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**QUEST FOR
POLITICAL LEGITIMACY;
UTAH 1896-1933**

**SENIOR HONOR THESIS
by Kirk V. Shepherd**

INTRODUCTION

FROM 1896 until the early 1930's, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS or Mormon), executed what was in my opinion a quest to regain and establish it's own political legitimacy as an institution. Since early in the Church's comparatively brief history, the very mention of their religion in the majority of modern societies carries negative connotations. I hypothesize that the quest to eliminate or at least "back seat" this stereo type was the primary motivating factor behind many of the decisions made by leaders of the Church during that time period. I will focus on the national level rather than local or regional (but these could be aptly argued individually), and it is in this arena that many decisions were made which affect church policy and official position to this day.

It is true that Mormons have gone from viewing the United States as "the mother of all enemies" (excuse the vernacular), to seeing themselves as one of the most politically involved and loyal groups in America. Not only this, but the Mormons also teach that the founding of this country was inspired, the drafters of the constitution being recipients of divine guidance. This change is what interests me most, mainly because it didn't occur in a single day but, rather, evolved. Nor in any way was the evolution a response to changing conditions outside of the church, but rather took place from within¹.

I hypothesize that many decisions made by the LDS Church leaders were politically motivated, but not in the sense that other historians have portrayed them. Many have tried to draw the conclusion that these were the specific instances that ushered in a new era in the church and thus

¹ If there was an exterior catalyst, it is weak at best and certainly not as strong as the evidence that points to a solely internal evolution.

began the polarization from a theocratic organization to one with more political interests. This notion I refute. I believe that the church, by making these clearly political moves, tried and succeeded in removing road blocks that threatened the growth and well-being of the church and its progress, and its goals as an organization. I believe that it was the leaders' intentions all along that once the dust settled from their road-block demolition, they would resume building the Kingdom of God where they had left off.

I approach this thesis hypothetically because of the difficulty of obtaining primary sources to support my conclusions, and although I use peripheral sources in my documentation I welcome critique. I feel confident in this invitation because a responsible would-be critic needs these same, virtually inaccessible sources, (namely First Presidency Minutes, found in LDS Church archives) to prove any inaccuracies. Though it is possible that the conclusions drawn may be off mark, the paper will be a success if it encourages one person to prove me wrong and obtain loftier heights of more accurate historical understanding. Although I have relied heavily on the scholarship of others and their documentation on specific topics, so far as I know, the macro approach which I will be taking is original and only implied if at all intended by other authors.

I think the specific issues referred to are related in so much that at the time the individual decisions were made, leaders of the church recognized each conscientious move as a piece in the puzzle entitled "Quest For Political Legitimacy."

STATEHOOD! 1896

ALL Utahns must have been pleased with their admittance into the Union. The long sought after goal had been accomplished, but not without price. Undoubtedly, there were expectations of increased power and autonomy as a people. Once recognition as a state had been achieved, most Mormons (including the leaders) felt that dues had been paid and full legitimacy was at hand. But as Utah soon found out, the rest of Americans had different points of view.

Still on the forefront of many people's minds were statements such as Brigham Young's "The thread is cut that has hitherto connected us (Mormons and the United States). Amen to it!"² During the Reid Smoot hearings, Senator J.C. Burrows of Michigan accurately quoted a University of Deseret (now University of Utah), professor as having said "The government of the United States is a stink in the nostrils of Jehovah."³ These as well as the problems in Missouri, New York, and Illinois had seared the hearts of Americans. The undeclared Utah war, difficulty in setting up a Utah territorial government, and the theocratic control of the Church over the populous were legitimate concerns of both saint and gentile.

But more recently, the struggle with polygamy had been long and tiring and it was highly publicized in the eastern press. With a majority of church leaders having been imprisoned under the Edmunds-Tucker Law, Utah was politically exhausted, frustrated and discouraged with a federal government that was abusing its power, denying Mormons their First Amendment rights, and "trampling the constitution under their feet."⁴ A quote by John Taylor (second president of the Church), expressed the

² G. O. Larson, The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood. 1971, p.21.

³ U.S.U. archives; speech during Smoot hearings. Vault pam 59.

⁴ R.R.Rich, Ensign to the Nations. Chapters 1-12.

sentiments of most Mormons at the time regarding federal intervention in the religious affairs of the territory.

"You cannot stop these (polygamous marriages); if you would you have not the power. We have, and prefer purity, honor, and a clear conscience, and our motto today is, as it ever has been, and I hope ever will be "the Kingdom of God or nothing!"⁵

The political climate in Washington was understandably one of animosity towards Utah and the mormons. It is my opinion that at some point before statehood, the leaders of the LDS church made a monumental rectifying decision and chose to swim with the current rather than against it. The church made a conscientious effort to shed the belligerent armour it held to for so long, improve it's image (particularly in the eastern press), and become more politically concerned and motivated. It is under these circumstances that the church "traded" polygamy for statehood (I defend my claim that this was a conscious decision on the part of church authorities, and not a position that evolved or came about via some other motivating factor.)

The Manifesto⁶ was a pivotal point in the history of Mormonism and indeed the United States, and few would dispute that this was a last-ditch effort by church authorities to keep the Church as an institution intact. The foregoing explanation has been argued in many author's well documented works. (D. Michael Quinn⁷, Thomas G. Alexander⁸, Edward Leo Lyman⁹).

⁵ Larson, "Americanization" p.64.

⁶ Official declaration issued on October 6, 1890 by W. Woodruff, then President of the Church. It stated that the Church as an institution officially denounced and separated itself from the practise and teaching of plural marriage.

⁷ "LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages". DIALOGUE, A Journal Of Mormon Thought. 18 (1):9

⁸ Mormonism In Transition, A History of the Latter-Day Saints, p.9.

⁹ Political Deliverance, The Utah Quest for Statehood. p. 135-140.

Polygamy was indeed a struggle of state's rights verses federal authority¹⁰. This, as well as the delicate balance of pro-con slave states in the mid 1800's, proved to be the two most significant mitigating factors for Utah on it's road to statehood.¹¹

Assuredly, there were many disappointed saints when the long awaited legitimacy did not accompany statehood in 1896. Many of the old problems persisted and in addition there were new, unanticipated challenges in Washington. The hopes of equal representation on a national level soon gave way to the reality of unearned trust and questioned loyalty in D.C.. The road to legitimacy was still impassable, and so Utah¹² continued in the quest.

¹⁰ Mormon Tribune (Salt Lake City), Feb. 19,1870, p.2.

¹¹ Polygamy and slavery were labeled "the twin barbarisms" by the Republican party in the mid-1800's. (Larson, "Americanization").

¹² I use the words "church", "leaders", "Mormons", and "Utah" interchangeably to mean the people of Utah, their church, and it's leaders (which for all practical purposes were synonymous in the theocratic Mormon society.).

NATIONAL REPRESENTATION

Along with the issuance of the Manifesto, an important stipulation was that only post-manifesto plural marriages were prohibited; previously contracted plural marriages were to remain intact, lawful, and binding. With amnesty granted by the federal government to all previous offenders¹³, Utah became part of the Union. Once statehood was obtained, one of the first and most important privileges given a new state is to elect it's own federal representation. This Utah did, and from its population the most likely candidates were members of the ecclesiastical leadership of the LDS church.

Two members of the LDS hierarchy, Moses Thatcher and Brigham H. Roberts, accepted nominations to the Senate and House respectively. Both men did so without consulting other authorities in the church and this resulted in the issuance of what has been known since as the Political Manifesto¹⁴. All members of the leading councils in the church signed this statement (which is still in effect) except for Moses Thathcer, and consequently was relieved of his position in the Council of the Twelve. Mr. Thatcher did however go on to enjoy an illustrious and eventful political career, unlike that of Mr. Roberts.

In the House, B.H. Roberts met stiff resistance. He himself had indeed entered into polygamous marriages prior to the Manifesto and still lived with these wives. This, among other lesser accusations by the House Hearing Committee forced him to abandon his hoped-for Congressional

¹³ Rich, *Ensign*, p. 430.

¹⁴ In brief, stated that before accepting any position which could potentially limit that ability of the individual to carry out his (her) ecclesiastical responsibilities, he (she) was to petition the proper church authorities and learn from them whether or not the two positions could be carried out simultaneously. Only after this would the candidate receive the church's stamp of approval.

career. He returned to Utah, was active in local politics, and remained loyal to the Church.

The man most interesting and helpful to my thesis is Mormon Apostle Reid Smoot. After approval from the church, he was nominated and elected to the Senate in 1900. Following the murky mire left by Mr. Roberts, the church and Utah badly needed to have their representative/Apostle seated. Consistent with his foregoers, Smoot met resistance in the Senate Hearing Committee. In an unprecedented 30 month-long hearing, both Smoot and the church were raked over the coals and once again thrust on to the front pages of the eastern press.

Parenthetically, as further support of the stormy climate in Washington in the early 1900's, I submit some information about another prominent Mormon/diplomat, J. Reuban Clark¹⁵. Clark was a prominent international attorney (1903-1926), Ambassador to Mexico (1926-1933), and later a Utah Senatorial candidate. While still in Washington, he found it "increasingly more difficult to attend church services on a regular basis."¹⁶ (Incidental, these services were held at the Smoot residence on a bi-weekly basis.) J.R.C., politically minded as he was, probably felt as though it was either his church or his future professional career. I hypothesize that his inactivity was intentional rather than circumstantial, in hopes that his Mormon heritage and beliefs would not be to the detriment of his reputation in Washington. Although he was very busy and often claimed "ox in the mire"¹⁷, I believe that the primary motivating factor behind J.R.C.'s inactivity was political, which helps to draw a better picture of the hostile attitude in Washington towards Mormons at this time.

¹⁵ Clark later became First Councillor to the President of the Church.

¹⁶ Frank W. Fox, J. Reuben Clark, The Public Years, p.412.

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.432

Roberts had bowed out without the church sustaining too much damage, but Apostle Smoot on the other hand was in it for the duration. The two issues in question were Smoot's marital status and the oaths he had allegedly taken in the temple. Although his monogamy was established early in the proceedings, it continued to be used as a thorn and a prod by antagonistic Republican members of the committee. The issue at hand in this thesis is the "oath of vengeance" oath.

To the best of my knowledge, no one else has asserted that the First Presidency had invested interest in seeing that Smoot succeed in his bid for Senator. During his hearing, many church officials were subpoenaed, and some voluntarily testified. This is the first indication that the church felt strongly about his seat and that their interest went beyond justice alone.

Many members in good standing refused to testify as to the nature of the oath, and they were found to be protected under First Amendment rights. But some high ranking officials in the church virtually volunteered the information¹⁸, and considering the amount of control the First Presidency exercised over its members this must have been discussed and approved in closed meetings. I see this as a desperate attempt by a First Presidency who would go to almost any length to see this Apostle seated. Interestingly enough, Smoot declined his invitation to state the oath.

Consistent with at least three testimonies, the oath was that "You and each of you do covenant and promise that you will pray, and never cease to pray, Almighty God to avenge the blood of the prophets¹⁹, upon **this nation**²⁰, and that you will teach the same to your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generations." This was followed by "Each of you bow your heads and say 'yes'."²¹ (emphasis mine)

¹⁸ Proceedings in the case of Reid Smoot, Vol. 4, p.93

¹⁹ Understood to mean Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum.

²⁰ Understood to mean the United States of America.

²¹ Proceedings in the case of Reed Smoot, Vol. 4, p.7.

Concerning the oath, there were two issues at hand; did it conflict with the oath of office (in which the member pledged his/her uncompromised loyalty to the United States of America), and secondly, did Reed Smoot indeed take this oath. A negative finding of either would necessarily invalidate the applicability of this pivotal point. He testified that he had never taken the "Oath of Vengeance", claiming he never completed the then 7 hour-plus ceremony. Contrary to the definitive support given to Smoot's testimony by James Allen and Glen Leonard in their otherwise accurate and insightful work²², this was most probably a purged statement. I find it difficult to believe that two fine scholars such as these would overlook the fact that Smoot became an apostle in 1900, four years prior to his successful election bid. It seems to me quite unlikely that an Apostle would not have taken all oaths offered in the temple in his first four years of stewardship, but again, I cannot document this.

The recommendation from the committee was to deny Smoot his seat, but contrary to this he was seated and served six consecutive terms; longer than any other Utah senator to date. The victory was the church's, and the puzzle began to take shape.

²² Story of the Latter-Day Saints, p.441.

THE OATH AND ALCOHOL

The history of the "Oath of Vengeance" is worth noting on it's own merit, and is indeed helpful to my thesis. This same oath that plagued Reid Smoot in the Senate threatened to stifle the church's objective of portraying mormons as "ideal Americans." Although they had made considerable progress towards their objective, this oath still loomed in the background.

During the first part of the administration of President Grant²³, the oath continued to be administered to every person who went through the temple, my wife's grandmother included²⁴. As more politically aware leaders entered the hierarchy of the church, I suspect they became increasingly more fearful of the potential damage that could be done, should this topic be reborn in the press. As early as 1924, an attempt was made by Salt Lake to phase out this portion of the ceremony. On June 19th of that year a meeting was held in the St.George temple, and from those minutes we read President Snow's (President of the St.George temple) words; "..... One change mentioned (at a meeting of all temple presidents in Salt Lake) / no longer praying that the blood of the prophets be atoned for, because this prayer has been answered / no longer necessary."²⁵

Apparently, this was not enough to finalize the change, because another letter dated February 15, 1927, from G.F.Richards, President of the Salt Lake Temple, was sent to President Snow reiterating the mandate.

²³ Became President on Nov. 23, 1918 and held that position until he died on May 14, 1945.

²⁴ Ida Lou Beckstrand Dial, personal interview. She first went through the temple in spring of 1925 and was somewhat surprised at the nature of the oath. She took the oath "five or six times" before it was removed in order to, according to her, "shorten the ceremony". She recently celebrated her ninetieth birthday and still "takes her exercises" twice daily.

²⁵ Tanner, Mormonism, Magic, and Masonry, p.68.

"At the request of President Grant we have already adopted some of the changes decided upon, and it will be in order for you to do the same....Omit from the prayer in the circles all reference to avenging the blood of the prophets. Omit from the ordinance and lecture all reference to retribution."

From this time forward, there is no record of the oath being administered in the temples, and it was left to retrospective historians to hypothesize as to the implications and repercussions of its omission. Regardless of the primary motivation behind the move, the church would never need to worry about it again; it was history, and I'm sure the leaders slept easier knowing that it was gone.

More than any other distinguishing characteristic, it is the Word of Wisdom, (the mormon health code), that sets Mormons apart as a peculiar people. Joseph Smith, founder of the religion, announced his revelation in 1833. This Word of Wisdom (hereafter WW), found in the 89th section of the Doctrine and Covenants²⁶, advises against the use of alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea. Specifically given "not by way of constraint or commandment"²⁷, it was not followed strictly for nearly one hundred years after its introduction.

Once in Utah, the WW was a frequent topic for mormon sermons. In 1860, Brigham Young merely advised tobacco users and specifically chewers, to use it with discretion and modesty, and went out of his way to state, "I do not charge you with sin."²⁸ Within two or three years however his lenient stance stiffened up a bit, coinciding with his own curbed appetite for a good plug. This began the trend.

²⁶ One of the four canons of the Mormon faith, consisting of the Bible (King James version), Book of Mormon, D. and C., and the Pearl of Great Price.

²⁷ Sec. 89, verse 2.

²⁸ Journal of Discourses, VIII, p.361.

Economic independence was and still is an ideal teaching in the church. In an article by Leonard J. Arrington²⁹, he proposed the idea that economics was one reason for the WW to be observed. The climate of the Salt Lake valley was not fit for the cultivation of tobacco, vineyards, tea, or coffee. The 1500 miles from St. Louis made these "unproductive commodities" quite expensive for Utah Mormons. Unbeknownst to most LDS, one of the major reasons for the colony of St. George was not only for cotton (thus the nickname 'Utah's Dixie'), but also to produce wine. By doing so, the price of wine in Salt Lake was deflated considerably, and the mormons didn't contribute to the economy of their enemies (the U.S.).³⁰ Alcohol was not uncommon in homes of the Great Basin in the late 1800's and early 1900's.

Heber J. Grant always resisted the lax interpretation of the WW. At every chance, he was insistent and vigorous as he stressed the divinity of the revelation and held fast to this conservative position. With his stewardship as President beginning in 1919, so began an evolution of the interpretation of the WW that is officially observed to this day. In support of my thesis, there was also a conservative Protestant movement in America in support of prohibition. I hypothesize that in an effort to align the church with other "red blooded Americans", Heber J. Grant and the church jumped on the bandwagon. Coinciding with prohibition in 1919, so came a concerted effort in the church to mainstream the stricter interpretation. These are the first reports that adherence to the WW be requisite for temple attendance. By the time prohibition was repealed in 1933, abstinence was engrained in the society. In effect, in an effort to identify themselves with conservative America, Utah went into prohibition with the rest of the United States and never came out.

²⁹ BYU Studies, Vol. 1 (Winter, 1959), p.37.

³⁰ It can be documented that much to the disdain of a disgruntled Heber J. Grant, the first five Presidents of the church enjoyed wine, and Brigham Young in particular, whiskey.

Conclusions

Institutionalization of the stricter interpretation of the WW was the last definitive step in the string of events that gained Utah and Mormons their political legitimacy. The vindictive hatchet, used by both the Church and the US at large, had been buried. Utah and her elected representatives began to be accepted in Washington as a helpful and respected peer rather than a problem to be dealt with. This closed the book on the spicy past of Utah/U.S. conflicts. LDS leaders had accomplished their goals, and thus completed the puzzle entitled, "Quest for Political Legitimacy; Utah 1896-1933."