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[Introduction to] The Columbia Sourcebook of Mormons in the United States

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the
COLUMBIA
SOURCEBOOK
—— *of* ——
MORMONS
in the
UNITED STATES

Edited by Terryl L. Givens and Reid L. Neilson

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P R E F A C E

A MONOGRAPH HAS THE ADVANTAGE of not pretending to be more than a particular scholar's interpretation of his or her subject. A documentary sourcebook, in contrast, is intended as a resource and aims to satisfy the interests and pedagogical needs of an array of researchers and teachers across a span of contexts. We present the current offering as an effort to provide access to core documents that illuminate Mormon history and culture in America, from its nineteenth century beginning to the twenty-first century present. It is our hope that the array of primary sources here reproduced (many excerpted due to space restrictions, although original spelling and grammar have been retained) will serve as a nucleus for courses or class segments that deal with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, popularly known as the Mormon or LDS Church. The featured texts and introductions are intended to capture pivotal moments in LDS history, to demonstrate textual foundations for its theology, and to illuminate the practices, issues, and challenges that define the Mormon community in the present.

While preparing this sourcebook for publication, we deferred to the church's official style guide, posted on its "Newsroom" Web site (<http://newsroom.lds.org>), which states: "The official name of the Church is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This full name was given by revelation from God to Joseph Smith in 1838. While the term 'Mormon Church' has long been publicly applied to the Church as a nickname, it is not an authorized title, and the Church discourages its use." Accordingly, we use the full name of the church

as the first reference in each chapter and use *the church* as a shortened reference thereafter. When referring to church members, we use *Latter-day Saints* and *Mormons* interchangeably. We also use the term *Mormon* in proper names (like Book of Mormon, Mormon Tabernacle Choir, or Mormon Trail) or as an adjective (like Mormon pioneers) per the LDS Newsroom style guide.¹ To avoid confusion, we did not apply the term *Mormon* to the hundreds of schismatic groups that followed the 1844 martyrdom of Joseph Smith, including the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (renamed the Community of Christ in 2001), as instructed by the *Associated Press Stylebook*.²

The Utah-headquartered church already appears as a topic in many religious survey courses in American classrooms. A number of universities are also offering specific courses in Mormon studies. At present, a few useful surveys of Mormonism (the combination of doctrine, culture, and lifestyle unique to the church) exist, and a number of outstanding monographs on LDS history, scripture, and culture are produced annually. Nothing on the market, however, affords college students or serious researchers access to Mormon primary sources in any systematic or comprehensive way. A wonderful collection by William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, *Among the Mormons* (1958), continued in print for many years; but it consisted almost entirely of historical and sociological observations by contemporary outsiders. In contrast, our current collection consists wholly of documents produced by Latter-day Saints themselves and expands considerably the historical scope, the subject matter, and the genres represented. It therefore breaks new ground in the range and type of texts made available in one place. Still, our volume focuses on the Mormon experience in America, following the template of Edward Curtis's *Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States* (2008), which centers on Islam in America, not abroad. Like Islam, the church is a worldwide religious movement with members in nearly every nation. At present, more than half of its members reside outside the United States. But neither we nor any other editorial team could hope to do justice to both the North American and international Mormon past and present in a single volume.

Considering the difficulty of capturing the essence of the American church experience in one collection through the limited perspective of only ourselves, we solicited input from dozens of Mormon and non-Mormon scholars in the fields of American religion, sociology, theology, and history, as noted in our acknowledgments. While their suggestions have considerably altered and improved our original plan, we are confident no one will be fully satisfied with

the final list of what is included and what has of necessity fallen by the way. Misrepresentation is, we fear, an inevitable casualty of the genre. To include a dissident voice in a section of three texts, for example, is to overrepresent a minority perspective. To omit it is to silence it altogether. To provide an official version of history, to give another example, is to privilege a dominant, institutional voice. To provide an alternative account is to obscure the canonical text that endowed an entire people with the sense of identity they now possess. With these limitations in mind, we have sought to balance the mainstream and the peripheries, the institutional and the personal, the theoretical and the practical.

We have included a variety of orthodox and heterodox Latter-day Saint voices in this volume. But we have made no attempt to incorporate nonmember sources or anti-Mormon rhetoric as both would widen the scope of the text unmanageably and would constitute separate subjects. About half of the authors of the primary sources are male and half female. As the church is led by a male priesthood, women's voices are principally found in the social and cultural, rather than theological, sections. About half of the selections are of an institutional nature, while the balance of the texts come from the church laity. We have included a sample of voices that critique or question mainline LDS teachings on sexuality, gender, and other issues. However, it is a sociological fact that the church is authoritarian and that there is a strikingly (and statistically demonstrable) high level of correspondence between official doctrine and rank and file adherence. The church and its members, in other words, are by and large notably traditionalists. That very conservatism is one of Mormonism's hallmark features and as such is reflected in the selection.

We deliberately privileged The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints over other "Mormon" groups. Our focus is, quite explicitly, on the religious organization that follows in the wake of Brigham Young's succession to Joseph Smith and which constitutes, numerically, probably 98 percent of restorationist adherents. That said, we are aware of the variety of "Mormon" movements that need to be recognized, including polygamy-practicing, self-described "Mormon fundamentalists," which derived from Joseph Smith. Approximately two hundred splinter groups have emerged in the aftermath of Smith's assassination in 1844. The Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or RLDS Church) is one group often accorded some emphasis in Mormon studies circles. However, numerically their 250,000 members represent a tiny fraction (1.8 percent) compared to the church's 14 million members.³ And doctrinally, the leadership of the Community of Christ

has been moving further and further away from their roots in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, conspicuously de-emphasizing both. In an edited collection of limited size and scope, it would clearly be impossible to cover the range of topics presented as they pertain to two or more groups rather than one. Nevertheless, in chapter two we describe what led to the “scattering of the Saints” after the assassination of Joseph Smith and include some of the pivotal documents of those groups. This arrangement allowed us to focus the body of the sourcebook on the LDS tradition while also helping readers understand both the similarities and differences between the various “Mormon” groups.

Our organization is thematic, with a largely chronological arrangement within those categories. We were thus able to cover the widest variety of subjects while giving some sense of historical and doctrinal development. We have also sought to balance foundational and traditional with those topics and issues that are the subjects of current debate and in a process of evolving definition, such as gender roles, sexual orientation, and race.

The church and its members are too often caricatured and exoticized by observers, including well-meaning scholars, who want to reconstruct Latter-day Saints in their own images and according to their own interests. While there will likely be debate over what we have included and omitted, we are confident that the vast majority of past and present American Mormons would recognize themselves and their church in this volume’s pages. Sir Richard F. Burton was perhaps the most successful European ever to blend into the Arab cultures he studied and was the first outsider to explore such forbidden cities as Harar in Somaliland, as well as Mecca and Medina. But even he sensed that “there is in Mormondom . . . an inner life into which I cannot flatter myself or deceive the reader with the idea of my having penetrated.”⁴ It is our hope that these texts will provide multiple windows into a religion and a people that Burton—and many others—have found so baffling.