

Columbia University
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Liberal Studies Master of Arts
American Studies

Political Mormonism from Joseph Smith to Mitt Romney

A final paper
By
Abraham J. Frost

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Masters of Arts

May 2013

While it could have been advantageous for the purposes of this paper for Mitt Romney to have been triumphant in the 2012 presidential election, his candidacy nonetheless was an important one, if only for its own historical merits. Significantly, Romney was the first Mormon to have gone so far in American politics. On the cusp of one of the most coveted and powerful political positions in the world, that Romney was even inches away from the Oval Office manifests the widespread acceptance of a once widely despised and feared religious minority group. The day after the election, the *New York Times* ran an article that read in part: “Romney exposed Americans to some of the virtues of his faith – its emphasis on wholesome living, industriousness, and above all, family” (Stolberg). Indeed, while this is quite a sanguine assessment, for most of their history the Latter-Day Saints (or in the more popular parlance Mormons), have existed on the fringes of an overwhelmingly narrow Protestant polity, one that has long dominated elite levels of political influence. While “Romney refused to mix religion with politics [during his presidential campaign]...that didn’t repress people’s curiosity about Mormonism. His candidacy brought the homegrown faith into the spotlight” and in the most public way possible (Hagerty). Notwithstanding any obstacles to the contrary, Mormonism’s very short span has been an underlying thread within the tapestry of American history and only within the last century have Mormons become a vital and sought-after political entity. As a constituency, “Mormons are politically and culturally distinctive” (Campbell and Monson, 107).

Within the vastness of an ambiguously defined American religious tradition, the contribution of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been copious and fascinating. In less than two centuries this outsider religion, often regarded with contempt

and suspicion from other Christian groups, transformed from agrarian, theological agitators to a fully courted constituency prized for their loyalty and ballots: “For a religious group amounting to only two percent of the U.S. populations, the Church...has achieved an outsized cultural relevance” (Turner, 2). Further, “[v]oters expressed a high level of interest in Romney’s Mormonism throughout his campaign” (Flock). Because of the renewed cultural relevancy, appreciation of Mormonism’s role in the American polity is of utmost value; “the Mormon experience also reveals the limits and challenges of minority religious influence in secular [nation]” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 299). What makes contemporary analysis challenging, considering the historical progression of this faith in America, is that while “Mormons may seem to be exemplary conservatives...they are also something else...a prophetic people who have claimed new prophets, new scriptures, new holy lands, new doctrines and new heavens” (Gilmore, 68).

The basic inquiry attached to such a phenomenon is fundamentally twofold: in that I am exploring the *why* of political Mormonism as well as *how* it came to its current station in America. Both seek to understand the operative function of Mormon political behaviors, while exploring unique position Mormons hold in the American experiment. There is an old cliché that goes something along the lines of “This story can only happen in America,” but I feel that, for the particular context of this thesis, the axiom is appropriate. Indeed, “[t]he birth of Mormonism coincided with the birth of modern America” (Hansen Experience, 45). The intellectual development of Mormonism in the ensuing two centuries has given way for countless Americans to contribute to the founding Constitutional ideals, hopefully in the ways that would never had been possible in the closed-minded religious moldings of the Old World. The uniqueness of the

American constitutional attitude towards religion when compared to the official and mandatory state religions of Europe engendered novel theologies and thinkers to proliferate and, in due course, congregate. If truth be told, “there is a special intensity in the playing out of Mormon culture across American society, because it is an American religion, whose canonical took place here, not all that long ago” (Lemann, 41). As an accessory of the American ideal, the Mormon experience reveals “the yearning to enact an endless process of re-inventing the self on an open prairie of endless possibility” (Lears). Any political aspiration relates to an innate desire to manipulate forces in such a given way as to provide a viable future. The Mormons so suspected of not working within the framework of the American enterprise have felt this and have behaved accordingly.

The intended purpose of this thesis is to provide a reexamination of Mormonism’s political dimensions and its relevance in contemporary culture because, as it happens, “Mormons are both familiar and unfamiliar to the American public imagination” (Trepanier and Newsander, 9). While the official policy of the Church is to ostensibly remain a non-partisan entity, to deny that there is an evident political culture imbued by Mormons would be folly. However, “the church encourages its members to vote” yet any overt “attempts[s] to direct [Mormons] how to vote...would be met with hostility” (Roarty). So then, the most recent presidential election, the first to feature a Latter-day Saint as a practicable candidate in a general election campaign, provided a compelling platform to investigate the dimensions of the faith in the public square. In essence, the heart of this paper is concerned with a peculiar dialectic, one that is perfectly fitting for Mormons in America. During the 2012 election, there was much space dedicated to the

following thought, elucidated by Amy Davidson writing for *The New Yorker*: “It would be absolutely wrong to vote against Mitt Romney because he is a Mormon, rather than because of his political position. At the same time, it is hard to see what would be lost by anyone...if we were to seize this moment to talk about a faith whose history is a narrative of change, tolerance, exploration, and reinvention” (Davidson). Ironically, this sentiment would have been considered nearly unthinkable during the formative years of the Mormon religion, wherein adherents to the young faith were constantly expelled and persecuted for their beliefs.

Overall, the question that frames this paper is: How did this entity called political Mormonism develop over the last two centuries? What were the mechanisms that shaped Mormonism’s political philosophy and how does that affect real government action today? What is of the utmost interest during the course of this thesis, then, is the analytical evolution of the Mormons within the realm of the conventional American political culture. For University of Notre Dame and Brigham Young University political scientists David Campbell and J. Quinn Monson, respectively, “Mormons [as a distinct political group] are conservative and cohesive” (Campbell and Monson, 107). For Campbell and Monson, however, Mormon voters can be a latent unit until the right occasion should arrive, then as an extremely powerful political mobilization bloc they are very capable of great showings of voting solidarity. They metaphorically equate members as “dry kindling,” ready to spark when a particular issue becomes important for the Church. Taking a larger view of the system, to what extent can such a theory be extrapolated to an entire church population? Indeed, while Mitt Romney certainly had the most attention during the last presidential election cycle, prominent Mormon figures

ranging from Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to radio talk show host/polemicist Glenn Beck have no doubt had their own impacts on society, to a great extent. Increasingly, Mormons are becoming more relevant fixtures in federal politics: during the most recent election, “the Senate [had] more Mormons than Episcopalians or Lutherans, but polls consistently showed that Romney’s religion...remained a factor” which shows that many voters were unsure of how to interpret normative Mormonism within the Oval Office (Dovere). This thesis is about religion and politics, but it is not about religion vis-à-vis Mormon theology in the strictest sense. There is not much interest in this paper about *why* Mormons believe certain things, or *why* other voting blocs are hostile to Mormons, but as I have indicated more so about *how* their moral and social beliefs have been manifested into concrete political action. Indeed, “[w]hat matters most about...the study of American religion...is [the] convergence today with several other intellectual models of critique and reassessment” (Griffith and McAlister, 533). Reassessing the how of political Mormonism, as it is viewed within the context of American history, becomes an exercise concerning the ontological role of religion within the public sphere; “one does not have to be a Mormon to take the movement seriously as a motivating force within the lives of many true believers” (Wood, 169). What makes this analysis pertinent, then, is the notion that “[r]eligiosity has partisan overtones now that it did not have in the past” (Putnam and Campbell, 369). Any culture that allows a comfortable relationship between politics and religion is necessarily one that needs to reflect on the burden of integrating two very dissimilar modes of cosmology. While using Romney as a convenient standard bearer for his faith seems simple enough, his incontrovertible ideological ambiguity during his runs for the presidency act as a relatively capable prism

by which to view the Mormon political experience, though it would definitely be wrong to extrapolate a preconceived ideology to every Mormon citizen.

Conversely, while there may have been some softening of bias to build sustainable ideological coalitions, it is self-evident that many tenets of Mormonism are still viewed with suspicion from more established Christian groups. The faith has “long suffered from widespread misconceptions in some corners of American society” (Roarty). Furthermore, the “apprehension of the American public about a Mormon [politician]...demonstrates not only the difficulty of American civilization in accepting Mormons, but also the limits of...American values” (Trepanier and Newsander, 51). Walter Kirn, in his seminal *Newsweek* article that propelled a popular reexamination of Mormon cultural relevancy, writes: “despite the sudden proliferation of Mormons in the mainstream, Mormonism itself isn’t any closer to gaining mainstream acceptance (Kirn). So then, what has caused this seeming and stark attitudinal juxtaposition of Mormon acceptance in such a relatively short amount of recent American political history? What is the ensuing significance? When a well-known conservative publication like the *National Review* writes that Mormons are “the yardstick of normalcy,” how are we to reconcile nearly a century and a half of bigotry and misgivings on the part of more mainstream Christians? (Williamson). Respectfully, the absorption of Mormons into the mainstream body politic has been a multifaceted and evasive endeavor. To be sure, “[i]t is difficult to find an ideological Mormon bloc on Capitol Hill” (Ostling and Ostling, 139). Yet, it should be stated that Mormon system is exceedingly hierarchical, which is a reflection of the Church’s belief that it is the vanguard of a heavenly kingdom on Earth. Because of such a cosmological worldview which stems from the days of Joseph Smith,

Brigham Young, and the wheel cart pioneers, there has been a keen interest in Mormonism concerning the role of government. Whereas in another century Mormons were too mistrusted to even be considered citizens, they “now stand for traditional...moral values, for political conservatism and patriotism” (Conkin, 222). We can conceive the evolution of this Mormon outlook as an ongoing Berlinian dialectic between government as protector of natural rights as well as possible inquisitor, negatively operating to bring discomfort on minority beliefs. Whether this governmental viewpoint is spiritual or temporal in nature outlines the necessity of Mormon ideological allegiance.

The first part of this thesis is to analyze the political actions of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young and the development of Mormon politics. Smith’s campaign for president in 1844 may have been quixotic, at best, but it would only time a Mormon had been in serious consideration until the emergence of Romney more than a century and a half later. Smith is the most American of any religious prophet, deigning a new religion unto a new land. He was a “shaper of both present and future, a man who seemed to make history rather than merely reacting to it – qualities much prized in early America” (Flanders, 75). Young, upon taking the mantle of the church after Smith’s assassination, was as much a vital figure in the development of a political attitude for his fellow Mormon pioneers as Smith, while also situating the religious refugees in the new state that would be called Utah. There has been recent scholarship devoted to exploring Mormonism’s early commitment to socialist and progressive types of politics. Young, even more so than Smith, defined the destiny of political Mormonism, instituting practices that would, rightly or wrongly, define the operational countenance of Latter-day

Saints for decades; he defined the economic and social temperament of the new Utah settlements. Young released proclamations that coordinated with Smith's regarding plural marriage and, in a way that would affect the racial attitudes of the church for generations to come, denied blacks access to the higher realms of religious participation within the church. Such developments shaped generations of Mormon political participation and understanding these developments are essential when examining Mormonism's political relevance.

Moving forward from these issues will be an appraisal of Mormonism in politics during the course of the twentieth century into the twenty-first. This is the time that Mormons begin to integrate into the Republican Party, which has "[given] Americans ample reason to reflexively associate them with political conservatism" (Bowman, Progressive). Consequently, as prominent Mormons become more entrenched within Republican politics, so does renouncing the communitarian ideals in favor of a streamlined, capitalism-centered perspective. Significant were the Mormons who supported Senator McCarthy during the Communist Witch Hunts and helped to establish the John Birch Society. This does not discount the counterbalance of more liberally minded Mormons and indeed both political persuasions will be analyzed for their contributions to the political culture. Accordingly, there is an assessment of the Mormon political landscape and the men, for the most part, who steered the faith towards certain ideological outlooks. Ideological fluidity is the norm.

Something that cannot be avoided is a discussion about the national impact of the "Mormon Moment," a considerable social phenomenon that seemed to suddenly sweep America at a most portentous time in Mormon history. A new, successful, and award-

winning musical featuring Mormons as the subject matter opened on Broadway to rave reviews, Mitt Romney clinched the nomination for president while a fellow adherent ran in the Republican primary and without warning, the country had become suddenly and relentlessly fascinated by the Mormon religion. While this was certainly an indication toward a broader interest in Mormonism, it was also a peculiar fad that seemed to transcend any reason for its existence; it simply existed in the ether of American popular culture until its shining moment dimmed, arguably with Romney's presidential defeat. Ultimately, what I hope to accomplish throughout this thesis is to impart that there is no inherently liberal or conservative religious group in America, but that any system of belief informs and imparts tangible political action. Mormonism, as a byproduct of constitutional toleration towards nonconforming religious belief, remains a wholly unique and diverse American enterprise which shapes a politically astute faction of the electorate. Further, Mormonism provides a narrative with constitutional values at its core. To contemplate the contemporary conditions of these traits demands from us an acute sense of events that have transpired and it is our role as actors in the political *milieu* to construe the consequences of history.

I.)

The origins of Mormonism have been written about extensively, but it warrants a cursory, contextual summary¹. Joseph Smith never conceived a political role for his new church. Indeed, raised in the spiritual fervor of the Second Great Awakening and the Burned-Out District of upstate New York (so named for its many passing religious revivals), Smith was part of a culture that brought urgent visions of the apocalypse, one

¹ A more thorough telling of Smith's upbringing can be found in Richard Bushman's preeminent biography *Rough Stone Rolling*.

of the “first expression[s] of the kind of hyper-emotional, revivalist Methodism that has remained a signature style of American Christianity in our own time (Gopnik). Among the already established Protestant groups, new sects were being established on an almost daily basis. Once popular groups like the Shakers, the Millertites and the Oneida were all influential elements jockeying for followers and theological dominance but now only remain as historical relics. Historian of Mormonism Jan Shipps described the era thusly: “Religion in the nineteenth century America was like a collage made up of a huge number of diverse materials” (Shipps, 51). This is the background of the nascent Mormon faith.

Smith, whose family of itinerant farmers was never secure financially or spiritually, longed for religious truth in times of uncertainty. To bring in income, Joseph and his father acted as diviners and treasure seekers, using objects known as seer stones to assist in their searches. It should be stated that “[f]or every neighbor who saw [Smith] as a con artist, there were five who found his company so magnetic that didn’t care when he could not, finally, produce any treasure” (Winer Candidate). Even in the early part of his life, Smith was a divisive figure with the ability to draw and repel those around him. In the framework of the era, however, “the line between the seer and the scamster wasn’t clearly marked in early-nineteenth-century America² (Gopnik). Besides helping to provide for his family, Smith was constantly seeking religious truth amid the “tears, trances, and convulsions” of the heated revivals (Lears). Concerned that he may be following a wrong type of church, he prayed to find the correct path. In the now famous account of the First Vision, an angel appeared before Smith and told him that no other churches were correct

² The veracity of any of Smith’s claims, or to judge him as a fraud, especially when considering his related prophet-hood and the circumstances surrounding the record of the *Book of Mormon*, which for good measure, are sacred beliefs held by millions of people, are immaterial in the greater context of this survey.

and that, at a future date, a new church would soon be revealed. Several years later, according to Mormon tradition, an angel by the name of Moroni visited Smith and relayed instructions to the gospel of a new holy testament written upon golden plates. Using a different set of seer stones, which were designated the Urim and Thummim, and placing them in a stovepipe hat, Smith was able to “translate” the unusual markings into English. As an alternative means of communicating his holy directive, Smith used a type of divine inspiration by which he arrived at a definitive text. Smith’s work at translating the plates was achieved by using a unique approach of the form and while his “process is difficult to reconstruct,” Smith would use this same method with all the scriptures of the Mormon canon (Bushman VSI, 21). Although many of Smith’s other followers inquired to see these holy golden plates, Smith limited their viewing under the presumption that anyone except Smith would instantly perish. We can see this as one of Mormonism’s first intra-religious/political clashes.

After the process of translation and transcription was completed, Smith was told by the angel to rebury the golden plates back in their original location. With the assistance of several new followers and financial backers, Smith published the first edition of the Book of Mormon in 1830. The book, which chronicles the exodus and travails of an ancient Israelite people upon leaving Jerusalem, is unique for the central role that America plays throughout the text; a literary representation of a the American religious epiphany. In essence, this new religious text gave a newly constructed theological meaning to the American landscape, giving it an equal footing with the biblical Levant. Reaction to the book garnered intense interest and controversy from the moment it left the printing presses. While professed believers cannot discount the

assurance of the book's holiness, reaction from those outside the faith has been less than effusive. In an infamous remark about the Book of Mormon, the novelist Mark Twain declared the book to be "chloroform in print." A less acerbic, more holistic opinion might be expressed that "a book [this] boring...could have been inspired only by the breadth of God" (Gopnik). Regardless, of the book's contents (this paper is agnostic when considering the inherent divinity of such things), given some of the unusually novel understandings of America that were contained within the narrative, the nascent Mormon Movement quickly found new Saints eager to share in this audacious new rendering of America. As a philosophical treatise, "Smith's book resonated with Americans' longings for immediate communication with the deity, in their own time, on their own ground" (Lears). For this ruminative splendor, however Smith found that being the prophet for a new church brings swift and earthly predicaments.

Notwithstanding all the internal power struggles, Smith and his new followers quickly left the Northeast, "forced out of New York by...fierce Protestant hostility," and moved towards the unspoiled potential of the newly opened west (Gopnik). By the early 1830s, Smith "decided to move the bulk of his small, but growing, church...to Kirtland, Ohio" while another group headed to Missouri, and it was in these new locations where the first clashes between the Mormons, their more orthodox Christian neighbors, and the government began to percolate (Winer Candidate). For the more established Christian groups who met these early Mormon pioneers, Smith's divine claims of a new religious writ and his declarations of prophet-hood must have come as a horrible shock to the deep-rooted Protestant system. Still, the Mormons quickly began building houses of worship while Smith further developed a comprehensive religious society to exist in

harmony with his holy work. Smith was successful at gaining new converts and his “broad appeal...attracted a remarkably wide range of able people” (Arrington and Britton, 74). All the while, Smith and the Mormons were continuously “mixing visions of heavenly and earthly glory” to their new homesteads. (Lears). Such bold pronouncements were not met with enthusiasm from other Protestant groups, who began to feel threatened by perceived Mormon encroachment. Regardless of this xenophobia, Smith and his Mormon settlers began their efforts to spread their gospel, sending missionaries across the country and abroad; among the new faithful sent out was a new convert named Brigham Young.

While Smith’s Mormon religion was attaining new followers, it was also gaining interest from local governments, acting on the worries of their Protestant constituents. To many, the Mormons presented a threat at an existential level: these new religionists were claiming a new testament of Jesus, thus challenging the prevalent Protestant dogmas engrained in the American social psyche. Upending the status quo was an unsettling prospect: “[t]he old, non-Mormon population resented the intrusion of this strange sect into their territory” (Wood, 178). Furthermore, it did not help that once these new Mormons began to settle, they seemed to deign themselves as a holier people than their Gentile (non-Mormon) neighbors. Indeed, “the Mormons never forgot that they were the new Israel” whenever they were forced to a new location (Bowman, 102). Having such a surety in their biblical identity lent itself to the fortitude by which Smith and these pioneers developed their identity. To be sure, “wherever they settled...animosity built up” (Bushman VSI, 11). Met with resentment wherever they went, the “spread of Mormon settlements [provoked] violence among the Gentiles” and bands of vigilantes

began to attack the Mormons (Lears). Many times during this early period, Smith was constantly being arrested on various charges, some of them politically or religiously motivated, others simply vindictive. Despite all this suffering and “[f]or all the bitterness they caused, [these] wrongs united the Mormons, making them depend on each other because they could depend on no one else” (Bushman VSI, 44).

After being expelled from the state of Missouri altogether, Smith established the settlement in Illinois that he designated “Nauvoo.” Nauvoo, for a short time, was a prosperous town thanks in part to the large influx of foreign-born converts. Immediately, Smith began integrating his own religious ideals along with his ideas about creating a new community of “Zion.” No aspect of Nauvoo’s operation was too small for Smith and, rejecting any semblance of the Jeffersonian notions of the separation of church and state, Smith acted as both general of the local militia group and town mayor. Without a doubt, “the interweaving of ecclesiastical and political government disturbed many of Nauvoo’s neighbors” (Bowman, 69). A later Mormon writer comments that Smith “revealed an instinctive knowledge of justice and civil responsibility” (West). While not a totally convincing statement, it has a seed of credence due to Smith’s definite ability as a spirited leader. Another attitude suggests that “Smith’s dynamism allowed him to gain followers,” but once opinion split about certain directions of the church, there was swift animosity: “the early history of the movement involves a bewildering series of excommunications, internal banishments, and the increasing threat of violence to enforce new rules as Smith received” (Gopnik). Both facets of Smith paint a compelling picture of a prophet interacting with the secular world. Due to these human flaws, as Smith was consolidating his religious authority he perhaps myopically did not attend to the

particular needs of every follower. Indeed, “a camp of...disgruntled Mormons...planned to publish a weekly newspaper” which sought to question the divine leadership qualities of the prophet (Winer Candidate). Attempting to prevent publication, Smith led his local militia to the publishing company and “ordered the immediate destruction of the press” and all extant copies of the paper (Gilmore). Such an “infringement on press rights ignited a conflagration” and violent vigilante groups quickly called for Smith’s blood (Bushman VSI, 12). Riots were an impending concern for the local, secular authorities and Smith conceded to the local authorities to be arrested and stand trial. While cornered in a jail cell in Carthage, Illinois with his brother Hyrum, Smith could not escape from the ferocity of vigilantism and was shot to death in June 1844. Significantly, at the time of his death, Smith was in the midst of one of his most overt political endeavors: running for President of the United States.

Smith’s run for the Presidency in 1844 affords us a partial view of his ideological disposition, and while Smith will forever be remembered as one of the more influential religious leaders in United States history, his idiosyncratic political views provides us with an interesting, contextual template for all future Mormon politicians. While we are looking at Smith’s campaign through a secular lens, it is impossible to separate the period’s Mormon religiosity with America’s constitutional secularism. Running on an independent platform, Smith did not conform to the rigid political dogmas of the era; this was in line with views regarding conventional Christianity. Like many aspects of his life, Smith’s candidacy has been viewed through a variety of lenses, both positive and critical. Indeed, “historians debate the motives behind Smith’s presidential bid. Some believe it was part of a desperate effort to protect his people...[o]thers chalk it up to megalomania”

(Steinberg). What is clear, however, is that the impact the candidacy had for posterity has been extremely vital for analyzing all future Mormon political aspirants. According to historian Matthew Bowman:

“[Smith’s] decision to run for President of the United States in 1844 reflected his persistent optimism that American politics could be perfected through righteousness. He likely had few expectations for winning the office, even though he had a large Mormon missionary force doubling as his campaign team. His campaign seemed primarily concerned with declaring to the nation that its politics had forgotten the blessings of brotherhood and egalitarianism that had once made it great” (Bowman, 87).

In a more expansive sense, then, the very notion of Smith’s candidacy can be viewed as an exercised protest against the perceived wrongs experienced by the Mormons through external religious and political strife. A tender feeling during this period reminded Mormons that they were solely “attacked on the basis of their religious identity for engaging in the political process,” starkly contrasting with constitutional guarantees of free exercise (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 302). Radically for the era, “Smith used his presidential platform to articulate a series of social ideals” that had been percolating since the founding of his new church (Wood, 168). Because they were forced into tenuous relations with their non-Mormon neighbors and lacking a viable avenue for redress, Smith moved the Mormons towards a model of communal self-reliance that eschewed dependence on the federal government. Yet, “[t]o Smith’s detractors his presidential run could only be seen within the context of his [perceived] megalomaniacal madness...historians...argue that Smith was trying to stand for his principles, argue publicly for civil liberties for Mormons and publicize the church” (Tapper). What cannot be denied is that Smith’s politics were exceedingly complicated and reflected his own

thinking in regards to long-term spiritual matters, rather than simply focusing on a system of temporal governance. This was a century of lofty political intentions and as Richard Bushman writes, “[d]riven by political expediency, Joseph [Smith] had made himself a son of America” (Bushman RSR, 513).

What we can see are the beginnings of a normalization of Mormon interaction with the political process, though it is still very rough and undefined. Like any minority group that demands legitimated recognition, Smith’s candidacy provided a means for the conveyance of an agenda that would give his group the ability to compete in the marketplace of ideas. “For Mormons, the ideal society was theocratic” and Smith acted accordingly to this accepted precept (McCormick and Sillito, 9). With this in mind, it is more than likely that Smith’s “presidential campaign amounted to the Mormon founder’s attempt to publicize [the church] on the national level” (Wood, 190). More consequentially to his situation, Smith was in a precarious position. Due to the growing tensions, “Smith soon came to the realization that an overt Kingdom of God...would only intensify the conflict between Mormons and Gentiles and well lead to the destruction of all he had lived and worked to accomplish” (Hansen, 139). Staving off any more physical violence was essential to survive in these Mormon-averse lands.

Considering this, we can see how Smith’s political platform exists within the circumstances of its time while also proving to be a fascinating study in the broader understanding of Mormonism’s nontraditional modes of interdenominational polity interaction. The centerpiece of the platform was the notion of American “Theodemocracy,” a hybrid system of republican government that integrated the well-known founding precepts with Smith’s more aggressively inclined ideas of theological

public discourse. Indeed, “there is a strain of [Mormon] folklore that attributes to Joseph Smith and [later] Brigham Young that one day the Constitution would be ‘hanging by a thread’ and a Latter-day Saint would save it” (Stolberg). Whether this can be considered part of the intrinsic Mormon political attitude is irrelevant *except* that it assists in providing us an interesting contextual anecdote into the early leaders’ positions on their role in the American political system. Its overarching totality, at least to Smith and the early Mormons, forms a foundation from which an interface between faith and politics can be disseminated. We can contextualize that the mechanism of Mormon Theodemocracy was a tool to stave off intra-denominational disunity. By providing an apparatus to maintain solidarity, Smith allowed a marginalized base to possess tangible political meaning. In Smith’s conception, this system was never meant to subvert the religious rights of non-Mormons. Indeed, Smith believed that his system was the only one that could actually conserve the nation from destruction and “minimize faction by promoting consensus” (Trepanier and Newsander, 103). If viewed through a more contrarian interpretation, however, we can frame Smith’s candidacy by recognizing “Smith’s sense that God was on the side of the [Mormons], and that God might, at any time, weaken or destroy gentile [that is, non-Mormon] governments” (Conkin, 203). Influenced by the notion that all would soon end, Smith regarded a religiously centralized government as the best alternative to the perceived threat of imminent annihilation. And “[a]s part of their apocalyptic vision, Smith and his followers believed that all churches and governments would soon fall in a mighty conflagration and that a new government...created by the Prophet would come to fill the void, literally revolutionizing the world” (Gottlieb and Wiley, 66-7). Such an outlook, while a curious means by which

to create a government, should be understood through the customary framework of the early nineteenth century apocalyptic fervor that had fermented with the Second Great Awakening. Building a consensus among the Mormons was, for Smith, essential to securing political and religious legitimacy.

Despite eventually becoming a powerful constituency, the early “Mormons had an awkward relationship with political parties” (Bushman RSR, 509). There was little respect from local and state governments to step in and protect Mormon constitutional liberties. Following such a political course, Smith “hoped to eliminate the rough-and-tumble of American politics, the electioneering and the pandering that had so often betrayed the Mormons” (Bowman, 87). Ideologically, Smith was eclectic. Eschewing orthodoxies of the Whig and Democratic platforms, he devised a unique platform that weaved disparate policy goals that encompassed and transcended simply defined spectrum politics. In a more common parlance, Smith was neither a conservative nor a liberal, and certainly from our contemporary perspective, his views on politics can be interpreted as exceedingly eccentric. According to historian Timothy L. Wood, “Smith outlined six major policies that he wished to implement if elected to the presidency:” abolition of slavery, Congressional membership reduction, reestablishment of a national bank, American territorial expansion in Oregon, federal oversight to curb mob actions, and prison reform (Wood, 180). Each of these disparate planks provides an insight into Smith’s political ambitions, revealing the depths of his political psychology. While Smith ran for a secular office he never saw his role as strictly secular and hoped to integrate his Theodemocracy model to the entire nation. Smith himself leaned in favor of a “strong central government” which may seem unusual, but is contextually intuitive due to the

many state governments that had expelled and persecuted Mormons (West). Supporting a stronger federal government would act theoretically as a bulwark against wanton state action which Smith's perceived as stifling the religious rights of the Mormons.

Smith's support for stronger government protection presents a paradox, and one that has survived into normative Mormon political action. (Consider Mitt Romney's charge that President Barack Obama wanted a "government-centered society"). Bearing in mind state action against Mormons, how does belief in a government fit into Smith's schema of community political organization? Also consider that "Mormons tended to favor an authoritarian style of leadership, which enforced doctrinal conformity" (Wood, 177). This does not sound a like a group whose ideology is conducive with coexisting within the framework of clear Constitutional ideals. However, "implicit in [Mormon] theology was the necessity for the religion to exist within a free society...Existing alongside the church's more authoritarian tendencies, then, was also the expectation that Mormonism could only flourish in a society that was free" (*Ibid.*). Smith's political visions can be seen as existing within two planes of thought: the heavenly and the terrestrial. Terrestrial governance, left to the devices of men, was only a sufficient placeholder until the end times, which Smith believed to be close. Securing a peace with the United States government would be enough to protect the Mormons until the Apocalypse. Another interpretation of early Mormon politics can be seen as a means to protect the religious and economic interests of the struggling church and protest against unequal government response against violent reprisals. Smith was using his platform as way to consolidate unified Mormon representation, but this time in a secular setting. As it happened, Smith was assassinated during his presidential campaign, and "there the story

might have ended” (Gopnik). Though Smith was never likely to get very far in the field of American electoral politics, his campaign remains a significant event, certainly for the history of the Church and even in the field of American politics. It displayed for the first time that someone considered as a fringe candidate can bring substantive political arguments on a national level. Though not terribly effective at the time, in retrospect this is the case. The nuances of Smith’s platform defied traditional categorization, which has been an existential trait of Mormonism since the beginning. Indeed, it shaped the early political psychology of the Mormons.

If we have the temerity to conceive Joseph Smith as the Jesus or foundational figure of a new church, then Brigham Young acted as both a St. Paul and Moses-like analogue. Smith and Young represent an exercise in contrasts: Smith had been an inspirational and “charismatic leader... Young was a genius organizer and shrewd administrator” (Ostling and Ostling, 42). Young’s skills would allow the Mormons to reorganize from a persecuted religious minority into a vibrant, flourishing constituency. Akin to the ancient prophets, Young positioned himself as a political figure with the fate of an entire people in the balance. So as much as he was an explicator on Mormon theology and religious doctrine, Young behaved as a consecrated political actor and economic thinker, leading the exiled Mormons west and establishing new settlements which would become the state of Utah; “[i]f the Mormons saw themselves as a new Israel, the trek west was inevitably their Exodus” (Bowman, 96). Young presents us with a complicated character study, another blueprint by which to examine the role of Mormons in the American political landscape. Admittedly, Young’s tenure as prophet and leader remains controversial. At the turn of the twentieth century, it was noted that

Young was an “extraordinary character, for a daring a Cromwell, for intrigue a Machiavelli” (Hartt). Moreover, as Lawrence Wright writes in the *New Yorker*, “The Mormons, at first derided as cranks [by their non-Mormon neighbors], were soon objects of fear and hatred, not just because of their [supposed] heretical beliefs, but also because of their communal economy, their monolithic politics and...their practice of polygamy” (Wright). Due to the circumstances of the Mormon pioneers’ westward journey, Young had to expand and extrapolate Smith’s attitudes of societal organization to the new Promised Land. As the leader of an exiled and persecuted flock, Young had to take Smith’s religious ideals and re-appropriate them to a broken people. While Smith introduced the America and the world to the Mormon political enterprise, it was Young who refined it and made it known. As Bushman writes: “Young wanted to create a new culture just as Smith wanted a new society” (Bushman VSI, 101).

Young was an early convert to the Mormon faith. Originally from New England, like Smith, Young was raised as a Methodist. Young came to the church when his brother introduced him to the Book of Mormon. Enthralled with the book, Young and his entire family became early adherents to the new faith. A historian recounts that “[a]fter his Mormon baptism, Young immediately assumed active service and leadership in the church and rarely wavered in his commitment to his new faith” (Turner, 28). Young joined together with Smith and the other early Mormon leaders in Kirtland, Ohio, where they proceeded to delve into the spiritual realm, speaking in tongues and giving themselves over to the throes of religious passion. As with Smith, Young was uneducated in religion or politics, but this was immaterial: he quickly grasped onto the finer points of Smith’s faith and became a keen missionary. Originally sent to Canada,

Young's most successful missionary venture was in Britain, which led other nations as the largest source of new converts; many of these converts would subsequently move to America and join Young's westward pioneers. Young's tenure in England was consequential and not only for the apparent religious reasons. While most of the American converts were from rural communities, indeed Joseph Smith himself was from such a background, "many British Mormons were from industrial working class of the urban centers of Manchester and Liverpool" (Bowman, 67). The grimness of Industrial Revolution would allow these new Mormon converts to conjure a virgin American continent as a refuge from the sooty Britain; Young and his team of missionary apostles were the engine of this successful migration.

Yet, after Smith's death, there was a significant existential question concerning who should succeed him as a leader and prophet of the church. Naturally, there were vastly disparate opinions on who should take charge. Young, as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (one of the high-ranking religious councils in the Mormon hierarchy), believed that he had the vested authority to take control of the Church. After being challenged by other prominent leaders, Young "arose and dramatically reinforced his own...claim to preeminence" (Arrington and Britton, 84). While there were tensions between Young, Smith's family and other leading Mormons about who should take up the holy mantle of prophet. "[Young] trod carefully as a leader, expressing his love for Joseph Smith and affirming his teachings" (Turner, 113). Contextually, Young's historical legacy is intertwined with the survival the faith as "[Mormonism] might have perished...had Brigham Young not stepped in to succeed Smith" (Kirn). What makes Young's ascension a uniquely American is that he was an *elected* leader: his leadership

was put to a vote and he was successful at attaining the majority. Even after the failure of Smith's Theodemocracy, temporal democracy of the American sort was already too ingrained into the Mormon spirit to be let go of entirely. Nonetheless, "Joseph Smith's vision of Zion guided Brigham Young's plans for these people" (Bushman VSI, 101). A later analysis of Young's role as leader of the Latter-day Saints was that Young was "just the right man to lead his people to their promised land" (Ostling and Ostling, 43). There would be difficulties for the pushcart pioneers before they made it to their final destination. One later commenter conveys the staggering emotional complexity of the Mormon exodus: it was "an enthralling journey rich with acts of bravery, frailty, strength, violence and mendacity" (Winer, Candidate). Encompassing all these human traits provides a portrait for the political mindset of the pioneers, already shaken from their previous, negative encounters with government inaction against vigilante pursuits. Young needed to use all his wits as well as the organizational construction that had begun under Smith to rally the Mormon faithful. Rather than following the standard westward routes, Young in due course "chose an arid but suitable piece of land, [and] planted his people there" (Gopnik). Traversing the unkempt American wilderness, Young led the "veritable pilgrimage" to the basin of the Great Salt Lake, a vast area that had not been tapped for potential by the federal government (Hartt). This new settlement developed into Salt Lake City, which subsequently came to be the administrative nucleus of the Mormon faith: a central, earthly location where every aspiration of the growing church could be realized.

Finally, after all the persecution, the Mormons had a land to call their own, seemingly free from government inaction. Without a working societal system, however,

the whole enterprise would fail. Young took charge of the new encampments and devised the political schema of the settlement. Prior experiences with non-Mormon governments influenced new outlooks in regards to governance and interaction with other groups. Much of Young's thinking situated on the "future direction of the society he would lead: a theocratic kingdom resisting encroachments on its autonomy, a society that at best tolerated but could not fully welcome non-Mormons" (Turner, 171). In this new place, Young shaped an ideology that eschewed a reliance on the federal government and instead turned his attention to an organization that would protect and care for itself. Such a system would allow the once exiled Mormons to thrive. It is remarkable that, after all the events that had transpired, Young and the Latter-day Saints would be successful in their venture: "[t]hroughout America there was an admiration, often grudging, for the perseverance the Mormons brought to the task of conquering the Great Basin. Many of the positive qualities and ideals Americans had prided themselves on – toughness, determination, ambition, hard work, expansionist vision – were exemplified in this group" (Arrington and Britton, 161).

Most fascinating about the pioneer experience was Young's conceptions of a communitarian organization of Mormon society. Experimenting with ways to sustain the Mormon refugees, "Young believed that the Mormons' prosperity was tied to their righteousness, and he sought a system that would promote both" (Bowman, 114). Perhaps incongruous with the contemporary image of Latter-day Saint capitalistic flair, Young was quite emphatic about going against the economic degradations that capitalism engendered. John Turner argues in his biography of Young that these views formed while Young was a missionary in Great Britain: "[t]he sooty misery of working-class

England...had left Young with a lingering belief that capitalism could produce an existence worse than chattel slavery” (Turner, 398). Joseph Smith was also interested in a proto-communist society, a “doctrine of covenant Christian communism” that would pool every Mormons’ resources for the utility and stability of the church community (Gilmore). For decades, Young tinkered with various forms of cooperative enterprises, all of which were meant to reinforce the notion of a unified Mormon front, one that was not dependent on outside resources or federal assistance. Through this rubric, all faithful adherents would be equally valued under this economic design. Conceptually, this *kibbutz*-style form of society was meant to provoke Mormon solidarity. Furthermore, “Young implemented his own version of this ideal in parts of Utah” under the guide of a group called the United Order (*ibid.*). All those who participated in the Order would see some monetary return on their efforts through their labor. The efficacy of these groups varied: “[s]ome of these cooperatives fell apart quickly through member disagreements. Others became increasingly complex as they branched into a wide variety of ventures” (Ostling and Ostlings, 51). As part of their directed duties, groups associated with the United Order would collect and distribute goods to benefit those who did not have the ability to afford them; “[r]esources were pooled through the revived principle of consecration, but private property [for the most part] was not abolished” (Lears). And while this system communalism of the Mormons operated for a while, it could never be a long-lasting success. Apropos of its historical relevance, however, “[t]he cooperative ideal had always been part of Mormonism’s essence – the church would never had survived without it” (Gilmore). Traces of this cooperative zeal can still be seen in modern Mormon practice, but despite his attempts to the contrary, Young was not able to

completely squash the capitalistic fervor from the Utah settlements. Once the Golden Spike was driven into the Utah soil in 1869, completing the Intercontinental Railroad, the state was “flooded...with cheap Eastern goods as well as outlaws, mineral prospectors and Gentile Immigrants” (Davis). Furthermore, “a mining boom...diverted the loyalties of many working-class Mormons” (*ibid.*). Longing for a completely autonomous territory free from any outside influence was something that not even the faithful could sustain.

Young’s approach to governance was different from Smith’s and had much longer lasting effect on the Mormon psyche. Smith tended towards an approach of universalism and inclusion; this can be gleaned from his revelations and presidential platform. Young, in contrast, could be harsh in his outlooks. Notwithstanding his organizational aptitude, Young put in place church teachings affected membership and relations with United State government. Young prohibited black members of the church from the holy duties of the priesthood, in essence denying them a spot in heaven. This racial legacy would last until well into the twentieth century, becoming a critical political topic that would split the Mormon faithful. Seeking retrenchment against external forces, Young “rededicated the Mormons to collective enterprise and economic self-sufficiency, urging the cultivation of tobacco and cotton and other cash crops” (Lears). This exclusive reliance on other Mormons naturally led to the establishment of Mormon-only political parties in Utah to draw a distinction with the establishment (and particularly hostile) partisans in Washington. These parties are of definite interest: “when the Mormons settled in Utah, the Church actually had its own political party [called the People’s Party, which would compete against the non-Mormon Liberal Party], which would dominate state politics until it was disbanded in 1891 by Church leaders who thought that Utah’s unique political

landscape was an impediment to achieving statehood” (Campbell and Monson, 110). On a related point regarding hesitancy of political recognition, the question of plural marriage was an enormous, complicated hurdle if Mormons were to achieve assured and equal political footing. While the practice certainly had not originated with him, Young institutionalized the practice of plural marriage even more so than Joseph Smith. Plural marriage, more so than any other Mormon attribute of this period, would come to define the caricatured image of the *Mormon as outsider* in the popular conception. The practice may have had many dimensions to it, perhaps as emulation of the biblical patriarchs for sure, or alternatively a means to create a separate Mormon ethnicity based in Utah and totally devoid of any gentile influence.

But, let’s be clear: plural marriage as a practice influenced external political conflict between Mormons and non-Mormons. The outcry against it was strongly felt and “[a]ll of this marrying did not go unnoticed by the federal government” (Winer, Candidate). Much of the country’s political establishment detested plural marriage and concluded that the Mormons continual practice of it ran counter the aspirations of the nation. In an ironic twist of history, the 1856 Republican Party platform denounced the Mormon ritual of plural marriage, deeming it one of the “twin relics of barbarism” along with the institution of slavery. Certainly, the dislike for the practice from the greater part of the mainstream Christian population was among the most vitriolic in all of American history. We are still reconciling with its affects to this day. Young had to deal an overwhelming anxiousness within his community about how to deal with the federal government. The structural dynamics at this moment were critical for Mormon history: “passions were high as Mormon leaders made repeated attempts to become a state”

(Condon, Jr.). The government felt weary about Mormon practices, while the Mormons felt the government was unfairly intruding upon these practices. In turn, many Mormons agitated for an independent nation without any federal oversight. The United States Army, under the direction of President James Buchanan, began to encircle Mormon enclaves, while Young, “anticipating Armageddon...encouraged [several Native American tribes] to attack Gentile wagon trains and to prepare to fight the U.S. Army” (Lears). There were some skirmishes (including the tragic Mountain Meadows Massacre), but ultimately there was no possibility of Young leading the Mormons to victory against the United States Army. The task was too much.

Further, “Washington’s message to the [Mormons] was simple and implacable: abandon polygamy and open the doors to eastern capital or face destruction” (Davis). When the Civil War began in 1861, Young’s attitudes towards the war were indicative of the inherent idiosyncrasies of his faith. All told, “Young anticipated the conflict would benefit the [Mormons]” (Turner, 317). In an unusual move, Young refused to endorse either side, as he believed both had interests against the Latter-day Saints. While some Mormons did enlist in the Union Army, “Young did not want his people marching off to defend a government he loathed” (Turner, Sit Out). Such a calculated decision reveals another dimension of political Mormonism, namely a hesitancy to involve the faith in national matters that have no apparent interest to the Church.³ Nonetheless, what becomes apparent when reading into these episodes against the United States Army is that, even with the strong will of a leader like Brigham Young, pure political dexterity cannot compete against the larger forces of the federal government. Though Young

³ While Abraham Lincoln was a Republican, he did not seek to prosecute the Mormons for their beliefs. He “[hoped] to find a truce with the saints while he prosecuted the war” (Burr).

would still be the dominant force in Utah politics, this was the “end of theocratic government in Utah” (Lears). Plural marriage would, in the end, cease as a mainstream Mormon practice in 1890, leading to the formal allowance of Utah into the union at the tail end of the nineteenth century, though schismatic fundamentalists would not relent and would continue the practice, and they do so even today. As “Utah gained statehood...Mormons began their transition into American’s political mainstream” (Quinn). Young, through all these governmental tribulations, would still retain his powers as a leader of the Mormons and the situation with the government displayed the ever-evolving political dimensions of the Church. The distrust of the government would manifest itself much differently in the decades to come. The end of plural marriage would become a hallmark of political Mormonism’s adaptive deftness: “the gradual repudiation [of the practice] reflected a pattern in Mormon history, a reluctant and defensive accommodation with the outside world whenever the survival...of the church was at stake” (Conkin, 222). What we can glean the most from these adventures is that the Mormon attitude primarily focused on the good of their community above all else.

III).

From a political standpoint, Young could not stave off the arrival of non-Mormons into Utah. Consequentially, he could not sustain the particular Mormon economic views that had begun with Smith. The influx of new blood and goods from the east ensured that the self-contained communal system was doomed to be only an experiment. Mormonism would have to adopt the economic outlooks of American capitalism or be doomed to irrelevancy. As one commenter puts it, “[f]orced into a corner by the Feds, Young’s followers put down their guns and got busy making money”

(Gopnik). More than simply a monetary shift, the Mormons began to follow a different political path than that of their ancestors. For the most part, Smith's independent ideology and Young's insistence for a cooperative Mormon model of society had been the established attitudes that defined the politics for the Church. Political self-preservation, supra-partisanship, and historical theodicy, along with a prevalent distaste for gentile discrimination, informed the political ethos of the modern Mormon Church. There could be no escape from the creeping materiality that ruled the American body politic: becoming a part of the United States meant a fealty to its economics and government organization. In the words of a prominent Mormon historian: "[t]he economic activities of [non-Mormon] outsiders threatened the identity of the political Kingdom by drawing it into the economic pattern of the surrounding areas, largely dominated by eastern capital" (Hansen eds. Hill and Allen, 124). As is the situation when all great faiths have their practices uprooted by societal upheaval, has always been a means to re-appropriate beliefs to perpetuate religious life. For Mormonism, "the intensity of the faith got sublimated into missionary zeal and commerce" thusly allowing an expansion of contact into the gentile world (Gopnik). This paradigm shift had an irrevocable impact on Mormonism, especially with the interaction of Latter-day Saints in the political sphere: history transpired in such a way that Mormons have been placed as "full participants in an ongoing debate about what constitutes American culture and politics (Trepanier and Newsander, 109).

Once Utah joined the Union in 1896, the beehive of Mormon activity shifted in considerable ways: "[a]s Mormons rose in respectability, their church became less tolerant of ecstatic revelations" and there was a need to renege on certain teachings that

had once been cornerstones of the faith (Lears). Any remnant of plural marriage was washed away, and anyone who still clung to the old ways was excommunicated. Richard Bushman frames the new Mormon standing thusly: “The end of polygamy...altered profoundly the relationship between Mormonism and the rest of the United States. For the first time, Mormons could aspire to national respectability” (Bushman VSI, 103). So, by shedding their most overt social stigma, the drift into the mainstream of the American political sphere would certainly engender more political opportunities for Mormons beginning in the early twentieth century. Yet, because of the many previous negative interactions with Washington and hostile non-Mormon entities, “Mormons were not entirely accustomed to participating in democracy, and the first problem its leaders faced was the integration into the national political community” (Bowman, 154). There were certainly fears of ecclesiastical overreach on the part of the central Church to wield its influences in ways that were anathema to regular political business; this led Church leaders to influence members to join the Democratic Party, as the memory of harsh rhetoric from the Republicans still “harbored ill-will” (Burr). This was a worry among non-Mormons who had never felt much kinship for the Mormons anyway. This caution against Mormons by mainstream Protestants denominations would seemingly produce a bit of a tolerated stance politically, if only because both groups share a majority of similar social policy agendas. Even with these superficial goals in mind, “[m]any in the Christian Right do not [even] acknowledge Mormonism as part of the Christian faith tradition,” going so far as shortsightedly refer to members as being part of “cult” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 303). This persistent, tangible bias between the two faith factions ebbs and flows depending on political exigency; the overlap of moral issue unity usually leads

to perfunctory theological truces (for example, the Romney 2012 campaign). There remains a challenge to interpret how much space non-Mormon Christian organizations will allow Mormons in the mainstream sphere of Republican politics. While discrimination and a touch of circumspection from the established Christian groups still lingers, over the decades there was a notable modification and mellowing of attitudes towards Mormons. To put it another way, the “faith has come of age at the national level” (Stanley).

Further, there is a greater cultural and political fascination with Mormonism than ever before. The next sections of this paper are going to explore the dimensions by which Mormonism expanded its modern political reach and how members have manifested their ideological outlooks, how certain members have behaved as political actors and reacted to domestic trends in politics, and how the contemporary cultural awareness surrounding Mormonism has expanded and transformed. Almost as a matter of official doctrine, the politics of the Mormon Church is strictly nonpartisan and the leadership will be constantly remind the faithful of this point. To reinforce this importance, the Church released official statement regarding its own political neutrality (Addendum I). The task of nonpartisanship is an essential task that the “church encourages its members to be politically active and offers them a chance to register to vote” (Roarty). To be sure, when elections are approaching, “the church regularly issues affirmations of its political neutrality and urges generalized citizenship responsibilities” (Ostling and Ostling, 112). This point has become so entrenched that it acts almost like a matter of religious doctrine. While a minority within the minority, liberal Mormons are as much a part of the community as any other internal political faction. Yet, for the greater part of its

population, normative Mormon political behavior has swayed towards conservatism for particular, spiritual reasons.

III.)

Historically, Mormons have expressed much political solidarity within their own spheres of influence. Per D. Michael Quinn,⁴ “from 1851 to 1859, more than 99 percent of Mormon voters supported Church-approved candidates in all but one election...[and] nearly 96 percent voted for the candidates selected by the LDS president (who at the time would have been Brigham Young)” (Quinn). Furthermore, the state of Utah has “had a Mormon governor for all but twenty of the years since statehood” (Ostling and Ostling, 140). While exit-polling data is not available for the Mormon electorate in both the 2000 and 2008 elections (constituting a lamentable oversight by the polling firm), “80 percent of Mormons voted for [George W.] Bush, while 78 percent voted for Romney” (Flock). So while it would indeed be unwise for Mormons to “be lazily categorized as raging conservatives,” there certainly has been a stable right-wing contingent within the faith that has manifested itself since the introduction of Utah into the union (Stanley). As an observation, “[Mormons] tend to be stalwart defenders of conservative social values and American exceptionalism” (Worthen).

The development of political Mormonism has been defined by historical and religious circumstances stemming from issues pertaining to both external and internal forces affecting the Church. As the Mormon political persuasion, is informed by an embedded fluidity of the faith, this ultimately means that the majority right-wing leaning is not entirely monolithic, just simply dominant: “[o]n matters relating to religious

⁴ Quinn is a historian who has been excommunicated from the Church for controversial views regarding Mormon history and politics. His credentials, however, cannot be denied.

tradition, individualism, and personal morality, the LDS leadership has taken resolutely conservative stands” (Ostling and Ostling, 113). What makes the Mormon political enterprise so fascinating is the way by which a distrusted faith has steadily entered the mainstream political sphere. To be sure, the broad incorporation of Mormons into the Republican Party can be viewed as a historical incongruity. As Campbell and Monson note, “There is great historical irony in the act that contemporary Mormons are such loyal republicans. When [the party] was founded...its aim[s] [were] the elimination of slavery and polygamy. [This] reference to polygamy was a direct attack on the Mormons, because they were reviled for this practice” (Campbell and Monson, 107). Such a juxtaposition of attitudes is a testament by which Mormons have successfully found a home for their ideological viewpoints: as they “embraced economic individualism and hierarchical communalism; they distrusted government interventions in business life but not moral life...They celebrated endless progress through Promethean striving” (Lears). The integration into the conservative wing of American politics was simply an unexpected turn of history. As Lawrence Wright notes, “[a] paradox of Mormonism is that a faith with such an embattled history has fostered a community whose members are so ostensibly conventional” (Wright). This conventionality surely accounts for the strong conservative ideology of the Mormons.

From a historical standpoint, the conservatism of contemporary Mormonism can be regarded as emblematic of the market forces that drove Smith and Young’s underlying distaste with capitalistic societal construction. Significantly, “[t]hroughout much of the 20th century...Mormonism grew away from its founding communal ideals” and more towards the normalized American economic schema (Gilmore). There lingers a

hint of the old progressivism in the Mormon body politic, which is most influenced by the fact that Mormons “have great faith in organization,” especially when working for those in most need of it (Benson). By embracing the normal economic systems in America, Mormons were able to use their deeply rooted organizational skills in the same vein as other politically astute Christian groups. More than simply an economic consideration, the evolution of the Church’s central operating structure and ethos has had a great influence in the development of Mormon political culture.

IV).

No faith or religious system can behave in an apolitical fashion. Throughout the history of the United States, the pull of governmental and political involvement has led countless groups to participate in their civic duties. Mormons exhibit these behaviors as well, yet because of their storied history they have had an irregular relationship with government and related political power structures. Though Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had ultimately decided that American federal government did not work in the interest of the Mormons, there was no way to break away from it completely. Taking a longer view, political Mormonism’s unique development appears slowly gain strength: “[a] mercantile church and a missionary church move in the same holy direction, and the vector that points both forward is the energy of enterprise” (Gopnik). Moving out of the pioneer towards the contemporary era, we begin to view complete and distinct attitudinal shifts from within the Church regarding political participation. Notwithstanding economic incentives to fully integrate within the Union, large picture analysis recognizes that Latter-day Saints, as a both a group and as newly minted American citizens, must do

their part within the grand social contract while also recognizing their singular identity and different from mainstream Christian political partisans.

With regards to approaching the Mormon political climate, focus must be placed upon “the church’s moral teachings – especially on social issues – [because these] are often thought to bear on politics” (Roarty). This is a powerful factor in how the Church interacts with mainstream American politics. On a normative level, the projected moral teachings that the Church means to convey defines the deep conservatism of the Mormons; this is a broad rule. Another consideration should be this: “[f]or many Mormons, the idea of free agency, with its intrinsic emphasis on individual responsibility, translates into a belief in limited government and an abhorrence of the welfare state, which is seen as crushing individual initiative” (Landsberg). The focus on individualism in the modern Mormon political ideology sets up a fascinating contrast between Smith and Young’s prototypical notions of a Mormon communalist society. The effect of modernity and capitalism has been commensurate with the underlying identification of conservative politics, and certainly this is true enough on the temporal plane: it is “perhaps unsurprising that Mormonism, [as] an indigenous American religious, would also adopt the country’s secular faith in [capitalism]” (Winter).

When viewed narrowly, the operation of political Mormonism has been pursued more by the Church rather than by individual actors, on the whole; this is summary notion of Campbell’s conception of this schema. Delving into the reality of this argument presents us with a striking juxtaposition due to the presence of an overarching influence that is the central Church hierarchy, including the elite figures that include Prophets/Presidents and General Authorities, has on its members. Mormons “hold

stronger conservative views than the general public,” with a Pew poll indicating that 77% of adherents lean towards the Grand Old Party (Haglund). Furthermore, though “LDS church leaders may wish to see greater partisan diversity among Mormons, their conservative leanings on social issues make the Republican party their natural home” (Campbell Monson, 111). More than a simple one-dimensional construction of aggregate Mormon political leanings, Mormon behavior is complicated by the subjective whims of the modern world. Succinctly, “countercultural ferment provoked conservative retrenchment” (Lears). Accordingly, Mormons can be expected to be attracted to the Republican Party [for a large part] as long as the political environment is characterized by conflict over cultural issues” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 303). While Mormons are undoubtedly at full liberty to act on their own behalf politically and the “high rate of...activity of Mormons full engaged with their church is not generally due to explicit mobilization on the part of LDS leaders” (Campbell and Monson, 120). Solidarity expressed in tandem with the moral thrust of their central institutions has led to assured and reliably consistent voting behaviors. While, “[n]umbers-wise, Mormons aren’t a huge voting bloc...they can be politically powerful” (Good). Thusly, “the potential potency of a Mormon electoral bloc is not merely a theoretical proposition” but an entity that affords politically positive consequences in the ballot box (Campbell and Monson. 105). Indeed, on most political issues the Church will lay dormant, waiting for an opportune time to mobilize their flock but only during moments that are deemed absolutely necessary. Returning to Campbell and Monson’s dry kindling theory of Mormon political interaction, we see how the dominance of political Mormonism’s conservatism becomes a useful illustration in how the moral teachings of the Church are utilized on a

temporal location. What makes these teachings such a potent imposition for the Mormon electorate? The meeting of individual agency coupled with a central Church's strong views on moral issues leads to a consistent political outlook that results in effective mobilization strategies.

The gravitation of Mormons towards conservative causes stems from worldview that takes an individual and conceives him as a vital component of the community. When such views become challenged, certain contingents of the church population express their moral outlooks through political action: “[w]hen there is agreement among LDS leaders on an issue and an official pronouncement is made, Mormons become politically activated” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 301). Significantly, when the central Mormon Church takes a political stand, it is rarely for or against an individual. Rather, the typical response will be that “the LDS Church [will take] official stances on issues raised by ballot initiatives, rather than campaigns for elected office” (Campbell and Monson, 124). We can see this in concretely in two major examples: the failure to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the late 1970s and early 1980s and the more recent and successful passage of Proposition 8 in California during 2008. While each has been thoroughly written about in the past, they warrant examination nonetheless.

Both of these political pieces display the Mormon Church's retrenchment into conservative causes based on the estimation that the outcomes would have a severe liberalizing effect on United States social structures. For the church leadership, the ERA was an icon of an American polity spiraling out of control. While the intended goal was an egalitarian definition of nondiscrimination based on gender, defeat of the bill was a warranted position for the Church as the Church believed that “women's roles were being

redefined in ways that reduced the importance of mothering” (Bushman VSI, 110). The battle over the ERA was a significant paradigm shift for the Church’s involvement in politics: “[the Church’s] political authority was secured first in the equal rights amendment battle as church leaders tested their ability to mobilize members towards a political objective” (Young ERA, 628). Even more so than just a singular political matter, the conservative elements of the Church believed that the ERA disrupted the status quo of American family values. Bluntly: “[c]onservative groups in and out of the Church feared the ERA would destroy the family” (C. Bushman, 118). The sheer magnitude by which the Church rallied its members to defeat the ERA was an impressive operational feat, so when considering the above statements about official pronouncements of policy it is not much of a normative surprise that these activities occur. What was most controversial about the Church’s opposition to the ERA, however, was how overt and uncompromising it was. Even more surprising was that the Church had decided to make a “decisive entry” into the political realm and had caught many non-Mormons off-guard (Wright). The vituperation of Church leaders against the amendment provided an essential tipping point on a national level, showing people for the first time how much political power a minority religious group can wield when it views an issue anathema to its core theological holdings. This same principle held for Political Mormonism during the gay marriage debate and Proposition 8 in California. The proposition, which would outlaw gay marriage even after the state had legalized the practice, was a particularly contentious one. Broad swaths of the conservative political/religious electoral contingent came out strongly in favor of the proposition, which then succeeded in passing during the same election that swept Barack Obama to the presidency. Across the nation, political

observers were stunned that the Mormon Church had held so much sway in the proposition's passage. Yet, looking from our analytical perch of Campbell and Monson's political cosmology, we should not be so surprised that the Mormon Church became a dominant entity in leading to the defeat of gay marriage in California: "Because the preservation of the *traditional* family is a major focus of modern Mormonism, the surprise came not in the church's stance on the issue, but rather how explicit and official that stance became" (Putnam and Campbell, 365). Thus, the conservative entrenchment of the Church stemmed from more modern notions of tradition in an arcane sense and a longing for an American system that seeks broad disapprovals of sexual vice and more time-honored social mores. While these displays of forceful political mobilization are rare, "when the LDS church asks for the support of its members in pursuit of a...political goal, it can be a very powerful thing" (Wald and Calhoun-brown, 301).

There is a dark side to the Mormon propensity for conservative politics which is manifested most strongly in reactionary paranoia and fear mongering. When "[t]aken to an extreme, the peculiarities of Mormon history and belief can lead to...antigovernment conspiracy theorizing" (Kirn). The contemporary locus of the Mormon relationship with extreme far right-wing ideology stemmed from, ironically, one of the first Mormons into be accepted in mainstream American politics: Ezra Taft Benson. Benson would serve in the Eisenhower Administration as Secretary of Agriculture for a full eight years, but in time he would also rise through the ranks of the Mormon senior hierarchy and eventually become President of the Church. While Benson was, in the words of political and literary contrarian Christopher Hitchens, "not a member of the [John] Birch Society," he was undoubtedly "a strong endorser" of the organization (Hitchens, Slate). Beyond being

simply a vehicle for concerned citizens to voice their opinions, the John Birch Society reveled in conspiracy theories that attempted to point out plots against America and its citizens. The Society was made up of rabidly anti-communist elements in the United States during the height of the Red Scare and McCarthyism, and Benson would attack both Eisenhower (after he left office) and John F. Kennedy for their views on civil rights, for example; Benson was never considered a fully accepted member of the organization due to the general anti-Mormon sentiment still in vogue across professional fields. Nonetheless, Benson had an important effect on the attitude of the reactionary right. He published pamphlets lambasting the Civil Rights Movement in addition to communism, creating the “soil that nurtured Cleon Skousen and the other paranoid elements [that] in the end incubated Glenn Beck” (Hitchens).

Skousen and Beck are both fascinating figures. While they are not representative exemplars of Mormonism as a faith, they both exhibit the understated abilities of certain members of a minority group that thrust into the spotlight and able to achieve a far-reaching cultural relevance. Skousen’s work concerned itself primarily with the perception that the entire United States government was about to be overthrown by communist/leftist elements that hated the very notion of American liberty. When the LDS Church internally struggled about the role of blacks in the priesthood, Skousen and his acolytes opposed any integration. Skousen’s most considerable legacy has almost become a trope of political reactionaries, a truism that has redoubtable clout for the like-minded. Essentially, Skousen was amenable to the conceit that the “Constitution was rooted not in the [philosophies] of the European Enlightenment but in the New Testament,” further making the literal point of America’s holy purpose in the world (Winer, *Magi*land). Any

consideration to the contrary was in all likelihood the work of a communist plot in Skousen's view; his extremism was so profuse that he was expelled from many sympathetic groups for being too *outré* with his political views. Beck has operated on similar model to Skousen, but in a manner that makes his extreme views palatable; it would be ill guided to correlate his personal Mormon beliefs with his political goals. It is important to consider Beck's choices: he converted to Mormonism later in his life, after years of alcohol and drug abuse, and used his new faith as springboard for his budding political viewpoints. His media presence during the early years of the Obama presidency proved to be very influential within a certain niche of the American electorate, one that was not simply limited to Mormons. That would be too narrow an audience. For Beck, the heritage of Skousen's ideological views was consequential for Beck's public persona as a severely conservative political commentator. In an observationally astute passage in a long-form book critique of Beck's role in American politics, and the propensity for some Mormons to slip in the stew of reactionary ideology in general, author Alexander Zaitchick writes that:

“The biggest factor in the development of Beck's conspiratorial worldview was his midlife Mormon conversion. Within Mormon culture, there runs a strong current of New World Order paranoia. After joining the church in 1999, Beck aligned himself with the religion's ultraconservative strain, in which this [type of] paranoia thrives. It is through mixing in these circles that Beck encountered the legacy of Mormonism's most influential hard-right figures of the last century [including Cleon Skousen]. These men brought anticommunist extremism to Utah during the 1950s. They interpreted the Cold War as the fulfillment of Mormon prophecy and saw radical-right organizations like the John Birch Society as embodying 'proper' Mormon politics. The fruit of their efforts was a philosophy within Mormonism in which ultraconservatism, end-times prophecy, and the paranoid style freely mix” (Zaitchick, 213).

Because of Beck's persuasive presence and long-armed media reach, most of the long-forgotten books written by Skousen became guiding documents for the nascent Tea Party movement. These books including *The Naked Communist* and *The 5,000 Year Leap*, are the most potent examples of reactionary literature spread in a mass medium. Beck's ensuing reactionary attitudes should be considered the contemporary apotheosis of ultraconservative Mormonism in a public setting, while not being entirely typical of the average Mormon's moderated conservative views.

For all the space that I have dedicated to present the very prevalent conservative attitudes of Mormons, it would be entirely amiss to ignore the less present but equally important liberal faction of Mormonism. In a Pew poll released in January 2012 asking Mormons about their political views, only 17% identified themselves as Democrats or leaning to the Democratic Party (Passey). While it has already been heavily established that Mormonism is a traditionally inclined faith, there is something to be said about the heritage of Mormon liberalism, and its antecedent of progressivism, which has a more historical association with Mormonism than the embrace of that contemporary conservatism presents. Mormon progressivism attempts a prototypical understanding of the term. Conceivably, "part of what makes Mormonism unique...is the communal ethic" (Wallace-Wells). Looking at this ideological purview holistically, it is an arguably valid point to consider that "Mormons are progressive in the classic sense, the sense of Jane Addams and Theodore Roosevelt" (Benson). In another seemingly ironic turn, the beliefs of the progressive Mormons were inspired by the (re)introduced gospel of Joseph Smith. In essence, liberal Mormons have attempting to go back to the ideals that Smith had always intended for the new community. These adherents saw "progressivism's

aspirations to moral uplift... [and] the unlimited possibilities of human potential” (Bowman, Affinity). Though these aspirations approached the biblical loftiness Smith was conveying, the retrenchment of conservative values has for the most part stifled the growth of liberal political Mormonism. This is not to say that there have not been pockets of liberal Mormons who have achieved nationally prominent roles in the Church. Like his complete ideological opposite Glenn Beck, Harry Reid, “a rare liberal Democrat amid a largely Republican flock” was a convert to the Mormon faith later in life (Ostling and Ostling, 137). Whereas Beck chose to follow the most reactionary, paranoid voices in the faith, Reid went with a moderated liberal perspective, engaging in social issues that at times went against official Church doctrine.

One of the most difficult aspects of being a liberal in the overwhelmingly conservative Church is the doctrinal disagreement that arises. For example, during the 2012 presidential election, “many left-leaning Mormons [found] themselves defending their worthiness to fellow church members” (Passey). But the election was only a small blip when considering the bitter division between partisan factions during the Civil Rights Movement. Because of Brigham Young’s policy against admitting blacks into the Mormon priesthood (the most important step to achieving a place in heaven) many Church conservatives were against the goals of the movement. One of the most telling disagreements against Church leaders came from George Romney, governor of Michigan during the 1960s and father of Mitt. Romney “[declared] support for black civil rights in 1967” and worked diligently from then on so that that Church would officially rescind its policy (Gilmore). For years “within the church, leaders were advocating for change, but the most conservative members had their say,” and this overwhelmingly stifled much

discussion (Winer, Candidate). It was not until 1978 when the Church finally scrapped the policy, years after the Civil Rights Movement had its full impact but it was still a step in the right direction (Gilmore). For liberal Mormons, the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement has morphed into contemporary action for equal rights for gays and lesbians, gender pay equality and social justice. In participating in these activities, so diametrically opposed by a large faction of the Church, “such efforts...[help] to revitalize the creation of the Kingdom of God and to create a citizenry worthy of it. The impulse was their own, but progressivism provided them a structure” (Bowman, Affinity). This broad sketch of liberal Mormonism is no less diffuse than that of their conservative brethren. It is simply that, over the course of the twentieth century, many of the teachings of Smith and Young have been reinterpreted to apply to an ethos that extols the virtues of capital and self-reliance. This is not to impugn those believers, but to make an anecdotal consideration that much of modern Mormon political practice may be at odds with a majority of the original community structures that the first church leaders wanted to establish. Inculcated into Church members is the “focus on self-help and community,” which would lend support for an underlying liberal renaissance, though it may not be appear anytime soon in mainstream consciousness (Kotkin). Springing off ideals that valued communitarianism, liberal Mormons continue a political practice that seeks to emulate the earliest known Latter-day Saint organization. Prognosticating the continued success of liberal Mormonism is difficult and problematic, yet what is foreseeably tenable is that their minority status within the Mormon minority will be assured.

V.

One of the most interesting religious phenomena of the last decade was the so-called *Mormon Moment*, a sudden convalescence of interest in all things related to Mormonism. More ponderous is how the Moment came to pass and why it had so much impact. For the Mormon Church, the Moment was an instantaneous pull into the spotlight and the “church that [preferred] to keep private became very public” (Merica). Indeed, why nearly two centuries after the Church was first formed were people (read voters) paying attention to this group so often on the fringes of culture in the first place? For political Mormonism, it was a time of great and controversial activity. The dates of the Moment are difficult to discern as it was never an officially recognized event, more like a loose amalgamation of stacked political and entertainment entities, but the harbinger of the Moment was certainly manifested by the introduction and prominence of Mitt Romney on the national stage during his candidacy for President; it also helped that there was a renewed artistic fascination coalescing around that peculiarly American faith.

For most Americans, the first time they were arguably aware of the phrase was in Walter Kirn’s piece in *Newsweek* Magazine published in the summer of 2011, when Romney was back on the campaign trail for the second time. Political Mormonism had been active well before that summer, but the placement of Romney amplified the punditry because of the viability of Mormon as a candidate. Politics in the Mormon Moment were chaotic, especially when it came to figuring out how to portray Romney. For Kirn, Mormons were finally in a position to display their full heritage without many of the past social stigmas (though some were still present). Kirn writes that “[p]olitics—the field with perhaps the greatest potential to change how most Americans view

Mormons—has yet to catch up. But while national figures...are still reluctant to highlight their Mormon faith, other politicians are starting to see their Mormonism as a selling point” (Kirn).

If the *Book of Mormon* musical was the sail, then Romney was the anchor of the Mormon Moment, the center of attention during the Mormon zeitgeist in all of its perplexity. For Mormons and Gentiles alike, Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts, acted as a cipher and someone on whom various groups could hang their impressions on Mormon faith and culture. Across the political spectrum, even partisans who were expected to be natural allies, Romney was viewed suspiciously. In a report from the *Washington Post* during Romney’s second campaign, it was noted that “Romney’s quest for the Oval Office...has seen rumblings of anti-Mormon sentiment carry over to the ballot box. He lost much [support] of the evangelical-dominated south. Some prominent pastors have [already] dismissed Mormonism as a cult” (Stack). There were not-so-subtle whispers that Romney’s Mormon heritage could be a detriment to his candidacy. Romney acknowledged this questioning of his faith and in response to the barrage of suspicion from Evangelical leaders gave a speech outlining his general views on religion and politics. In doing so, “[Romney] made more headway than his father” did in the political realm and pushed the limit on how far a Mormon politician could go (Bowman, 227). In a parallel situation with Catholic candidate John F. Kennedy a generation before, Romney had to contend with Evangelical voters who considered Mormonism nothing more than a dangerous cult. If this election was proof of anything, it was that “Mormons [could] bring out the crazy on both sides of the aisle” (Williamson). To assuage any fears these essential voters had, Romney gave one of the most critical

political speeches of his career, highlighting the separation between being a Mormon versus a *Mormon Candidate*. Romney walked a fine line for many voters concerned about his faith. As a rhetorical piece Mormon scholars felt Romney's speech was a hollow: "Romney's comparison of his situation to Kennedy's is dubious at best. The American Catholic tradition which JFK based his claim to political independence is completely different from the tradition of American Mormons" (Quinn). Word Cloud analyses (Addendum II) of both speeches reflect the stark attitudinal differences between Kennedy and Romney with regards to their rhetorical choices. While Kennedy overtly mentioned his Catholic faith, Romney references the notion of faith and not his specific Mormon one. There was clearly reluctance on the part of the Romney campaign to stress the candidate's religious nature, such as his many of vague invocations of God, but not the large topic of religion exactly. Rather than referencing specific doctrinal beliefs, Romney and his campaign preferred universal but abstract religiosity: "[Romney] uttered sunny, generalized statements about faith, family and morality" (Ostling and Ostling, 136). The speech ended up being controversial where Kennedy's was not. On the other hand, Romney "emphasized repeatedly that his candidacy should be seen as evidence of the nation's belief in religious liberty" (Kranish and Helman, 303). For all the criticisms of the speech from those inside and outside the faith, the speech made a push for religious tolerance early in the campaign; Romney laid down his commitment to maintain his religion strictly as a personal matter. Although he lost the 2008 Republican primaries, Romney was triumphant four years later and became the official nominee for President. In those intervening four years, a subtle yet tangible shift occurred in the American electorate's perceptions about Mormons. Evangelicals, for the most part, staved off their

Mormonism as Cult charges, instead attempting to coalesce around a Republican candidate with the most solid chance to defeat Obama. It was a tough position for many voters in this bloc, and “many American Christians had to decide if they could put aside their biases and vote for a presidential candidate they supported in every way except his religion” (Walker). Yet, Romney as a candidate was seen as constantly weakened by his apparently fluid policy positions. Even an article in *The Weekly Standard* noticed this Romney trait: “He is...a man of principles so pragmatic that he lacks any unshakeable political foundation” (Anderson weekly standard). Because of this embedded pragmatism, some thought that “[w]hen [Romney] first appeared on the American political scene it seemed he might follow his father’s progressivism” (Gilmore). As a candidate for the Senate, running against Edward Kennedy, Romney strongly declared his support for gay rights and abortion protection. But only when Romney became a politician on the national stage, he began courting favor with a harder-right electoral base dictated and they shifted his policy outlook. While it would seem to be an incongruous political calculation, much of Political Mormonism’s historical power has come from the ability of candidates to hover between ideological planes. This could be plainly seen with Jon Huntsman, Jr., one of the many candidates vying for the Republican nomination in 2012. Like Romney, Huntsman was a Mormon and was a former governor, though from the state of Utah. Huntsman also tried to “[deflect] attention from his Mormon on roots” and instead brought a certain focus on the role of a general faith in his life (Kim). In contrast with Romney, however, Huntsman did not try to gain the support of the most reactionary elements of the Republican Party and dropped out of the race early during primary season. What is more, both Romney and Huntsman had the perfect platform by

which to dispel any lingering doubts that voters had about Mormonism, but both did not seem primed for the opportunity to forcefully express this view. While Romney (and to a lesser degree Huntsman) was being the standard bearer for Mormonism on the political front, a new musical opening on Broadway prepped the nation for, not only a point of conversation about the national consequences about Mormon Moment, but also a full onslaught of stories where Mormon content was the main generator of interest.

While much of the focus on the Mormon Moment was centered around its effect on politics, it is important to comment on the wave of pop cultural fascination Mormonism due to the opening of the Broadway musical simply titled *The Book of Mormon*. The pomp and sheer American-ness of Mormonism became a meme, a feat that really had not occurred since the pioneer days of Smith and Young. The musical's writers, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, creators of the hit comedy television series *South Park* had a long fascination with Mormons.⁵ The musical, which was written in collaboration with Robert Lopez, a co-writer of the spoof puppet musical *Avenue Q*, would go on to win a Tony Award for Best Musical, presented a story about two young, naïve Mormon missionaries sent to Uganda to convert the villagers. Considering the satirical and borderline blasphemous nature of the show, there were commentators who wondered why it was possible to create an irreverent show about Latter-day Saint beliefs, but not one against Islam or mainstream Christianity. What was it about the Mormon faith that allowed such a show to open with little fanfare about its subject matter? This consideration was a hot topic, particularly in the conservative press. In an op-ed that ran in the *Wall Street Journal* written during the 2012 campaign, Bret Stephens wrote: "In

⁵ For example an episode in the seventh season of *South Park* featured the main characters interacting with their new Mormon neighbors, while many tacit references to the faith have been mentioned over the course of the series.

the consensus view of modern American liberalism, is it hilarious to mock Mormons and Mormonism but outrageous to mock Muslims and Islam. Why? Maybe it's because nobody has ever been harmed, much less killed, making fun of Mormons" (Stephens). The implication of this inquiry is clear: Mormonism can be an easy target because the repercussion of gently satirizing or forcefully excoriating the faith rarely results in full-scale violence. On a political level, this leads to charges that Mormonism is a soft target, with a minority status that allows it to exist in the polity while not being accepted entirely by the general electorate. But then again, the *Book of Mormon* musical, while being overtly crass, had a type of morality at its center and "[m]any reviews credited the musical with an underlying fondness for Mormonism (Bowman, 249-50).

As with the Mormon Moment's debut, its end is nebulous. For many, the moment ended with the defeat of Romney against Obama during the presidential campaign of 2012. The autopsy of Romney's candidacy inevitably involved questioning whether knowledge about his Mormonism by voters helped or hindered his campaign. Commentators are still divided on the subject. What is clear is that Mormon Moment leaves behind a notably more recognizable Church, which "suggests that the [Moment] was about more than presidential politics" (Walker). Indeed, the Moment was a cultural phenomenon that rose and fell precipitously. Only now are we able to begin to piece together its impact in American political life. Nonetheless, "the cultural, political, and religious significance that modern Mormonism has achieved in the last decade guarantees that this Mormon moment will long outlast the temporary prominence Romney enjoyed" (Young, Moment). The contemporary focus on the Church altered perceptions about its adherents and now "public impressions of the Mormons are increasingly positive" (Pew).

If the Mormon Moment will have any lasting relevancy, it's that the notion of American religious liberty, while flawed in practice, is still vibrant. Political Mormonism, as an entity contained within these precepts of religious toleration and practice, will grow in influence.

In the end, what are we to make of these ventures of the Mormon Church into the realm of politics, considering the dual allegiances to enshrined apoliticism and political action? Bearing in mind my central proposal of a political Mormonism, the notion that the Church can truly be an apolitical enterprise is myopic, but the enterprising spirit of the Church raises questions about the role that religion and politics have played throughout the course of American history. I feel that I have only scratched the surface in the examination of the Mormonism's political identity. Within the limited space I was allowed, I have only begun to explore the deeper ramifications of the political Mormon experience. But if there is a thread that weaves through the Mormon history in the United States, it is that it was once one of the most persecuted minority groups, the manner by which they successfully integrated into the American political mainstream is throughout unique to the notions of American constitutional philosophy. The liberal tolerances enshrined in the Constitution can be found inherently in the story of Joseph Smith and the religion he founded on American soil. While the legacy of anti-Mormonism will remain, it will exist mostly as a minor remnant of a past era. In the meantime, Mormons will continue to play a valued role in national and local politics, on both sides of the ideological divide, and in their own ways, contribute to the experiment of American republicanism. Political Mormonism will be but one engine that continues to allow the flourishing of minority religious rights in the United States. Indeed, "America continues

to evolve into something new, with its core values being defined and redefined over time...the history of the Mormons in America follows this same pattern of [adaptation]" (Trepanier and Newsander, 113). And it will continue as long as the relationship between religion and politics remains an immutable force of voter interaction and participation within American government.

Works Cited

"Americans Learned Little About the Mormon Faith, But Some Attitudes Have Softened." Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life . PewResearchCenter, 12 Dec 2012. Web. 12 Apr 2013. <<http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Mormon/attitudes-toward-mormon-faith.asp&xgt;>.

Arrington, Leonard J., and Davis Britton. *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* . 2nd Edition. Urbana : University of Illinois Press , 1979, 1992. Print.

Benson, Eric . "Latter-Day Leader (Interview with Matthew Bowman)." *New York Magazine* . 29 Jan 2012:. Web. 24 Mar. 2013. <<http://nymag.com/news/frank-rich/matthew-bowman-romney-2012-2/>>.

Bowman, Matthew . *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith*. First Edition . New York : Random House , 2012. Print.

----- . "Mormonism's Surprisingly Deep Affinity For Progressive Politics." *The New Republic* . 21 Nov. 2011. Web. 03 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/politics/97613/romney-mormonism>>.

Burr , Thomas . "Republican Party started out anti-Mormon ." *The Salt Lake Tribune* [Salt Lake Ciy, UT] 27 Feb. 2012, Web. 24 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/53577596-78/romney2012-party-church-mormons.html.csp>>.

Bushman, Claudia L. . *Contemporary Mormonism: Latter-Day Saints In Contemporary America* . Westport, Connecticut : Praeger; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. , 2006. Print.

Bushman , Richard Lyman. *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling (RSR)* . New York : Vintage , 2005. Print.

----- . *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction (VSI)*. New York : Oxford University Press , 2008. Print.

Campbell David E. and J. Quin Monson. "Dry Kindling: A Political Profile of American Mormons." Chapter in *From Pews to Polling Places: Faith and Politics in the American Religious Mosaic*, ed. J. Matthew Wilson. 2007 Print Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Condon, Jr., George E. . "Republicans Weren't Always So Accepting of Mormons ." *National Journal*. 27 Aug. 2012:. Web. 11 Mar. 2013.

<http://www.nationaljournal.com/daily/the-history-of-gop-opposition-to-mormonism-20120827?mrefid=site_search>.

Conkin, Paul K. *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity* . Chapel Hill, North Carolina : The University of North Carolina Press , 1997 . Print.

Davidson, Amy. "Latter-Day Politics." *New Yorker* . 23 May 2012: Web. 12 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/comment/2012/05/mitt-romney-mormon.html>>.

Davis , Mike . "The Reds Under Romne'ys Bed ." *Los Angeles Review of Books* . 25 Oct. 2012: n. page. Web. 28 Apr. 2013. <<http://lareviewofbooks.org/article.php?id=1036&fulltext=1>>.

Dovere , Edward-Isaac. "Romne'ys Mormon Faith in spotlight ." *Politico*. 28 May 2012: Web. 02 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0512/76776.html>>.

Flanders , Robert Bruce . "Dream and Nightmare: Nauvoo Revisited ." ed. D. Michael Quinn *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* . Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books , 1992 . Print.

Flock , Elizabeth. "Jewish Voters for GOP Jumps in 2012, Mormon Vote Slips ." *US News & World Report*. 09 Nov. 2012: n. page. Web. 21 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/washington-whispers/2012/11/09/jewish-support-for-gop-jumps-in-2012-mormon-support-slips>>.

Gilmore, Mikal. "Mitt Romney & The Ghosts of Mormon History." *Rolling Stone* . 25 Oct. 2012. Print.

Good , Chris . "The Mormons: The Most Conservative Religious Group in America ." *The Atlantic* . 24 Jul 2009: Web. 24 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2009/07/the-mormons-the-most-conservative-religious-group-in-america/22102/>>.

Gopnik, Adam. "I, Nephi: Mormonism and its meanings ." *The New Yorker* . 13 Aug. 2012: Web. 05 Dec. 2013. <http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2012/08/13/120813crat_atlarge_gopnik>.

Gottlieb, Robert, and Peter Wiley. *America's Saints: The Rise of Mormon Power* . G.P. Putnam's Sons : New York, 1984. Print.

Griffith, R. Marie , and Melani McAlister . "Introduction: Is the Public Square Still Naked?." *The American Quarterly* . Volume 59.Number 3 (2007): 527-558. Print.

Hagerty , Barbara Bradley. "Mormonism: A Scrutinized, Yet Evolving Faith." *All Things Considered* . NPR, 28 Nov. 2012. Web. 5 Mar 2013.
<<http://www.npr.org/2012/11/28/166022894/mormonism-a-scrutinized-yet-evolving-faith>>.

Haglund , David . "Not Every Mormon Holds the Same Beliefs as Mitt Romney." *Slate* . 12 Jan 2012: Web. 5 Dec. 2012.
<http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2012/01/mormons_in_america_a_new_survey_reveals_that_mormons_aren_t_just_a_bunch_of_mitt_romneys_.html>.

Hansen, Klaus J. *Mormonism and the American Experience*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981. Print.

Hansen , Klaus . "The Political Kingdom as a Source of Conflict ." Eds. Marvin S. Hill and James B. Allen. *Mormonism and American Culture* . New York: Harper & Row , Print.

Hartt, Rollin Lynde. "The Mormons ." *The Atlantic* . 1 Feb 1900: Web. 05 Mar. 2013.
<<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1900/02/the-mormons/305339/>>.

Hitchens , Christopher . "Romney's Mormon Problem." *Slate* . 17 Oct. 2011: Web. 5 Dec. 2012.
http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2011/10/is_mormonism_a_cult_who_cares_it_s_their_weird_and_sinister_beli.html

Kirn, Walter . "Mormons Rock! ." *Newsweek/The Daily Beast* . 05 Jun. 2011: n. page. Web. 05 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/06/05/mormons-rock.html>>.

Kotkin, Joel. "Utah Up, Chicago Down: Why Mitt Romney Should Embrace His Mormonism." *Newsweek/The Daily Beast* . 22 Aug. 2012: Web. 5 Mar. 2013.
<<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/08/22/utah-up-chicago-down-why-mitt-romney-should-embrace-his-mormonism.html>>.

Kranish, Michael and Scott Helman. *The Real Romney*. New York: Harper , 2012 . Print.

Landsberg , Mitchell. "Romney's conservative roots lie in Mormon Faith ." *Los Angeles Times* [Los Angeles, CA] 21 Sep 2012, Web. 03 Dec. 2012.
<<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/sep/21/nation/la-na-mormon-conservatism-20120921>>.

Lears , Jackson. "The Mormon Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism." *The New Republic* . 19 Oct. 2012: n. page. Web. 28 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/magazine/108787/the-mormon-ethic-and-the-spirit-capitalism>>.

Lemann, Nicholas . "Transaction Man: Mormonism, private equity, and the making of a candidate." *The New Yorker* . 01 Oct. 2012: 38-51. Print.

Merica , Dan. "Romne'ys loss closes out 'Mormon Moment'." CNN Belief Blog. CNN, 08 Nov. 2012. Web. 12 Apr 2013. <<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/11/08/romneys-loss-closes-out-mormon-moment/>>.

McCormick, John S. , and John R. Sillito. *A History of Utah Radicalism: Startling, Socialistic, and Decidedly Revolutionary*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press , 2011. Print.

Ostling , Richard N., and Joan K. Ostling . *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* . Revised Edition. New York : HarperOne, 2007. Print.

Passey, Brian. "Mormon liberals: A 'minority within a minority.'" *USA Today* 30 Oct. 2012,. Web. 3 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2012/10/30/mormon-liberals-minority/1669155/>>.

Putnam , Robert D. , and David E. Campbell with the assistance of Shaylyn Romney Garrett. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* . New York: Simon & Schuster , 2010. Print.

Quinn, D. Michael. "When Mormons Go to Washington." *Vanity Fair* . 12 Oct 2012: Web. 3 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/2012/10/mormon-politicians-lds-church-romney>>.

Roarty, Alex . "Mormon Solidarity Bolsters Romney in Nevada ." *National Journal*. 03 Nov. 2012: n. page. Web. 28 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.nationaljournal.com/2012-election/mormon-solidarity-bolsters-romney-in-nevada-20121103>>.

Shippo , Jan. *Mormonism: The Story of A New Religious Tradition*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press , 1985. Print.

Stack , Peggy Fletcher. "The Mormon moment is now ." On Faith . *Washington Post* , 11 Apr. 2012. Web. 12 Apr 2013. <http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-04-11/national/35452732_1_anti-mormon-mormon-church-brother-romney>.

Stanley, Timothy . "How Mormonism Has Moderated Romne'ys and Huntsman's Politics." *The Atlantic* . 26 Oct. 2011:. Web. 12 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/10/how-mormonism-has-moderated-romneys-and-huntsmans-politics/247106/>>.

Steinberg , Avi . "What Joseph Smith's Candidacy Can Teach Mitt Romney." *Bloomberg Businessweek*. 15 Mar. 2012:. Web. 20 Feb. 2013.

<<http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-03-15/what-joseph-smiths-candidacy-can-teach-mitt-romney>>.

Stephens , Bret . "Muslims, Mormons and Liberals ." *The Wall Street Journal* [New York] 19 Sep 2012, Web. 12 Mar. 2013.

<<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390444450004578002010241044712.html>>.

Stolberg, Sheryl Gay. "For Mormons, a Cautious Step Toward Mainstream Acceptance." *The New York Times* 07 Nov 2012, New York Edition P4. Print.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/08/us/politics/at-least-a-degree-of-validation-for-mormons.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>.

Tapper , Jake . "The First Mormon Presidential Candidate." ABC News. ABC News Internet Ventures , 06 Dec. 2007. Web. 25 Feb. 2013.

<<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Vote2008/story?id=3963656&page=1>>.

Trepanier , Lee, and Lynita K. Newsander. *LDS in the USA: Mormonism and the Making of American Culture* . Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2012. Print.

Turner , John G. *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* . Cambridge, Massachusetts : The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press , 2012. Print.

----- . "The Mormons Sit Out the Civil War." Opinionator . *The New York Times* , 01 May 2012. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.

<<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/01/the-mormons-sit-out-the-civil-war/>>.

Wald, Kenneth D., and Allison Calhoun-Brown. *Religion and Politics in the United States* . 6th ed. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011. Print.

Walker , Joseph. "Why 2012 was 'more than a Mormon Moment'." *Deseret News* 31 Dec 2012, Web. 12 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865569619/Why-2012-was-more-than-a-Mormon-moment.html?pg=all>>.

Wallace-Wells , Benjamin. "Mitt's Stake ." *New York Magazine* . 23 Sep. 2012:. Web. 12 Mar. 2013. <<http://nymag.com/news/features/mitt-romney-mormonism-2012-10/>>.

West , Greg. "Liberal or conservative? Joseph Smith's 1844 presidential platform." Examiner.com. *Examiner*, 10 July 2009. Web. 25 Feb. 2013.

<<http://www.examiner.com/article/liberal-or-conservative-joseph-smith-s-1844-presidential-platform>>.

Williamson, Kevin D. "An American Gospel." *National Review Online* . 09 Apr. 2012 :. Web. 05 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.nationalreview.com/blogs/print/295305>>.

Winer , Laurie. "Magicland ." *Los Angeles Review of Books* . 1 Jul. 2011: . Web. 09 Mar. 2013. <<http://lareviewofbooks.org/article.php?id=878&fulltext=1>>

----- "The Mormon Candidate ." *Los Angeles Review of Books* . 26 Aug. 2012: . Web. 05 Dec. 2012. <<http://lareviewofbooks.org/article.php?id=878&fulltext=1>>.

Winter , Caroline . "How the Mormons Make Money." *Bloomberg Businessweek*. 18 Jul. 2012: Web. 20 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-07-10/how-the-mormons-make-money>>.

Wood , Timothy L. "The Prophet and the Presidency: Mormonism and Politics in Joseph Smith's 1844 Presidential Election." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* . Vol. 93.No. 2 (2000): 167-193. Print.

Worthen, Molly . "The Missionary Position." *Foreign Policy*. 12 Jun 2011: n. page. Web. 10 Dec. 2012. <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/13/the_missionary_position>.

Wright, Lawrence. "Lives Of The Saints ." *The New Yorker* . 21 Jan 2002: . Web. 26 Feb. 2013. <http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2002/01/21/020121fa_FACT1>.

Young , Neil J. "Is the Mormon Moment Over?." *The Huffington Post* . 20 Nov. 2012: Web. 12 Apr. 2013. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/neil-j-young/is-the-mormon-moment-over_b_2160270.html>.

----- "The ERA is a Moral Issue: The Mormon Church, LDS Women, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment." *The American Quarterly* . Volume 59.Number 3 (2007): 623-644. Print.

Zaitchik, Alexander. *Common Nonsense : Glenn Beck and the Triumph of Ignorance*. Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley, 2010. Print.

Addendum II.

LDS Statement on Political Neutrality

The Church's mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, not to elect politicians. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is neutral in matters of party politics. This applies in all of the many nations in which it is established.

The Church does not:

- Endorse, promote or oppose political parties, candidates or platforms.
- Allow its church buildings, membership lists or other resources to be used for partisan political purposes.
- Attempt to direct its members as to which candidate or party they should give their votes to. This policy applies whether or not a candidate for office is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- Attempt to direct or dictate to a government leader.

The Church does:

- Encourage its members to play a role as responsible citizens in their communities, including becoming informed about issues and voting in elections.
- Expect its members to engage in the political process in an informed and civil manner, respecting the fact that members of the Church come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and may have differences of opinion in partisan political matters.
- Request candidates for office not to imply that their candidacy or platforms are endorsed by the Church.
- Reserve the right as an institution to address, in a nonpartisan way, issues that it believes have significant community or moral consequences or that directly affect the interests of the Church.

In the United States, where nearly half of the world's Latter-day Saints live, it is customary for the Church at each national election to issue a letter to be read to all congregations encouraging its members to vote, but emphasizing the Church's neutrality in partisan political matters.

Relationships With Government:

Elected officials who are Latter-day Saints make their own decisions and may not necessarily be in agreement with one another or even with a publicly stated Church position. While the Church may communicate its views to them, as it may to any other elected official, it recognizes that these officials still must make their own choices based on their best judgment and with consideration of the constituencies whom they were elected to represent.

Political Party Participation of Presiding Church Officers

In addition, the First Presidency letter issued on 16 June 2011 is a re-statement and further clarification of the Church's position on political neutrality at the start of another political season. It applies to all full-time General Authorities, general auxiliary leaders, mission presidents and temple presidents. The policy is not directed to full-time Church employees.

"General Authorities and general officers of the Church and their spouses and other ecclesiastical leaders serving full-time should not personally participate in political campaigns, including promoting candidates, fundraising, speaking in behalf of or otherwise endorsing candidates, and making financial contributions.

"Since they are not full-time officers of the Church, Area Seventies, stake presidents and bishops are free to contribute, serve on campaign committees and otherwise support candidates of their choice with the understanding they:

- Are acting solely as individual citizens in the democratic process and that they do not imply, or allow others to infer, that their actions or support in any way represent the church.
- Will not use Church stationery, Church-generated address lists or email systems or Church buildings for political promotional purposes.
- Will not engage in fundraising or other types of campaigning focused on fellow Church members under their ecclesiastical supervision."