Study of Islam: A Response to Aaron Hughes” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 24 (2012): 387.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, 366.

deeper understanding of how scholars within the broader field of Religious Studies attempt to maintain the balance between church official and scholar, or between critic and caretaker.

In closing, a remark from Masuzawa is fitting. Masuzawa, in the conclusion of her history of the field of world religions, writes: “We must attend to the black folds, the billowing, and the livid lining of the fabric of history we unfurl, the story we tell from time to time to put ourselves to sleep. This is one of the reasons historiography must always include the historical analysis of our discourse itself<sup>7</sup>. Masuzawa offers the reminder that just because religious subjects and officials have helped to shape an academic field does not mean the field is necessarily flawed; its history simply bears careful consideration. So long as scholars remain actively aware of this reality, and position themselves as critical caretakers, I would posit that valuable scholarship can still be conducted, even from a church-sponsored Chair.

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<sup>7</sup> Masuzawa, 328.

## Appendix A: Timeline of Mormon Studies

Below is a timeline of the most significant dates in the history of Mormon Studies. This timeline is by no means exhaustive, but attempts to place the ecclesiastical developments alongside the most relevant developments in scholarship.

<b>December 23 1805</b>	Birth of Joseph Smith
<b>Spring 1820</b>	Joseph Smith's First Vision
<b>March 26 1830</b>	Book of Mormon published
<b>April 6 1830</b>	Church of Jesus Christ established by Smith
<b>December 1830</b>	Saints gather in Kirtland, Ohio
<b>July 1831</b>	Saints re-settle in Independence, Missouri
<b>1832</b>	Mormon periodical <i>The Evening and Morning Star</i> published in Independence
<b>1834</b>	E.D. Howe publishes his anti-Mormon book <i>Mormonism Unveiled</i>
<b>July 1837</b>	First mission established in Britain
<b>May 1839</b>	Mormons arrive in Nauvoo, Illinois
<b>May 1840</b>	First issue of <i>The Millennial Star</i> published in Liverpool
<b>June 27 1844</b>	Joseph Smith murdered in Nauvoo jail
<b>1847</b>	Mormons arrive in Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young appointed President
<b>December 1849</b>	Mormon Sunday School program organized
<b>June 1850</b>	<i>Deseret News</i> first published

<b>1855</b>	Maria Ward publishes <i>Female Life Among the Mormons</i>
<b>1860</b>	Joseph Smith III is made President of the Reorganized Church in Independence, Missouri
<b>1867</b>	School of the Prophets founded in Salt Lake City, Utah
<b>October 1875</b>	Brigham Young Academy founded in Provo, Utah (later BYU)
<b>1888</b>	Karl Maeser made first superintendent of Church schools
<b>October 6 1890</b>	Mormon ‘Manifesto’ officially discontinuing practice of plural marriage
<b>1894</b>	University of Deseret becomes University of Utah
<b>1896</b>	Utah is granted statehood
<b>1926</b>	First LDS Institute of Religion established at the University of Idaho
<b>December 1965</b>	Mormon History Association founded
<b>1966</b>	<i>Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought</i> first published
<b>1974</b>	<i>Journal of Mormon History</i> and <i>Exponent II</i> first published
<b>June 8 1978</b>	Revelation ending racial discrimination on priesthood announced
<b>1997</b>	More Mormons live outside of United States than within it
<b>2007</b>	Utah State University establishes Leonard J. Arrington Chair of Mormon History and Culture
<b>2008</b>	Claremont Graduate University establishes Harold W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies
<b>2012</b>	University of Virginia establishes Richard Lyman Bushman Chair of Mormon Studies

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