

Front Matter



American Sociological Review, Vol. 2, No. 5. (Oct., 1937)

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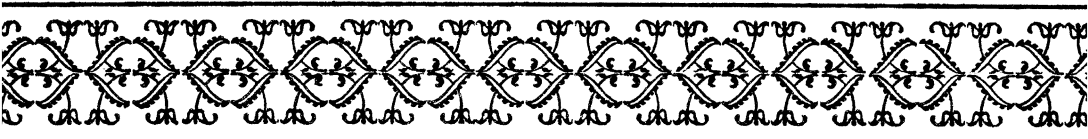
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American
SOCIOLOGICAL
Review



October
1937

Official Journal of the
American Sociological Society

Volume 2

Number 5



American SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW

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THE MORMON FAMILY

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WHEN the Mormons fled into the desert to escape their persecutors, they took with them the culture of backwoods New England. The Mormon commonwealth, a self-sufficient Zion, was a Rocky Mountain version of the Adirondack and Green Mountain frontier. Utah pioneers were industrious, home-loving, Bible-reading people, as were their New England ancestors in 1820 when Joseph Smith, Jr., was receiving his Latter-day Gospel from the angels. They were like New Englanders in many ways; also they were different.

The Mormon family was probably no more or less religious than the New England family, but it was identified with a more distinctive and controversial religion. The New England family was dedicated to the production of children, but the Mormon family made child rearing a major industry. The Mormon family, more than other pioneer families, made a fetish of education. Perhaps the most distinguishing ideal of the Mormon family was to serve as a Church-service unit, an ideal still held but with diminished zeal.

So far as the Mormon family differs from other families, its variation may be due to a number of selective and experience factors. The selective factors began with conversion to an unpopular religion. For many of the early converts, the acceptance of Mormonism meant to be cast out by family and community. The ordeal of getting to Utah was another selective agency, which is unmatched in American history. No less than fifty thousand converts walked distances of from eight hundred to a thousand miles over the plains and mountains to the Salt Lake Valley. Besides walking on short rations and without shelter against storms, men, women and children carried burdens on their backs or pulled handcarts.

As persecution figured in the selection of the Mormon converts, it also figured as an experience factor after they joined the Church. Who can say what was the impress on Mormon family ways of three generations of persecution, social isolation and living in the desert? What also were the effects of being for years called the worst people on earth, when they were convinced they were the Lord's Chosen? Polygamy was another experience which led to persecution and was influenced by it. Without polygamy the factor of social isolation might not have been so prominent.

It should be kept in mind that the typical Mormon family is not, and never was, the polygamous family. Once a romantic ideal and a tense religious issue, the polygamous family is passing into history. The monogamous family of Mormondom is also changing in character. Although different in type, the single and plural families were not different in the work

of the day, and their fortunes were very much intertwined. They were more nearly identical in 1890 when polygamy was ruled out, than either would be identifiable with the typical Mormon family of today.

Polygamy began about 1840 as a secret arrangement among certain Mormon leaders, but it was not until after their secure establishment in Utah that polygamy was publicly proclaimed. Whatever motives or interests may have figured in getting polygamy started, they were probably less statesmanlike than the purposes announced by Brigham Young when he made the doctrine public about 1852. The announcement came as a shock to the rank and file membership. They were unaware of the "celestial principle" when they were driven from Ohio to Missouri, from Missouri to Illinois, from Illinois to Iowa and thence over the plains. After all those experiences, suffering exposure, loss of property, beatings and even death, the people were in a frame of mind to accept any program for their own security. Polygamy was a plan to prosper Zion.

Information is not available about the types of persons included among the converts. How many came from the states we do not know, or how many from abroad. I have been permitted to review the United States Census sheets for three southern Utah counties for 1870. The following table is suggestive; practically all were Mormons, except a few older men.

WHITE POPULATION IN IRON, KANE AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES, UTAH TERRITORY,
U. S. CENSUS, 1870.

Age Groups	Male	Female
Under 20 years.....	2,134	2,104
20 to 44 years.....	854	956
45 years and over.....	<u>471</u>	<u>353</u>
Total.....	3,459	3,413

A fairly large part of those under twenty years were born in Utah. Scarcely any of the two older groups were born in Utah. All of those over forty-five years of age were converts. In this group, the men outnumbered the women. In the middle group, were the child-bearing women with a surplus of a hundred. In the upper age groups were a hundred or more extra men, but mostly they were older men. When the foreign-born are listed separately, we find, for the group from 20 to 44 years, 347 men and 436 women; and of the older group, 214 men and 188 women. This suggests that women in the child-bearing years were attracted to Mormonism. Here was the problem and polygamy was the answer.

As Governor of Utah and President of the Church, Brigham Young spoke with authority when he told the Mormons they would have to wax strong or be overwhelmed by their enemies. "Next time," he said, "they will drive us into the sea." The answer was easy to understand. First, it involved the missionary system for bringing in all the converts possible.

Second, it called for a rapid increase of the birthrate. Every woman was expected to do her duty. In view of the surplus of women, polygamy made it possible for all of them to bear offspring.

Contrary to all warnings, women were not afraid of Mormonism and much less of polygamy. Far from being afraid of plural marriage, they defended it. Women as well as men went to prison for the principle. The opposition on the plural family issue, and the persecution heaped on Mormons outside of Utah until about 1874, were transferred to the mountain settlements after that date, getting more fierce each year until Utah statehood in 1896, and Arizona statehood some years later.

The chief reason for persecuting the Mormons before polygamy was their claim of direct revelation from God. By a few they were hated because of their anti-slavery beliefs. Others did not like their claims of being a "chosen people," ready to take over the world and suppress other religions. Although polygamy put the issue on the front pages and made it a respectable thing to bait the Mormons, the old hatreds also continued. It became a public duty to bring the much married to justice. Three anti-polygamy laws were passed by Congress, the final of which was the Edmunds-Tucker act of 1887. Step by step through these laws and decisions of the United States Supreme Court, the polygamists and other Mormons were stripped of their civil rights. Finally, in 1887, the Government resorted to the device of confiscating or taking over all Church property in excess of \$50,000.

The struggle over polygamy carried on in Utah the persecution known by the Mormons before their westward trek, but it was a different kind of persecution. The Mormons were not so much at a disadvantage. The protection of distance was increased by the protection of their desert isolation. Notwithstanding their safety, however, life in the Mormon community or family for half a century was never free from tension. Polygamy was the issue. Around that issue gathered all the hatreds of the Gentiles for Mormons and of Mormons for Gentiles. The number of plural families was never so great as assumed. It varied with communities from one family in ten to one in fifteen.

Church sanctions made polygamy the test of social excellence. No man could hold Church office, if he was not plurally married. In the Church dances they devised a grand march for a man dancing with two ladies. In the parties, the polygamists had social preferences. Their wives were usually the social leaders. If polygamists went to prison, their neighbors came to cheer them. When they returned from prison, all the town folks went out to meet them. If the deputy marshals came to town, the children ran in all directions to warn polygamists and their wives.

Could a state of being at war for three generations with the rest of the country, which they called Babylon, have had any influence on the Mor-

mon family? What was the influence of their contact with hostile Gentiles at home? Practically all the non-Mormons in Utah were in league against them. Consider the Gentile types: soldiers in the army; judges, attorneys and marshals appointed by Washington; professional jurors, bribe takers, claim jumpers, fixers at court, professional and volunteer spies. Except a few preachers who came to save their souls and an occasional business man in the cities or the miners, most of the Gentiles in Utah lived by catching, protecting or convicting polygamists.

Territorial Utah had two governments: one, Federal, operated by outsiders appointed by the President, and the other local and controlled by the Mormon priesthood. The Federal government was the militant outpost of all that Mormons hated. The local government scarcely figured at all, except as an agent of the Church, and a buffer for the Church. The ecclesiastical organization had control of all matters concerning property, domestic relations and community problems. In the all-Mormon settlement civil authority scarcely existed.

Gentiles were boycotted in business and excluded from all social associations. Mormon children were taught to avoid strangers, to answer no questions, and to know nothing, if asked about their families or neighbors. An atmosphere of mutual distrust and suspicion prevailed between Mormons and Gentiles in Utah. The same was true out in the world where Gentile preachers warned the people to beware of the elders dressed in black suits and plug hats going about the country two by two to snare converts. "Receive them not into your homes, neither bid them godspeed."

Mormons in Utah heard the same solemn warnings respecting Gentile strangers, "Receive them not. Be wise as serpents but gentle as doves. Let them make honey in their own hives. They want to lead our children from us. They take our words and bandy them about." Year by year the Mormon family lived under this discipline of caution, quiet dignity and reserved silence. In remote places those qualities are still in evidence.

Without a profound religious family feeling, polygamy would have failed. Parents were dedicated by the Church to pious purposes and to children. The pious purposes were the hundred and one religious duties taking all their spare time and spare money. Polygamy itself was a type of sacrifice. When certain good Saints accumulated goods in excess of their neighbors they were instructed to take other wives, thus to share their wealth. Most of the surplus wealth was dispersed through tithes and offerings. Everyone contributed to the temple funds, defence funds, missionary funds and the Perpetual Emigrating Fund for bringing poor converts to Zion.

A youth in the pioneer Mormon family very soon learned that his life work was pretty much a matter of following his file leaders and living by certain formulae. In his personal habits he was expected to refrain from

intoxicants, tobacco and excesses. He would be rated good or bad, according as he contributed when called on and as he respected the leaders. In his late teens or early twenties he was expected to be prepared, if called on, to go out in the world to preach the Gospel. He paid all his own expenses on a mission, or depended on his family. Such a mission usually lasted two years, filled with experience: preaching in the streets, encounters with hostile preachers, traveling without money, and even running from the mobs. A young man expected hard experience on a mission, but he charged it to his education, as indeed it was an education which no school could match.

The girl in a Mormon family, exposed to the same influences, acquired the same stolid convictions. Long before her teens she would pair off with some boy of the neighborhood, going with him to all parties and dances or to Church. It was a normal thing for children to pair off at an early age, but with all the free relations between the young folks there was very rarely any sex irregularity. The one interest of the girl from babyhood on was, and still is, children. It is ever the subject when Mormon girls and women get together. The family pattern outlined by the Church was more seriously respected by the girls than by the boys. Should a boy be a little hesitant about going on a mission, or should he be wayward in habits, usually it was his girl who brought him to his senses.

Childhood in the Mormon family was a serious preparation for adulthood, and the life of adults was a pious service for the Church. Old age was a sober preparation for the next life. I note that I have been mixing the past and present tenses in this description. I have in mind mainly the Mormon family as it was and is in the hinterland, not the sophisticated urban version straining to shake itself free from its background.

Recreation in pioneer times was largely a family responsibility. With children in every home and a fairly uniform way of rearing children, there was much freedom in visiting from home to home. I knew a number of such homes when I came to southern Utah in 1907. Little children went to one home or another to eat; to Uncle Tom's or Aunt Minnie's, and there was no worry. They went to one home or another to sleep. Youths spent much of their leisure in the homes of their sweethearts. Being a parent was a community function, having a sense of responsibility for all children in the locality. For example, when on holidays the "big folks" had their evening dance, it was always preceded by a "children's dance" in the afternoon, with the parents as hosts.

Next to missionary service to bring the chosen to Zion, education has always been the most profound interest of the Mormon family. They recite in relation to this major interest certain slogans: "The glory of God is intelligence"; "Man is saved no faster than he gains knowledge"; "As God now is, man may become." Education is the secret of eternal progression

from the previous estate through this life and into the next. The foundation of their concept of education has been the missionary system. In all the first principles of learning the family is the teacher.

These first principles are very elemental ones. They concern the simple relationships within the family, the relationships between neighbors, and the relationships to the Church. They are stated in the simple creed of one pioneer who told his children and theirs to live poor and work hard, obey their leaders, and let God do the rest. Polygamy had much to do with this formula for family life, because it was polygamy that kept persecution alive and drove them into the remote places from Idaho to Mexico. This persecution for years turned their attention inward to self-sufficiency in family and community.

One phase of this self-sufficiency was the economic isolation that Brigham Young tried so hard to establish. It was his hope so to organize local industry and agriculture that the Mormons would not have to buy anything from the outside. If a perfect non-intercourse could be maintained, he hoped to retain thereby perfect social isolation. To this end the Mormons developed many kinds of co-operative industries, co-operative herds and flocks and, at one time, co-operative farming with community dining halls in some settlements. At the height of this isolation dream, the Church fostered and taught to the children the curious Hebrew-like "Deseret Alphabet," rather than the regular alphabet. It was believed this would further their ethnocentric purposes, made the more attractive because of persecution. Face to face with themselves, they believed Brother Brigham's claim, "We are the best people in the world."

Rearing children by the rules of the Church was a full-time job for any mother, and a good mother was expected to give all of her time to just that, having children and rearing them. The Church would forgive a bad job of rearing sooner than the failure of a mother to have all the children possible. The plight of a childless married woman was sadder than that of a spinster. So strong was the recognition of that duty that few women dared or desired to evade it.

I checked the birth records for a southern Utah city over a period of 27 years beginning in 1905, during which period I was able to get information on 119 completed families. The average number of children per family was 8.5 for the 119 mothers. I was able to secure the same information on about 150 mothers of one family. These included the granddaughters, the daughters and the four wives of a polygamist. They averaged 8 children each.

Old age in the Mormon family is a unique and distinctive condition. This observation again relates the big family ideal with the religious purposes of the Church. When the Mormon patriarchal father gets old, he and his wife usually divide their time between working in the temple and

visiting their children. The latter occupation becomes considerable of a burden, especially if there are many children and grandchildren, all with families. They scarcely have time to rest. A few years ago I talked with an old lady in southern Utah. She was getting quite feeble. She was worried because she had not been well enough to keep up with her visiting. Some of her grandchildren living in another county were angry because she had not visited them in two years. They would write to her but would not send pictures of their babies. She said, "I am behind a year in my knitting and I have so much temple work to do yet."

Temple work is very important in the Mormon family scheme. In the temples the living members of a family are united with the dead. Certain ordinances have to be performed so a man's wife or wives will be his in the next life, and so their children will be sealed to them. Marriage is a tie that outlasts this life. The family continues and grows in the next existence. Members of the family for generations past may be baptized in the temple by proxy. All the sealings and ordinations are done for the dead by the living. Old folks become so interested in temple work that they lose interest in all else. They become impatient with interruptions. The big interest is to get their family trees in shape before passing to the next life. Through temple work the living and the dead become a single family, so much so that the dead are often discussed as if they were present.

With this bond between the living and the dead, every family in the next life becomes a tribe. Every man or woman is great in direct proportion to his or her offspring. That makes the heavenly prospect sweet, but the earthly prospects increasingly difficult.

Brigham Young brought 50,000 or 60,000 converts to the valleys of the mountains. He believed the Lord would open the way for a limitless population there, but the available land was all taken up after four decades of settlement. Yet the birth rate did not decline. In 1880 the Mormons could show a thousand children under five years for each thousand women of childbearing years. Slowly the rate of birth has declined, but the Mormons still have a birth rate of 30.6 per thousand.

When the land supply was exhausted, the surplus of young Mormons went into the mines and industries or on the railroads, but the opportunities offered by industry in that region were too limited. They moved away to the cities. Those who have moved away may have grown a little cold in the faith, but in the main they keep their church ties. Branches of the Church outside the Mormon homeland are more occupied with social matters than with the old-time militant evangelism.

During the past thirty years the Mormons have made great sacrifices to educate their surplus children for whom there is no land available. This is proving to be an expensive solution to their problem because most of the younger generation on whom they spend so much are soonest to mi-

grate. They go to the big cities as white collar or professional workers. Upwards of 50,000 persons have left Utah alone, which reverses the situation that maintained in the days of Brigham Young when more than 50,000 converts were brought out to join the Mormon empire-building program.

The most critical problem facing the Mormon family, growing out of its high birth rate and overcrowded habitat, is found in the present-day exodus of the youth. It cost Brigham Young about \$200 to \$300 to bring a convert to Salt Lake City. He brought in adults. The cost of their upbringing and training had been paid for elsewhere. Today the Mormons export adults after they have been brought up and educated. It costs a Mormon family no less than \$10,000 to rear and train a boy for export. In this process they are depleting their land, overgrazing their range and sinking hopelessly into debt.

Of the present status of the Mormon family this much can be said. It is changing least in the removed villages. It is changing faster in the cities of the Mormon region, but in remote cities it is changing still faster. If there is a drifting away from the old orthodoxy, it is more evident in the decline of spiritual interest. This is less due to outside pressure than to the urge of this generation of Mormons to be one with the world. They are doing well at it, so much so that a Mormon can admit his religion today without facing scorn. As they become more like the world, they also lose to that extent their pioneer distinctiveness.