

Acknowledgments

The following people have read this manuscript whole or in part and have provided invaluable insight and suggestions: Robert Abzug, William H. Goetzmann, Roger Renwick, Howard Miller, Tad Tuleja, Neil Kamil, William Stott, Jan Shipps, Stephen Olsen, Stephanie Smith Eliason, Robert Crunden, Ben Bennion, William A. Wilson, and John Alley.

Tad Tuleja deserves special mention for inviting me to write an essay for his collection of scholarly articles on the uses of history by American folkgroups. This opportunity sparked an idea which evolved into this dissertation. An earlier version of the first section of this dissertation entitled “Pioneers and Recapitulation in Mormon Popular Historical Expression” appears in Tad’s edited volume *Usable Pasts: Traditions and Identity in North America* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997).

Over the past four years, countless people have provided me with their impressions, opinions, and recollections of Pioneer Day and pioneer veneration in their lives. Ron Walker helped introduce me to the scholarly literature on the Mormon Cultural Region. Thanks is due to KSL television in Salt Lake City for broadcasting Salt Lake City’s “Days of ’47” parade and to the people of Fairview, ^[v] Spring City, and Manti in Sanpete County, Utah, for their Pioneer Day festivities and pageant spectacles in which I was participant observer. My wife’s grandparents Marion and Wanda Smith shared many of their own reminiscences and documentation of Snowflake, Arizona’s Pioneer Day celebrations since the 1870s. My parents Dan and LeAnn Eliason, my wife, Stephanie, and children Shelby and Caleb have been great cheerleaders and a wonderful support.

The Charles Redd Center for Western studies assisted this project with a generous grant without which the research for chapters five through eight would not have been possible. The University of Texas at Austin Office of Graduate Studies also made fellowship money available. In the course of this research, I spoke on the phone with over two hundred mayors, city-council men and women, city and county government workers, chamber of commerce personnel, historical society volunteers, LDS bishops and Relief Society presidents, and other designated festival organizers—all of whom were gracious and helpful.

My own curious interest in this topic stems in part from the fact that I am a Mormon who is neither a convert from outside of the LDS Church nor an “ethnic Mormon” descended from plains-crossing pioneer ancestors. My liminality betwixt and between these two categories highlighted by my culture have given me somewhat of an outsider/insider perspective on the Mormon historical experience. “Mormonism” is the religion I practice. I came to do so as a “convert from the inside” rather than a proselyte. As far as this study is a study of religion, it is reflexive ethnography. As far as it is an ethnography of Mormon regional culture, my qualifications for being an “insider” are somewhat more ambiguous ^[vi] having grown up the child of an Air Force pilot and having lived five years in Utah and four in a historically Mormon part of Arizona.

Nevertheless, Mormon pioneer history is my “identity history”—the history of the people with whom I identify (even if they are my “spiritual” rather than biological ancestors) and to whose genealogical heritage I am linked by marriage. I am grateful to the Latter-day Saints who, with their heroic transcendence as well as with their human frailties, established Zion in the wilderness and gave it a strong base from which to reach out and touch the lives of my twentieth-century ancestors in South Dakota and California. I am what I am today because of the legacy they bequeathed me through their sacrifice. ^[vii]

Introduction

The Mormon Trek in a Comparative and Biblical Perspective

In the decade following the founding of their religion, persecution forced the Mormon people from New York to Ohio, to Missouri, and then to Illinois. After Joseph Smith's murder in the summer of 1844, Brigham Young led the Latter-day Saints on their famous hejira to the Rocky Mountains. From their 1846 expulsion from Nauvoo, Illinois to the 1869 arrival of the transcontinental railroad in Utah, Mormon pioneers drove wagons and pushed handcarts across the American West to perform the largest, and most persistently celebrated, religious migration in the history of the Western hemisphere.

Amidst a prolonged national crusade against their cultural autonomy and polygamous marriage relationships,¹ Mormons developed a cohesive cultural identity and founded over 350 cities and towns. They built a rich, communitarian society in a distinct cultural region and became significant threads in the complex cultural tapestry of the American West.² From its American base established in the nineteenth century, Mormonism has experienced explosive growth in the last ^[1] few decades of the twentieth century to become a world-wide religion of over ten million adherents that, as a significant occurrence in world religious history, has caught the attention of religious studies scholars.³

Throughout the American West, the individualistic efforts of westward-moving settlers have been an important component of popular historical consciousness.⁴ Among Mormons in general, and in the "Mormon Culture Region"⁵ in particular, commemoration of the cooperative and purposeful Mormon pioneer migration has achieved a particularly well-developed form. ^[2]

This dissertation examines how Mormons imagine their pioneer experience as a defining touchstone of their religious identity. Mormon nostalgia for their flight from persecution and hopeful arrival in a haven from oppression has

produced a complex inter-connected cultural system of commemorative activity including several heritage organizations; numerous museums, monuments and trail markers; a fine arts tradition; historical novels of both popular and literary aspiration; abundant oral folklore about ancestral endeavors; and scores of annual sermons, plays, pageants, and parades.

The flagship pioneer-reverencing event in Mormondom is the July 24th Days of '47 celebration in Salt Lake City which boasts the third largest annual parade in America.⁶ Similar Pioneer Day events claim the public space of Main Street in over 80 Western communities, and smaller celebrations occur on Church property in thousands of LDS congregations world-wide.⁷ During Pioneer Day celebrations, Mormons as well as many "Gentiles" commemorate the anniversary of Brigham Young's arrival in the Salt Lake Valley. World-wide interest in the Latter-day Saint pioneer experience was particularly high in 1997 since this year ^[3] marked the sesquicentennial of the first Mormons' arrival in the Salt Lake Valley.⁸

This study is not a history of the Mormon trek itself—several fine works already cover this topic—nor is it a chronological history of the development of pioneer expressive culture in Mormondom.⁹ Rather this study examines the cognitive origins, geographic distribution, cultural functions, and inner-tensions of the "pioneer myth"¹⁰ within world-wide Mormondom—and between Mormons and Gentiles in the Intermountain West—at the end of the twentieth century.¹¹ This study is a macro-ethnography of one aspect of a large diverse religious culture that is itself one aspect—to greater and lesser degrees—of the lives of people all over the world. ^[4]

The understanding of the nineteenth-century Mormon pioneers that Latter-day Saints and their neighbors entertain is not simply a traditional legacy of remembered historical facts, an

un-contested extension of the past into the present, or an uncomplicated projection of unifying community values into a ritual environment.¹² To meet the changing needs of a growing religion and a wide variety of evolving local communities, Mormons and Gentiles creatively refashion—occasionally with some contention and sometimes without success—the meaning and constitution of the pioneer myth and its cultural practices.¹³

The popular historical expressions commemorating the Mormon Exodus constitute an example of “invented tradition” as first identified in the influential 1983 book *The Invention of Tradition* edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.¹⁴ Pioneer cultural expressions also serve to symbolically “construct” aspects of Mormon identity and community.¹⁵ As methods of examining cultural [5] phenomena, “invented traditions” and “constructed identity” have provided many fruitful new approaches for scholars and caused major rethinking in several fields. Unfortunately, some studies have tended toward gleeful dismantlings and exposés of the “false consciousness” of identity or they have subjected to veiled ridicule popular historical understandings deemed sacred or quasi-sacred to the groups who maintain them.

While this study does not shy away from pointing out discrepancies between scholarly historical understandings and popular conceptions, this is not its main purpose. Rather, it traces the influence of popular historical thinking about pioneers through various aspects of Mormon and Western American culture to see what it can tell us about the about the people who mobilize its symbols and the general nature of popular historical consciousness development in various environments.

Trek Studies

Mormons’ usage of their pioneer past is by no means wholly unique. Launching from a basis in the dialogues about invented traditions and constructed identities, one goal of this study is to suggest a new inter-disciplinary enterprise— [6] “trek studies.” The Mormon trek and its cultural system of commemorative activities resembles other sacred and quasi-sacred migrations that have served as crucibles of identity formation and helped define the historical consciousness of peoples all over the world.

Few events serve better than a duress-induced migration to provide a central historical touchstone for a people’s identity. Through its representation in art and public historical displays, such a trek can galvanize generations if its drudgery is valorized, its most dramatic moments highlighted, and its embarrassing episodes forgotten. At least since the time Moses led the children of Israel to the Biblical promised land, disparate groups of individuals in various places at various times have come to see themselves as a distinct people through participation in, or shared remembrance of, a great trek.

One such group is South Africa’s Boers or Afrikaners from whose language and historical experience English acquired the word “trek.” Fleeing British encroachment in 1836, the Boers left their homes near the Cape and headed in covered wagons for a promised land in the Transvaal. In classic romantic nationalist style,¹⁶ today’s Afrikaners remember the struggles faced by their “voortrekker” ancestors as the ordeal that made them a people and gave them the character traits needed to build Africa’s “richest and most powerful nation.”¹⁷ [7] Like Mormons, Afrikaners celebrate their Great Trek in art, monument, song, pageant, and parade.

In China, the 6000-mile “Long March” that the People’s Army made to escape the Nationalists in 1936 is likewise regarded as the event that birthed modern China. Today, the route taken by the Long Marchers is memorialized by countless trail markers and thousands of nostalgic societies who meet regularly to commemorate—and for a few of the very old to reminisce about—significant events of the March. Stories and reenactments of the Long March still constitute an important part of the official school curriculum of “character development” for Chinese children.¹⁸

In the context of the American West, Mormon pioneer remembrance overlaps significantly with a larger tradition of pioneer nostalgia which includes the Oregon Trail and the California Gold Rush ’49ers. Other commemoration-spawning migratory events include Muslims’ flight to Medina and triumphant return to Mecca and the 1630s Puritan “Great Migration.” This latter migration has served as a popular conceptual model for American immigrant freedom and opportunity, to a greater or lesser degree, for most

subsequent American immigrant groups. New group identities emerged from, and somber popular memories endure of, tragic migrations as well, such as the Trail of Tears of eastern Native Americans or the Middle Passage that brought Africans into slavery in America.^[8]

Such events often tend to purposefully conceptualize themselves in terms of previous similar events. For example, the Biblical Exodus still celebrated throughout the Jewish Diaspora was self-consciously re-lived by the American Puritans fleeing England in the 1630s, the Boers in the 1830s, and the Mormons in the 1840s. Later, the Exodus was metaphorically reapplied by African Americans to their struggle for civil rights in the 1960s. The Mormon errand into the Utah wilderness also invoked their New England Puritan ancestors' escape to religious freedom even as it recapitulated the Biblical Exodus.¹⁹ Outside chroniclers have referred to a "Mormon hegira"²⁰ even though Mormons only occasionally refer to their own experience in reference to Islamic history.²¹

Such events have not yet been rigorously compared, nor are they fully understood as constituting a unified analytic category. While this dissertation is^[9] not a comparative study, I hope it will help open the way for such studies in the future and help develop modes for theorizing sacralized migrations.²²

Typology and Ethnogenesis

In comparing the migrations described above, it becomes apparent that, for many of them, their similarities are not random or arbitrary. Rather, they follow a particular pattern of biblical recapitulation called typology—especially those migrations instrumental in forming new group identities rather than merely an aspect of some regional or national historical consciousness. Understanding this style of reading the Bible and the sense of identity it produces is central to understanding how the 1847–69 trek came to have such a powerful grip on Latter-day Saints' historical imagination and commemorative practice.

Drawing on scholarship about typological Biblical hermeneutics and contemporary theory about the formation of ethnic groups, German scholar of American ethnic literatures Werner Sollors has provided some useful outsider insight

into the complex issues of identity formation in the context of the American experience.²³ To Sollors, this Biblical dimension is not just illuminating^[10] but central to understanding how migrations form groups and group identity in a process he calls "ethnogenesis."²⁴

In the early twentieth century, in its scholarly as well as popular conceptions, ethnicity was distinguished from other forms of identity by its focus on non-voluntary and hereditary criteria of inclusion. One was born into an inescapable ethnicity tightly bound up with notions of race whose roots ostensibly extended into the mists of the past.²⁵ In the 1960s several scholars, most notably Fredrik Barth,²⁶ began to question the notion of an uncomplicated hereditary basis for ethnicity and posited instead that ethnic identity was "emergent" within, and relative to, various geographic, national, and historical contexts. In this view ethnicity is constructed and ascribed rather than inherited and essential.

These new scholars of ethnicity pointed out several examples of the historically-contingent and relatively-recent nature of ethnicity formation. American ethnic groups formed within American historical and sociological processes that were different from those in other times and places. For example, for generations the "one drop of blood rule" made, and for the most part continues to make, "Blacks" out of American people who in a colonial American context or a contemporary Caribbean context might be considered mulatto or "brown."^[11]

Also there are no "Hispanics" in Mexico, Cuba, or Puerto Rico, but rather this identity is ascribed by American cultural debates and Census Bureau policies about the proper determination of ethnic identity for Americans with Spanish-speaking ancestors. The term Hispanic encompasses diverse groups of people who in their (or their ancestors') country of origin would understand themselves as part of several country-specific "logics of ethnicity."

For example, a Chicana immigrant from San Antonio, upon visiting her family in Monterey, re-enters a different classificatory world that historically would evaluate her as Creole (Spanish "blood" but New World born), Indiano (indigenous), or most likely Mestizo (mixed) based on the particulars of her ancestors' participation in a

history and culture that viewed native-European intermarriage in a much different light than was the case further north. These evaluations—if not manifest in local knowledge about her genealogy or, as is most often the case, expressed in her wealth and social class—would be deduced from attention to nuances of her physical appearance that might very well be lost to most white North Americans.

The literarily inclined members of immigrant groups literally inscribe their identity through political affirmation in “ethnic literatures” that define and reinforce the symbolic nature of identity.²⁷ For example, African Americans from Frederick Douglas, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, Richard Wright, Martin Luther King, Malcomb X, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Cornell West have all drawn from and added their own twists to the collective African ^[12] American experience. Each American identity-group has its own cadre of identity shapers and commentators not just in *bell lettres* but in art, folklore, politics, popular culture, and theology.

In the mid-1970s, sociologist Talcott Parsons began to suggest that ethnicity is not only recent, emergent, and socially constructed rather than innate and essential, but also that it has a strong “optional and voluntary component.”²⁸ Through assent and mobilization of recognized social symbols, one’s ethnicity is achieved and maintained. To be ethnic, then, is to participate in an at least somewhat shared historical memory, to recognize a set of aesthetic and moral stances, and to be able to decipher and resonate with a complex, interwoven set of group-associated, but not necessarily group-unique, cultural symbols.

This shift in thinking about ethnic identity allows for a greater recognition that all types of identity—religious, regional, ethnic, and even racial—are fashioned from conceptually similar historical and cultural causes.²⁹ In other words, various types of identity can be seen as different manifestations of an over-arching set of related processes rather than discrete qualities that are fundamentally different from each other in regards to the processes by which human beings come to be part of them.³⁰ This shift in the theorization of ethnicity ^[13] away from biological determinism to historically-contextual emergence, it is possible to see the Mormon experience as

an ethnogenesis. While debates continue in Mormon Studies over the appropriateness of calling Mormons “ethnic,” a shared sense of historical experience and common set of religious and cultural rituals and rites of passage have earned Mormons an entry in the *Harvard Encyclopedia of Ethnic Groups*.³¹

The new scholars of ethnicity enabled a fuller understanding of the nature and processes of *what* happens in “ethnicization.” Sollors’ contribution has been to show *how* this has happened in many cases in the American experience. As a combined tool for understanding American ethnogenesis, Sollors links the new theorization about identity with an understanding of the popular “typological” style of Biblical interpretation.

According to Ursula Brumm, typology is “a form of prophecy that sets two successive events into a reciprocal relation of anticipation and fulfillment.”³² In this interpretive strategy, the Biblical narrative provides a “type” (or, in other words, a foreshadowing or prefigurement) which has a fulfillment or recapitulation in a later “anti-type.” In popular applications of scripture, ^[14] typological interpretations span a wide range from retrospectively reading types as ironclad predictors of specific, singular, pre-determined historically occurring anti-types which prophetically and completely fulfill the type to, on the other extreme, being merely loose metaphoric imagery that can be applied to a variety of situations which are in some way reminiscent of scriptural events.

Typology is no new style of scriptural application. Jesus, Paul, and other Christian founders employed typological interpretation in a fairly strict sense to point to Jesus’ life and the emergence of Christianity as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. For example, Moses’s raising up on poles of serpents to which the children of Israel could gaze to be healed as well as the religious practice of blood sacrifice of a perfectly-formed lamb were understood by New Testament writers as foreshadowings of the crucifixion and atoning work of Jesus. Robert M. Grant and David Tracy rightly suggest that the primary stance of New Testament figures toward the Hebrew Scriptures is one of typological interpretation.³³

Typology, when strongly present in this way, can be a major part of the process by which mundane lives become sacred history, by which amorphous groups gain a shared identity, by which old religious traditions are revitalized, and by which new religions are fashioned to emerge from older ones. As with early Christians' use of the Old Testament, Mormonism's stance toward the Jewish and early Christian scriptures is primarily typological.³⁴ [15]

Of course, typology is only one of many often over-lapping styles and methods by which readers have approached scripture. Some look to the Bible as a perfect guidebook for morals and doctrine or for the earliest record of how Godly people lived. Some look for solutions to contemporary problems such as "proof texting" a particular doctrinal position or finding the best way to combat racism. Some read for poetic or literary enjoyment and with the interpretive eye of a critic. When Biblical scholars practicing higher criticism interpret the Bible, they emphasize the need to understand the Bible in the cultural context and social conditions in which it was written. They seek to find out what the original manuscripts were, who the original authors were, and what their intent for writing and what their intended meanings might have been. As with most scientists, their methods neither claim nor provide answers as to how believers ought live their lives.

These are tendencies in interpretation and not clear cut distinctions. Indeed, many approaches often operate together in any interpretive exercise. Different streams of thought within Judaism and Christianity have focused on different styles of interpretation at different times. While professional scholars of religion may be interested in typology as a subject matter, they have little use for it as an interpretive method, but for those who live a religion, or reform, or found one, typology continues to be a prominent approach to understanding the relationship between scripture and contemporary life.

Typology as a method endures because it succeeds in fulfilling some of the most basic human needs serviced by religion: the needs for a meaningful conception of one's place in the cosmos and accessible narrative structures [16] through which to make sense of one's experiences.³⁵ Typology provides a ready-made template

for understanding one's own trials and accomplishments—a template that puts one in league with chosen peoples in the age of the Gods and thus has the potential to sacralize one's own mundane or insecure existence.

It is not surprising then that in a land of new opportunity, wrenching dislocation, and few familiar indigenous templates for immigrants to make sense of their experiences, that typology became the main American mode of Biblical interpretation. It has been commonplace for scholars to see the United States as a country emergent from, and to some degree still continuing in, a bath of Biblical metaphors of self-understanding since so many immigrant groups applied typology to their own migration to, and experience in, America.

No group did this more dramatically than the "first Americans" of our historic mythology—the Puritans.³⁶ From small details such as Cotton Mather's dubbing of John Winthrop "Nehemias Americanus" and several early ministers as "John in the Wilderness"³⁷ to the over-arching themes of "Exodus," "errand into [17] the wilderness," and "City on a Hill" Puritans conceived of themselves in Biblical terms as a chosen people, a new Israel, with a central role in world history.³⁸

Sacvan Bercovitch suggests that Puritan modes of thought, especially typology, have continued to influence American ideas much more than is commonly acknowledged.³⁹ African Americans made another significant use of typology in their emergence from slavery and civil rights struggle. The question of whether to allow the Christianization of their slaves vexed slave-owners throughout the Western hemisphere. Most relented to the requests of missionaries hoping that planters could maintain control over how Christianity was presented and interpreted. Slave-owners hoped they could use admonitions such as Paul's in Colossians 3:22 "servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh" and Jesus' seemingly uncritical use of parables involving masters and servants to add a dimension of religious fatalism to their slaves' lives that would help legitimate their subjugation.

But once they had the Bible in their hands, slaves soon discovered the Exodus story of Moses' leading the children of Israel out of bondage to the promised land. To Christianized Blacks, Moses' demand of Pharaoh in Exodus 5:1 to "let my

people go” proved ultimately more inspiring than Paul’s admonition to servants. In the Christianization of slaves, people of different languages from different parts of Africa began to acquire a shared identity under a ^[18] new religion from whose sacred history they fashioned a millennial, emancipatory hope. As one of the most thoroughly Christian groups in America, Blacks put Exodus language at the center of their struggle for emancipation and the end of segregation. From Nat Turner to Frederick Douglas to Martin Luther King, Black leaders interpreted the African American experience in terms of the Israelite Exodus. They saw their subjugation as an evil, but also saw their suffering as a sign of chosenness. They hoped their eventual freedom was a millennial inevitability.

Like the Puritans, African Americans’ typological application of scripture to their own lives figuratively reversed the Biblical order of books making an “exodus” the cause of their “genesis” as a people. This pattern of “exodus recapitulation as ethnogenesis” is the definitive typology of the American experience for the nation as a whole and wave after wave of immigrant groups.⁴⁰

Perhaps no American group since the Puritans have so thoroughly conceived of themselves in typological terms as Mormons have. Latter-day Saints even exceed the Puritans in the literalness and pervasiveness in which they regard their faith as a return to Biblical religion. Chapter One looks in detail at the ^[19] particulars of Mormons’ typological recapitulation of the Biblical narrative. It is important to realize that Latter-day Saint typological understandings work on a level much deeper than just curious historical correspondences. These understandings made Mormon history not just an anti-type of scriptural events, but they placed Latter-day Saints *in* scriptural narrative itself—or rather they extended the scriptural narrative to include the happenings of Latter-day Saint history.

Mormons were not merely ritualistically repeating Biblical history, but were according to Philip Barlow, “*living through* the stories of Israel and early Christianity—reestablishing the covenant, gathering the Lord’s elect, preaching the gospel, building up the kingdom, living in sacred time and space.”⁴¹ Mormons believed that the canonical clock of sacred history had restarted

and that they were at center-stage in the unfolding drama leading up to the Second Coming of Christ. Part of that drama was for all truths and practices from previous eras to be gathered together in the “dispensation of the fullness of times.” Just as the early Christians had done with Judaism in the emergence of their new religion from older Jewish themes, Mormons re-appropriated in order to reinvigorate and transform. Latter-day Saints did this not only with Old Testament religion like the early Christians did, but they also re-appropriated apostolic era Christianity—complete with early Christian religion’s appropriation of the religion of the Hebrew scriptures.^[20]

The events that established Mormonism are typological at their core. When Mormons speak of the “Restoration” of Christianity led by apostles, or of being “modern Israel,” they mean much more than just reverential patterned emulation. They mean divinely directed re-institution, a re-opening of the heavens to unleash new revelations. Latter-day Saints have an open scriptural canon and understand themselves to have the same chosen relationship with God, and to be operating in the same sacred history, as New and Old Testament Biblical peoples.

So while Mormons speak of Brigham Young as “the American Moses” because he, in his own words, led “the exodus of the nation of the only true Israel from these United States,”⁴² they do not mean that Brigham Young *is* Moses but that he is *like* Moses in the same way that Moses is like Jeremiah or Jeremiah is like Paul. They are men of God living in sacred history, open to revelation, and authorized to add to the canon.

In following the American pattern of the typological creation of ethnic groups, Mormons are a special case. They are the only group to gain its identity by an exodus out of, rather into, the United States.⁴³ The United States has since enveloped and permeated most of the nineteenth-century Mormon Culture Region and Mormons have made their peace with the American nation-state and political culture. But the unique circumstances of the Mormon ethnogenesis still pose the question: As America’s indigenous contribution to universal world religions, in ^[21] what ways is Mormonism the most, or perhaps the least, “American” of American religions? Chapter One explores this issue in more depth.

Werner Sollors only cursorily touches on the Book of Mormon as a touchstone of Latter-day Saint identity that typologically provides a Bible-like history for ancient America, and he misses the Mormon exodus as the “lived literature” that is the major typological exercise contributing to Mormon ethnogenesis.⁴⁴ However, his linkage of typology with identity-formation greatly illuminates the Latter-day Saint experience and the place of pioneers and Pioneer Day in that experience.

Beyond typology and ethnogenesis, Sollors identifies a long and wrenching historical shift away from “descent” to “consent” as the means by which identity and inclusion in American culture is legitimated.⁴⁵ While consent, more specifically conversion, is the most original means of “making Mormons,” descent from those who crossed the plains came to make for a special class of Mormons. In the late twentieth century world-wide growth of the Church, consent by new converts seems to be again taking center-stage in the Mormon drama.^[22] Anthropologist John L. Sorenson’s contention that Mormondom is America in miniature⁴⁶ is true at least in the sense that both cultures have struggled internally about coping with the differences between citizens produced by enculturation vs. citizens produced by acculturation. Since the Mormon people’s ancestral relationship to the 1847–69 gathering has been a problematic issue in contemporary Mormondom, these tensions have shown up in popular historical expression as we will see in later chapters.

While typology does not provide the impetus behind all celebration of pioneers in Mormon culture, it provided the germ around which a tradition emerged that is informed by a variety of pious and recreational impulses. Mormon peoplehood is maintained through ritual enactment and popular historical expression. This dissertation explores the shape and strains on Mormon identity in the contemporary world as viewed through the lens of the place of pioneers in Mormon cultural practice.

Structure of the Dissertation

Rather than adhering to a traditional linear narrative structure or a set monograph form, this study tries to follow organizational principles suggested by the nature of its subject matter. Clifford Geertz once suggested that cultures, or sys-

tems of meaningful activity, are like octopuses. They do not necessarily fit together in orderly, fully-interconnected, and well-contained ways but they sprawl in unexpected directions taking on strange shapes; each arm of the system, while^[23] somewhat connected to a nervous center, acts semi-autonomously in response to its own stimuli and its own operating code.

While an octopus has a certain vibrancy, a tree metaphor allows for multiple branching and suggests the possibility of following limbs out to the related creatures living at the extremities—the birds’ nests and Spanish moss of a cultural system. This study follows the tentacles/branches of “pioneer ideology” through various zones of the cultural expression of pioneer consciousness. Some branches are long and full of foliage others are less well developed. Acting as participants in multiple regional and national identities with their own sets of commemorative practices, and in the midst of neighbors who are not LDS, many branches of the “Tree of Pioneer Influenced Activity” brush with the branches of other cultural trees.

Section One of this study sketches the genetic blueprint for the whole of the tree and examines the constitution and living processes of the “trunk” of Mormon pioneer ideology and practice. Chapter One discusses previous scholarly interpretations of the Mormon experience as an American phenomenon, and reviews key LDS concepts that help illuminate how Mormons’ pioneer past was understood by those who participated in it, and how it continues to be understood by those who entertain a cultural memory of it as a “usable past” constituting a uniquely Mormon sacred history.⁴⁷ Chapter Two examines the various “genres” of creative activity in which this usable past is shaped and maintained.^[24]

Chapter Three looks at the selection process by which specific sets of people during certain periods came to be regarded as “pioneers” of varying degrees of authenticity. It also discusses how pioneer-commemorating practices have responded to the dual challenges of world-wide LDS Church growth through conversion and the increased sensitivity to cultural diversity within the Mormon Culture Region. It also warns of the easy and debilitating scholarly arrogance displayed by some approaches to “constructed historical memory” studies which evade serious

grappling with the subjective experiences of cultural belief systems.

Section Two examines in more detail the main limb of pioneer cultural expression—July 24th Pioneer Day celebrations—particularly those in the Mormon Culture Region of the American West. This section relies on my own lifetime of participation in Pioneer Day celebrations throughout the world; interviews with Mormon and Gentile family, friends, and acquaintances; and fieldwork done in Salt Lake City, Fairview, and Spring City, Utah during the summers of 1994 and 1995. However, the core of this section emerges from an “experiment in ethnography”—whose design, advantages, and limits are described in Chapter Four—that allowed access to almost every civic-sponsored Pioneer Day in the American West through a month-long series of telephone interviews.

Chapter Five discusses the usefulness of various “key words” used by folklorists in analyzing festivals and delineates the features of a composite “normal form” civic Pioneer Day celebration. Chapter Six identifies and discusses Pioneer Day celebrations as a form of Mormon “carnavalesque”—a style of celebration present in many societies.^[25]

Chapter Seven compares and contrasts civic Pioneer Day celebrations throughout the North American West to discover the commonalities and variations among different local manifestations of this folkloric festival and to understand the contested cultural poetics taking place within, and at the edges of, the Mormon Culture Region. Special attention is paid to the interaction between Pioneer Day and Independence Day in the United States and also to the state of Mormon celebrations in areas with unusual degrees of bi- or multi-cultural interaction.

Chapter Eight moves the study toward the extremities of the tree—away from phenomena centrally concerned with pioneering to ones uniquely related to, or influenced by, it. Chapter Eight shows the Mormon Culture Region to be the geographic legacy of the Mormons’ pioneer enterprise; its contemporary borders are marked out in part by the presence or absence of civic Pioneer Day celebrations. This chapter also examines the significance LDS temples⁴⁸ have to an emergent world-wide Mormon cultural geography. Like Pioneer Day, but even more central to

Latter-day Saint religiosity, temple worship is a ritual appropriation of sacred meaning from the past—an ongoing cultural activity that indicates a Mormon presence on the world’s complex cultural landscape.

This final chapter is not a conclusion and does not seek closure to the study. Rather it is purposefully open-ended. It is a “declaration of scholarly opportunity”—a birds’ nest in the Pioneer Tree—a different creature related to a larger system and launching pads from which other inquiries might take flight.^[26]

Notes

1. Since Mormons in Utah did not practice polyandry (having more than one husband), in proper terminology they practiced polygyny (having more than one wife) rather than polygamy (having more than one spouse). A long tradition by Mormons and Gentiles alike of referring to Mormon “plural marriage” as “polygamy” has contributed to polygamy’s popular meaning of “more than one wife.”

2. There are several one volume works that cover the basics of Mormon history and Mormons’ significance in America. The best two are widely recognized to be Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1979); and Jan Shipp, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1985).

3. See for example Jan Shipp, *Mormonism* and Rodney Stark, “Modernization and Mormon Growth: The Secularization Thesis Revisited,” in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, eds. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 13–23.

Since Islam got its start in the seventh century, perhaps only two movements besides Mormonism—Sikhism and Bahai—can lay reasonable claim to new world religion status based on their longevity, millions of adherents, world wide distribution, and doctrinal uniqueness. Of these three, the origin and development of Mormonism is the best documented and most easily accessible to Western scholars. In the last few decades, there has been increased interest in Mormon studies, but this increase does not yet do justice to the significance of what is happening.

Since Latter-day Saints unequivocally regard themselves as Christians that practice the restored religion of Jesus and his apostles, it is perhaps more accurate to categorize Mormondom as a new fourth division of Christianity along with Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. Theologian Harvey Cox suggests that Pentecostalism is also a new division of Christianity which would make them fifth and Mormonism still fourth. See Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1995). Arguably, Mormonism differs historically, doctrinally, culturally, and canonically more from the other three or four great divisions of Christianity than they differ from each other. Therefore, in comparing doctrinal content, Mormonism seems to fall somewhere between being a new world Christian tradition and a distinctively new world religion.

4. For an examination of the place of pioneers in the popular history of the Western United States as part of a general analysis of American commemorative events, see John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

5. The Mormon West, Mormon Culture Region, or “the Book of Mormon Belt” as established by nineteenth and early twentieth-century colonization includes all of Utah, most of southeastern Idaho, the western edge of Wyoming and much of eastern Nevada, and outposts in eastern Arizona, southern Alberta, northern Wyoming, northwestern New Mexico, southern Colorado, and northern Chihuahua. These areas are the legacy of Brigham Young’s colonizing efforts and are still dominated and defined by Mormon culture. Through later migration and conversion, significant Mormon minorities have appeared in many places throughout the United States but especially in Hawaii, California (which contains the most Mormons of any state besides Utah), Colorado, Texas, and the Pacific Northwest. The seminal work in defining the Mormon Culture Region is D. W. Meinig, “The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847–1964,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (June 1965): 191–220. For more recent scholarship see S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, Richard H. Jackson, eds., *Historical Atlas of Mormonism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

6. Pasadena’s Rose Bowl parade is the largest and New York City’s Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade is the second largest.

7. Chapter Eight explores in detail Pioneer Day’s relationship to the Mormon Cultural Geography.

8. “Mormons recall flight from Illinois,” Associated Press, 4 February 1996. Harold Schindler, “Modern ‘Pioneers’ Trek Mormon Trail In Re-Enactment,” Salt Lake Tribune Webpage, 5 April 1997. The sesquicentennial celebratory events of 1997 deserve their own dissertation length treatment. This dissertation focuses on celebratory activity not tied to a particular anniversary.

9. Richard E. Bennett, *We’ll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846–48* (Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, 1997). Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1981). LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion: The Story of a Unique Western Migration, 1856–1860* (Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1992). William Mulder, “The Mormon Gathering,” in *Mormonism and American Culture*, eds. Marvin S. Hill and James B. Allen (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 87–100.

10. Throughout this dissertation I use the term “myth” not in its popular meaning as a bogus story or a widely-held misconception, but in the manner common among scholars of religion. In this tradition, myths are stories defined not by their lack of credibility to outside observers or by the ostensible failure of their truth claims to withstand critical analysis, but by the sacred and ontological significance attributed to them by the cultures from which they emerge.

11. Two important essay length treatments of Mormon historical expression are Steven L. Olsen, “Community Celebrations and Mormon Ideology of Place,” *Sunstone* 5 (May–June 1980): 40–45; and Davis Bitton, “The Ritualization of Mormon History,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (winter 1975): 67–85.

12. Early work from Emile Durkheim to Victor Turner stressed the straightforward, community-unifying power of ritual. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1915). Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine, 1969).

13. The meanings ascribed to the July 24th Pioneer Day flagship holiday display regional variation and change through time similar to the development of Christmas and other holidays. See Penne Restad, *Christmas in America: A History* (New York: Oxford, 1995).

14. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Hobsbawm and Ranger’s work has influenced many scholars. A collection of work relevant to North American cultural groups can be found in Tad Tuleja, ed., *Usable Pasts: Traditions and Group Expressions in North America* (Logan: University of Utah Press, 1997).

15. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991). This is an important study of the modes by which various communications media “culturally construct” national, ethnic, and religious identities. Anderson relies on pioneering concepts of the cultural rather than innate differences between racial and ethnic groups that were laid out in Frederick Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston: Little Brown, 1969). Other important studies of memory and identity include: Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From Moore to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1993); John Bodnar, *Remaking America*; David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Alessandro Falassi, ed., *Time out of Time: Essays on the Festival* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); and Richard Bauman, ed., *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

16. William A. Wilson, “Herder, Folklore, and Romantic Nationalism,” in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres*, ed. Elliot Oring (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1978), 21–37.

17. See for example: Vernon February, *The Afrikaners of South Africa* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1991); and Allister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990).

18. Jean Fritz, *China’s Long March: 6,000 Miles of Danger* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1988).

19. In his tabernacle sermon “Persecutions, Duties, and Privileges of the Saints” given to the children who formed the procession for the 1854 July 24th celebration, Brigham Young’s councilor Daniel H. Wells drew parallels not only to the Biblical Exodus and the Puritan Great Migration but compared July 24th to July 4th saying “This day, in reality, is the Anniversary of our Birth-day as a free people.” *JD*, 2:25, July 24, 1854.

Mormons thought of Pioneer Day not only in terms of the Exodus but its antecedent Passover. In an 1884 oration, Judge Warren Dusenberry of Provo, Utah said:

We commemorate the day with feast and festivity, as a sacred Passover and escape of the oppressed from their oppressors. We annually hail its return with joy and thanksgiving, because it is the anniversary of a triumph for religious liberty, and the laying of the foundation of a great commonwealth. (*JH*, July 24, 1884, 4)

20. John D. Unruh, *The Plains Across: Emigrants, Wagon Trains and the American West* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 252.

21. The words “exodus,” “hegira,” and “trek” each emerged from different and specific historical experiences, but their core similarities are evident in their roughly equivalent metonymic meanings in contemporary English usage. It is telling of the power of historical experience to fashion life meaning that one can scarcely speak of this topic without using a term once associated with a specific event. (“Migration” is too broad and mundane in its designation.) I selected “trek” not to privilege one historical experience over another, but because it is the most common term in referring to identity-forming migrations in general and its historical referent is the least closely linked to the semantics of the word.

22. Pilgrimage is a concept similar in significance to sacred migration that already enjoys its own scholarly literature. Treks seem poised for a such a development as well. On pilgrimage see: Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan, eds., *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); N. Ross Cumrine and Alan Morinis, eds., *Pilgrimage in Latin America* (New York: Greenwood, 1991); and Jean Dalby Clift and Wallace B. Clift, *The Archetype of Pilgrimage: Outer Action with Inner Meaning* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996).

23. Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

24. Sollors borrows this term from sociologist Andrew M. Greeley. Andrew M. Greeley, *Ethnicity in the United States: A Preliminary Reconnaissance* (New York and London: John Wiley, 1974), 309.

25. Harold J. Abramson, *Ethnic Diversity in Catholic America* (New York and London: John Wiley, 1973), 175.

26. Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.

27. Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 35.

28. Talcott Parsons as cited in Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 35.

29. Even the idea of race is now thought not to be so much biologically determined as it is a part of various cultural determinations and understandings of the nature, meaning, and significance of biological inheritances and their phenotypic expressions. For a popular treatment of this idea see James Shreeve, “Terms of Estrangement,” *Discover* 15 (November 1994): 56–63.

30. This fact makes the debate about whether or not Mormons constitute an ethnicity seem somewhat anachronistic. For there to be clear cut issues over which to debate, both sides need to rely on a pre-Barthian concept of what ethnicity means. Post-Barthian ethnicity theory, whose criteria can be modified to apply to religious identity, makes it difficult to sustain an either/or question over Mormons’ ethnicity since strong religious and strong ethnic identity come about and are maintained in such similar ways. For an

argument in favor of Mormon ethnicity see Dean L. May, “Mormons,” in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Stephen Thernstrom (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980): 720–731. For an argument against Mormon ethnicity see Armand Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1994).

31. May, “Mormons,” in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, 720–731.

32. Ursula Brumm, *American Thought and Religious Typology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970). On typology see also Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., *Typology and Early American Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972).

33. Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 36. As cited in Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 66.

34. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 66–73.

35. Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl sensitively proposes that the need for meaning undergirds most religious desire and expression in Victor Emil Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York: Washington Square, 1985).

36. In the nineteenth century, many Americans even made sense of the indigenous peoples, who are understood today as the first Americans, in Biblical terms as being part of the lost tribes of Israel. Popular science and fiction of the time promoted this view. See for example: Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews* (Poultney, Vermont, 1823); Josiah Priest, *American Antiquities* (Albany, New York, 1833); Solomon Spaulding, *Manuscript Found* (1812).

37. Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 36, 43.

38. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954).

39. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975).

40. Philip Barlow calls the Exodus the “type above all types.” Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 66. Michael Walzer identifies the exodus as one of, if not the, prime metaphor for action for the past two thousand years in the Western World. Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). The Biblical typological approach to history does not explain all trek-reverencing in all cultures world-wide. Its explanatory power breaks down when trying to understand the place of the trail of Tears and Chinese long march in the traditionally mostly non-Christian cultures that maintain a memory of them. Only by the longest stretch of the imagination seeing Marx’s concern for social justice as a sublimated reflection of his Jewish roots and vestigial cultural affinity for Old Testament prophets such as Moses and Amos, can we see communist Chinese as recapitulating ancient Hebrew history. Perhaps the nuts and bolts human activity of treks themselves leave a more powerful impress on the minds of a people over generations than the interpretive template used by the groups experiencing and remembering the events.

41. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 69.

42. Brigham Young as quoted in Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 75.

43. The only possible exception to this are the descendants of repatriated slaves in Sierra Leone and Liberia who maintain an ethnic self-conception as “Americans” even after their ocean-crossing exodus out of slavery.

44. Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 47. Sollors seems to posit that Anglo-Mormons have a typological affinity with the people described in the Book of Mormon as a New World remnant of the House of Israel who experienced an Exodus to the Western Hemisphere. Nineteenth-century Mormons, and most white Mormons today, see themselves in terms of Levantine Israel and New Testament Christianity. On the other hand, Latter-day Saints whose ancestors are indigenous to the Americas and the Pacific islands do often view themselves in terms of, and as descendants of, Book of Mormon peoples.

45. R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Moore would add “dissent” to the list of “-ents” by which American identity has been legitimated. He argues that because of America’s unique history of religious diversity and unique constitution to protect it, outsider religions can, and have, laid claim to being more “authentically American” by virtue of their dissent from the mainstream rather than in spite of it. Mormondom has certainly participated in this discourse of legitimization through full utilization of America’s expansive tradition of religious freedom.

46. John L. Sorenson, *Mormon Culture: Four Decades of Essays on Mormon Society and Personality* (Salt Lake City: New Sage Books, 1997).

47. Ray B. West, *Writing in the Rocky Mountains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1947), 74. West suggests that the past serves as a resource for creative endeavor in the present. Groups, such as Mormons, who are knit together by a especially distinctive and heroic shared historical memory enjoy pasts that are particularly “usable.”

48. Unlike chapels which are similar to the meeting houses of many other denominations and are open to visitors, temples are only open to Latter-day Saints who meet certain standards of worthiness. Temples are the site of many of the practices that theologically distinguish Latter-day Saints from other Christians including vicarious ordinance work for the dead.