

## PAST AS PROLOGUE

### Latter-day Screens and History

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This book considers gender and sexuality as examined through a range of screens, each containing a compelling combination of images, narratives, sounds, and discourses that I call mediated Mormonism. Though each of the texts I examine are bounded—in some cases by covers, in others by opening and closing credits—their meanings far exceed the boundaries of before, middle, and end that we have been taught constitute the basic elements of a story. Indeed, this is the very meaning of latter-day screens. It is not a single image or the sound of one bell ringing alone that I try to capture in this book but a palimpsest of images and a cacophony of noises, many bells clanging at once in synchronicity if not unison. While the intermedial discourse about Mormonism is complex, it is also remarkably coherent. Mediated Mormonism reinforces over and over again a story about preparing not for the end of times, the latter days, but for living in modernity itself, in all of its complexity, temporal dislocation, speed, and mediation. Remarkably, doing so requires engaging with and actively contesting conventional meanings of gender and sexuality in all of their complexity and nuance.

My interest in this topic is both personal and intellectual. I grew up as a non-Mormon in a highly Mormon city: Mesa, Arizona. As I detail in the memoir that serves as this book's epilogue, Mormonism taught me everything I ever needed to know about the silent workings of power, desire, and consent that we call hegemony. I also come to this project as a scholar of both gender studies and media studies, interested in how culture simultaneously

serves as a conduit of social instruction and a mirror of social relations. Because of my personal relation to Mormonism, I can't hope to sustain the pretense of the scholar's objective pose; my own dry immersion in Mormonism makes me as far from an impartial witness as one could imagine. Yet I decided to bring my subtle contact and contract with Mormonism to this study because memory, like mediation and narration, functions as an important filtering agent that shapes the power and meaning of ideas. Memory is its own medium and another form of screen on which these stories are projected. It thus seemed not only important but necessary to offer to this study of gender and media my own imperfect, distorting, and unreliable memory, that of a child who came of age in the shadow of Mormonism. If I had not lived a childhood on the fringes of the Saints, who themselves believe they operate on the margins of an American mainstream, I doubt very much that I would have even realized the veins of power and hegemony, alienation and belonging, obedience and independence pumping through the body of mediated Mormonism. And what is perhaps even more striking—the kind of mediated Mormonism I discuss in this book blossomed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, long after my period of growing up in Mesa in the 1970s and '80s. Yet, when I wanted to understand my own experiences more, I didn't go to a historical archive. Instead, I watched a lot of TV and surfed a lot of websites and read a lot of books. We might say, then, just like dusting for fingerprints, mediated Mormonism serves as a clarifying technology that makes the hegemonic markings visible. Latter-day screens require we look at what is projected not just on the screen itself but in the patterns of dust particles that swirl and dance in the light.

The primary source materials I use in this book are readily available and affordable through retail outlets such as Amazon, Netflix, and Hulu. Print materials span the publishing gamut, covering all literary classifications (novel, short story, memoir, biography, poetry, nonfiction) and all segments of the publishing industry, from vanity presses to major publishing houses. These materials are augmented by an increased awareness of Mormonism in journalism and academia, all of which have fueled the surge of interest in, and concern about, Mormonism. Although I did my research in the United States, and most of the materials I consider are produced in English-speaking countries, mediated Mormonism—much like the Mormon missionary—exists in an international polyglossic network, aided and augmented by worldwide media distribution and consumption at both professional and amateur levels. A complex multi-platformed media culture is thus critical to the dissemination of Mormonism as a meme, rich with infor-

mation about social values in the present moment. It is precisely because so much of Mormonism earns its saliency and visibility through both conventional and new media forms that its study has something important to say about the circulation, intelligibility, and appeal of ideas and ideology.

In doing this analysis, I am not so much interested in actual Mormon people or history so much as the fusion of stories and images that blend together to represent these things, what I call in the book Mormonism as meme. I am also interested in how the governing logics of Mormonism as a meme, in turn, provide a mediated pedagogy about power and identity, specifically with relation to gender and sexuality. I call this Mormonism as an analytic. Consequently, this book is not a sociological analysis nor a historical treatment nor a religious discussion nor an ethnography. In fact, during the writing of this book, I had the opportunity to interview a number of notable F/LDS folk, including Kody Brown, Steve Young, Donny Osmond, John Dehlin, Terry Tempest Williams, and Elizabeth Smart. Though fascinated by the possibility of actually talking to people, I chose not to pursue these possibilities because I wanted to engage with the cultural function of mediated Mormonism as both a meme and an analytic. Doing so requires that I engage with impressions as they exist in the public sphere. Yet I am very aware that Mormonism cannot and does not function only as a metaphor, and I want to be very clear that I do not wish to denigrate or disrespect any aspect of the religion or its peoples but, instead, to chart the movement of an idea as it moves across the mediascape.

### A History of Sorts

References to Mormon history and beliefs constantly bubble to the surface of contemporary mediation, and so it is important to have some sense of the backdrop for these allusions. As just one example, HBO's *Big Love* frequently cites Mormon history and religious beliefs—in ways both veiled and unveiled—from the schism between mainstream and fundamentalist Latter-day Saints to sacred endowment ceremonies to the wearing of garments to the forging of documents. The television show might still make sense if a viewer does not recognize the ghostly apparition of Emma Smith (church founder Joseph Smith's first and only legal wife, who was adamantly opposed to polygamy), but it certainly helps to know who she is. In this spirit of better understanding contemporary mediated Mormonism, then, I offer an overarching and very brief history.

By most accounts, the church was founded by twenty-five-year-old Joseph Smith Jr. in 1830 in Palmyra, New York. Smith originally called his creation

the Church of Christ and then changed it eight years later to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to emphasize how fully his Saints lay in wait for the end of days. “Mormon” is a colloquial nickname for Latter-day Saints (LDS) folk. The early nineteenth century was a period of great religious revivalism, particularly in the American northeast, when evangelism held sway as a precursor to the perceived end of times. The United States was awash with swashbuckling Methodists and Baptists preaching a fire-and-brimstone theology, and Smith’s new church offered a combination of spiritualism and rationality that appealed to a great many would-be saints eager to pledge fealty to a faith that promised salvation both here and throughout all eternity.

Smith founded his church after nearly a decade of religious questioning that began for him as a teenager. Biographical accounts are consistent in suggesting that while praying in the woods, Smith claimed a visitation from an angel—named Moroni—probably in 1821 when he was sixteen years old. At that time, Moroni considered the teenaged Joseph too immature for the weight of the heavenly message yet to be bestowed. So the Angel Moroni commanded Joseph to return again to the forest a few years later (some accounts say four years; others are more vague). In 1827, Moroni came again and revealed to the young Joseph the location of golden plates on which were inscribed what was later to become the Book of Mormon. These tablets, buried in the hills of western New York, were thought to be engraved in an ancient script (reformed Egyptian), and Joseph used seer stones, called in the biblical tradition the Urim and Thummim, set into a pair of his mother’s old wire spectacles, to read/interpret/create this new religious tract. Making matters of authenticity murkier, Joseph peered through his homemade spectacles into the deep dark spaces of his stovepipe hat, since the darkness apparently helped the clarity of his vision but also kept other people from seeing what he saw. In the process of translation, only a very select few (all sworn followers of Smith) were able to view the plates. Upon completion of the book, Joseph returned the tablets to Moroni, thus removing the primary evidence on which the religion was founded and making Joseph Smith’s Book of Mormon the only version of God’s truth available for followers and scholars.

There has been a great deal of controversy about the veracity of Smith’s vision and accounts of what really happened. Explanations cover many options from the possibility that Joseph truly was an earthly scribe for an angelic message to the prospect that Joseph was a delusional and deceptive genius, capable of manipulating people through the force of his imagination,

charisma, and colossal ego. My point in venturing into this much-told tale is not to lay out a truth claim of my own or to demean the origination story of the Mormon religion but to try to account for, at some level, the appeal of this new faith in the historical moment in which it was birthed as well as in the almost two centuries it has flourished.

Mormonism, like all religions, requires an extraordinary leap of faith in its followers. In this case, the fact that Joseph Smith quite literally pulled his revelation out of a hat has helped to build Mormonism in the American imagination as an odd religion and Mormons as a peculiar people, easily mocked by similar scenes of visitation, stone-enhanced visions, and testimony in HBO's *Big Love* and the Comedy Channel's *South Park*. It's worth repeating that this moment in nineteenth-century American history was notable not only for the evangelism sweeping through towns and cities but for the fusion of spiritualism and science that manifested in séances, dowsing and divining rods, and displays of clairvoyant behaviors, all predicated on the appeal of a rational holiness galvanized and made concrete by a charismatic personality.

Smith was a magnetic leader and, as appropriate for a man who made a business of finding lost treasure, he himself became a divining rod for religious converts, attracting masses of fans and parishioners even as these "latter-day saints" were persecuted and ostracized within their communities. As a consequence of many factors, including rumors of polygamy, the suspicious disappearance of the golden plates, the Latter-day Saints' charismatic hold on new parishioners, and the Mormons' often aggressive and militarized retaliation to perceived oppression from non-Mormons, LDS people were not much liked in the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, Illinois, Missouri, and the entire United States were separately at war, both figuratively and literally, with Joseph and his followers. Due to these many confrontations, Joseph Smith moved the Saints from his home in New York to Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831, and he moved them again to Far West, Missouri, in 1838 and then to Commerce, Illinois, in 1839. He renamed Commerce to Nauvoo, a Hebrew term he understood to mean beautiful.

Some fourteen years after his church's founding, the thirty-eight-year-old Smith was killed in a gun battle in which he purportedly did not fight back, a passive victimization reinforced by my junior high school friends and informants but contradicted by historical accounts, which place a pistol in Smith's hands. It is Smith's fabled passivism, after all, that lifted him to Christly martyrdom. What my friends never told me, and what they themselves perhaps didn't know as children, is that Joseph Smith had actively

outfitted a militia called the Armies of Israel and prepared it to fight. Smith was also the self-appointed leader of this army, and most visitors referred to him by the honorific of General Smith. Most accounts also suggest that Smith (and after him, Brigham Young) cultivated the secret vigilante force called the Danites, which governed through intimidation, force, and murder. Whatever the precise historical facts, there is no doubt that Smith was a shrewd leader and a fierce opponent, capable of galvanizing support in followers and controversy in those who did not believe in his revelations.

After Smith's murder in 1844, Brigham Young led the Saints to their American Zion, Salt Lake City. While their journey did not endure for the forty years that Jewish people wandered the desert wilderness, it did create the hard experiences of sacrifice, fortitude, and perseverance that are central to Mormon self-understanding. This peripatetic beginning based on violent social intolerance has led the LDS people to understand themselves as outsiders. It's a critical theme of aliens in America, or belonging-by-not-belonging, that runs through most discussions of Mormonism, even in a contemporary context where mainstream Mormons are arguably model minorities. Indeed, this notion of community and exile manifests across the mediated discourses about Mormons in the contemporary American imagination that I examine here.

Brigham Young governed the growing church for thirty-three years and gave it the foundation that led to its transformation from a home-grown American sect of the nineteenth century to a postmillennial world religion. Young's stamp is fully imprinted in contemporary Mormonism, from the university named in his honor to the machinelike political coordination and economic self-sufficiency that give Mormonism its worldly power and mysterious veiling. Joseph Smith and Brigham Young aren't the only influential figures behind the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, of course, but together they represent the heights of its patrilineal heritage. The Mormon Church has relentlessly been governed by white heterosexual (or at least not publicly gay) men, who claim an exclusive divine access to the Almighty and take for themselves a share of that blessing in the promise that they and other righteous Mormon men within the church can and will inherit a world of their own in a celestial heaven. The role of women and children within this cosmogony is simply to serve, happily and obediently. Mormonism is thus not only saturated with the ideological characteristics of Americanness as a political economy, it also has the gendered and sexed imprint of Americanness within its very DNA. It's not for nothing that Harold Bloom called Mormonism "The American Religion."

Two insistent questions adhere to contemporary members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Are you Christians, and Are you polygamists? The church has answered without hesitation or equivocation: yes to the question of Christianity and no to the question of polygamy. As mediated Mormonism makes evident, however, those answers may not be quite so simple, since the notion that a man might become the God of his own planet troubles the Christian notion of monotheism, and the likelihood of plural marriage in the Mormon afterlife makes polygamy more central to the bedrock tenets of the faith than is typically discussed. Indeed, for our purposes, it's important to have a clearer sense of the relation between polygamy-adherent Mormons (FLDS) and their more modern cousins, polygamy-adverse Mormons (LDS), which I detail in the next section.

### The LDS/FLDS Split

The present LDS and Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints (FLDS) grew from the same roots. Both Joseph and other early church fathers practiced plural (or celestial) marriage, though not always openly. *Doctrine and Covenants* 132 (revealed to Smith in 1842 and revered by both the LDS and FLDS) mandates plural marriage as a divine commandment from God. According to this edict, it is essential that men take at least three wives in order to be accepted into the highest level of the Mormon cosmogony, the Celestial Kingdom. Those who fail or refuse to achieve this number are relegated to the lower levels, the Telestial and Terrestrial Kingdoms, where they may only be angel-servants rather than Gods or, if women, the queens of Gods. There is no hell for believers, only this tripartite heavenly arrangement. In both LDS and FLDS contexts, hell, or outer darkness, is reserved for apostates—those who have followed the One True Church and rejected it.

When God spoke in 1890 and then again in 1904 to eradicate plural marriage, true-believing Saints split off into fundamentalist sects, themselves splintering according to various ideological conflicts or differences about which man was the true prophet. Both a specific sect and a generic label, FLDS is meant to indicate a number of fundamentalist groups that hold Joseph Smith's original version of Mormonism as the true iteration of the faith. As a result, the two faith systems share many common features and revere the same holy books and founding fathers, even while they hold each other in distrust and often open scorn. All Latter-day Saints consider themselves God's special people as reinforced by the Book of Mormon, but fundamentalists see themselves as purer and more righteous than the mainstream

church, believing a fundamentalist set of beliefs more faithfully carries forward Joseph Smith's vision. The Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints are certain of their salvation in the imminent latter days—or at least, the most worthy of them will be saved—their fallen mainstream Mormon cousins sinking into oblivion.

It is not only polygamy that defines fundamentalism, but a whole host of doctrinal differences that include the Adam/God theory and blood atonement. The first holds that Adam, the first man of the Judeo-Christian tradition, was actually God, a flesh-and-blood man much like any other human, who came to Earth from another planet.<sup>1</sup> This philosophy sets the groundwork for two beliefs that are central to both LDS and FLDS scriptures and serve as insistent themes in mediated Mormonism: exaltation, or the idea that righteous Mormon men will themselves become Gods of their own planet, and eternal progression, or the idea that families can be sealed and thus stay intact through eternity. The ideas of eternal marriages and forever families are critical to the brand of Mormonism, both mainstream and fundamentalist, and the notion of male Godhead equally blends both faiths. The Adam/God doctrine (where Adam is God), however, has fallen to the domain of the fundamentalists.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, blood atonement is a principle of salvation practiced in the nineteenth-century church that, in the twentieth-century fracturing, has accrued to fundamentalism. Blood atonement states that some crimes are so horrific that the conventional norm of Christian salvation does not apply. For those not familiar with the Christian tradition, the thinking is that God sent his son Jesus to be martyred and, in so doing, to absolve humans of their sin through his death. Mormon blood atonement takes this idea one step further, suggesting that for those sins not covered by Christly sacrifice (an idea sacrilegious to Protestant and Catholic thinking), the perpetrators of sin should be killed in a way that allows their blood to serve as a cleansing sacrificial offering. Jon Krakauer (2004) begins *Under the Banner of Heaven* with a description of a bloody scene of carnage, a woman and her baby daughter slaughtered at the hands of two fundamentalist men, who have enacted the commandment of ceremonial murder. Other mediated fare such as the feature film *Avenging Angel* (1985) or series of short stories in Shawn Vestal's *Godforsaken Idaho* (2017) show just how fully blood atonement is critical to Mormon history, both LDS and FLDS. Indeed, much of the mediated archive about fundamentalism fuses polygamy and ritual killing, the extreme beliefs of one reinforcing the radical possibilities of the other. In turn, the very real possibility of being blood atoned heightens the courage



necessary to fight the prophet and his followers, who are willing to kill and to die as demanded. There are life-and-death implications for the holy wars being fought on and through these latter-day screens.

It is important to know this background as a way of understanding the fear and apprehension that haunts the memoirs and documentaries about fundamentalism. Danger is not an idle worry in a world where, as Brent Jeffs reports in *Lost Boy*, “Once Warren [Jeffs] was placed on the wanted list and the show [*America’s Most Wanted*] aired, I was put under FBI protection. The violent history of Mormon fundamentalism combined with the nature of the charges that I’d made and the link between blood atonement and the building of a temple made them believe that I was at serious risk” (Jeffs and Szalavitz 2009, 222). Flora Jessop echoes these concerns in *Church of Lies*: “Why would Roundy [the Colorado City police chief] want to see me dead? Because I was rescuing his women and threatening his world. Besides, he was convinced I was working for Satan. Warren himself had said so, from the pulpit. I was a prime candidate for blood atonement—holy murder—an ongoing theme in Short Creek” (Jessop and Brown 2010, 256). Jessop places blood atonement at the feet of Joseph Smith, and indeed the concept originated with him. But media culture more fully attributes the violent justice of blood atonement to the dogmatic Brigham Young and, through him, to the branches on the polygamist tree that sprang forth in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

I should note at the outset that the term “Mormon” is claimed by the dominant sect of the faith, those headquartered in Salt Lake City, as exclusive to them, although in 2018 a new revelation required that Saints call themselves neither LDS nor Mormon but followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The mediascape has yet to follow this edict. Noted historian Jan Shipps calls mainstream followers “the Mountain Saints” (Metcalf and Shipps 2014). But the nickname Mormon is discursively used to address all of the many sects that make up the LDS movement, both mainstream and extremist, including its splinter organizations. The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the name of an actual group run, at present, by Warren Jeffs (from prison), but FLDS is also a more general descriptor for those organizations that practice the principle of plural marriage and hold other dogmatic beliefs predicated on the early Latter-day Saints church. In this book, I use FLDS in this more generalized way except when specifically discussing Warren Jeffs and his followers.

The mainstream church’s resistance has not changed the fact that many FLDS and independent fundamentalists of LDS extraction both self-identify

and are popularly identified by the term “Mormon.” Two examples from reality television evidence this point. *I Am Cait* features an episode when Caitlyn Jenner returns to Graceland University, the small Iowa college where she started her athletic and academic career. Caitlyn refers to the school as “very religious, very Mormon.” Graceland is run by the Community of Christ, formerly the Reformed Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (RLDS), or what Shipps calls “prairie Saints” (Metcalf and Shipps 2014). Though not mainstream LDS, popular culture referents still position RLDS as Mormon.

In another occurrence, on *Sister Wives*, Kody Brown and his family (who are members of the fundamentalist Apostolic United Brethren, or AUB) go hiking during their vacation in Alaska. In the woods, the family meets a man, Mo, labeled in the diegesis as a “native American” and “an Eskimo.” Kody gestures toward his brood, saying, “I have seventeen children; they aren’t all here.” The man looks both incredulous and impressed, asking Kody, “Are you a Mormon, or what?!” Mo’s comments suggest that even in the remote wilds of Alaska, Mormonism and its valences are recognizable. Kody demurs and chuckles a bit: “Well, no, well, ha ha, it’s funny. I have seventeen children and I do have multiple wives. They call that a fundamentalist Mormon, not a rank-and-file Mormon.” So again, we see that the term “Mormon” is used more broadly than the Salt Lake City church approves to stand for identities and ideas that have relationship to, but may not be, LDS. In similar fashion, I follow this discursive trend, letting Mormon or F/LDS stand as the large umbrella covering the amalgam of LDS and FLDS peoples, practices, and philosophies.

### Symbolic Proxies

A final point in this prologue needs to be reserved for the mainstream LDS church’s participation in baptizing the dead and the degree of both consternation and panic it creates in nonmembers, angered they have been secretly involved in a process for which they did not give consent. As I’ve noted, both the LDS and the FLDS look forward to the imminent latter days, when the wicked will perish and the world will be made new for the righteous. The LDS Church teaches that salvation is only possible to those baptized into the One True Church, and so those who did not know or who died prior to the church’s founding might be reclaimed through proxy baptisms, where a member in good standing goes through the process of baptism for another. By some accounts, the Mormon religious system also holds that the Kingdom of God cannot arrive until all living souls have been exposed to the faith,

either through active recruitment in life or baptism in death, one reason why F/LDS families have so many children. Mediated Mormonism is rife with accounts of symbolic baptisms, since any Mormon in good standing who is at least twelve and holds a temple recommend is expected to be baptized upwards of thirty to forty times per year. This is the temple work to which many good Mormons allude.

This policy has led to a somewhat frenetic baptismal practice, whereby members have performed ordinances for a series of high-profile people, including the Founding Fathers of the United States, Joan of Arc, and Adolf Hitler (see “Baptism for the Dead” 2018). They have also performed proxy baptisms for many Jewish victims of the Holocaust, both living and dead. Indeed, when Elie Wiesel discovered that, though living, the Mormons had baptized him into their faith, he became livid. “I think it’s scandalous,” he said in the pages of *USA Today*. “Not only objectionable but scandalous” (Grossman 2012). The church’s response has been twofold: (1) it has tried to calm the waters by telling folks that since the newly baptized person might refuse the offer of eternal salvation, it’s a no harm, no foul scenario, and (2) the church has restricted its genealogy websites to members, asking Saints to submit proxy baptism names only for relatives. As with the lax policing of antipolygamy doctrine in the 1890s, however, for the most part the practice of random baptizing for the dead still continues, with LDS peoples increasingly looking for more leaves on their family tree that they might baptize into Mormonism.

It is for this reason that genealogy is such a critical linchpin of Mormon domestic labor, an obligation that often falls to women, since it is their job to ferret out lost family members who can be reclaimed through proxy baptism. Increasingly, however, genealogy has become a thriving business concern that has spilled far beyond the LDS confines, with perhaps the best evidence of this claim residing in the corporate juggernaut Ancestry.com, a privately held genealogy company based in Lehi, Utah, and founded by two male BYU graduates. Containing more than seventy million family trees, it is the world’s largest for-profit genealogy company and a critical database for ancestry work.<sup>3</sup>

Ancestry.com is also a major corporate sponsor of *Finding Your Roots*, a documentary-style program on PBS, hosted by the esteemed scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr., that investigates the ancestry of “dozens of influential people from diverse backgrounds,” mostly entertainment or political celebrities (*Finding Your Roots* website). While the program proudly acknowledges that “major funding is provided by” Ancestry.com (along with Johnson &

Johnson and AT&T), it does not explicitly make connections to Mormons or Mormonism. Indeed, Ancestry.com's ties to Mormonism are an open secret—not announced and yet not exactly hidden, given the BYU, Utah, and genealogical connections. Yet it is exactly this kind of archaeological investigation that fuels the historical treasure hunt narrative of the program and, really, of history itself, where over the course of time ideology becomes practice becomes product becomes mediated idea, seemingly absent the founding ideology. In all, we see a deferred and dispersed network of symbolic proxies that become visible when looking through a latter-day lens.

Given the controversies over proxy baptisms performed on Jewish victims of the Holocaust, *Finding Your Roots* offered a supreme irony in late 2017 when it featured the stories of politician Bernie Sanders and comedian Larry David, who brilliantly portrayed Sanders in *Saturday Night Live* skits. Both Jewish, David and Sanders discovered through the program the unspeakable hardships their grandparents and parents had endured in Russia and Poland, ending the segment with a surprise announcement of a biological link between the two men. They are distant cousins—pretty, pretty good! Yet this connection between David and Sanders, mediated through the auspices of *Finding Your Roots*, also lies at the crossroads of an LDS commitment to discovering familial links and to baptizing through proxy, the symbolic meanings of Mormonism engaged in a richly contested historical conversation about meaning, choice, and identity.

While it could well be argued that mediated Mormonism functions as a recruitment and naturalization strategy deployed by the Mormon Church to spread the brand of their faith, this book approaches the meanings of mediated Mormonism as a broader cultural discourse that uses the Saints as a semiotic signifier to work out a simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from what it thinks Mormonism is and does, specifically with relation to governing codes about sexuality and gender. *Latter-day Screens* is thus quite literally a book about ideas, about what's being communicated by the kind and degree of Mormon-centric concepts in the contemporary American mediascape. It is about collectivities and large-scale cultural attention in a microcasted world of media where individuals might organize and consume media content per their own design rather than as prescribed through mass media broadcasts. These many narratives offer a lens that allows us to perceive a set of codes and practices that distinctly shape debates about what constitutes (and should constitute) normativity and fairness in the contemporary moment. With this as context, let us begin the examination of mediated Mormonism across our latter-day screens.