

# Darryl F. Zanuck's *Brigham Young*: A Film in Context

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When Darryl F. Zanuck's *Brigham Young* was first released in 1940, President Heber J. Grant of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints praised the motion picture as a "friendmaker."<sup>1</sup> The prestigious Hollywood studio Twentieth Century-Fox had spent more money on it than most motion pictures made up to that time. Its simultaneous premiere in seven theaters in one city (still a world record) was preceded by a grand parade down Salt Lake City's Main Street. Businesses closed for the event, and the mayor proclaimed it "*Brigham Young Day*."<sup>2</sup>

Not all reactions to the film, however, have been so favorable. A prominent biographer of Brigham Young called the movie merely an "interesting romance" when a more authentic treatment of Brigham Young's life could have made it "one of the greatest epics in the history of the [motion picture] art."<sup>3</sup> In the 1970s, President Spencer W. Kimball echoed the criticism of past and present LDS church members. He had little use for the film's portrayal of Brigham Young as a "weak, vacillating prophet."<sup>4</sup> Many members of the Church today look at the film with amusement; at BYU it has been used to quiz students on historical inaccuracies. Indeed, in order to view *Brigham Young* today, one would either have to tune in to a Utah television station during the July twenty-fourth Pioneer Day commemoration or stay up for a late-night broadcast. The film is rarely shown theatrically even in Utah. To understand the rise and apparent fall in the film's appeal, we must examine it in the context of its time.

## MOVIES IN THE THIRTIES

The 1930s were a bifurcated decade. During most of the decade, America was struggling to emerge from the Great Depression under Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs; the last

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three years, impacted by international events, witnessed a gradual preparation for participation in World War II. The American motion picture industry was similarly divided, but for different reasons. Beginning in 1934, the industry finally bowed to public (and especially governmental) pressure, stemming from as far back as the 1920s, and created the Production Code, administered by the Production Code Administration, whose chief leader was Will Hays, former postmaster-general under Calvin Coolidge. Known popularly as the “Hays Office,” although actually administered during the decade by Joseph I. Breen, the Production Code Administration, in concert with the major motion picture producers, established an intricate set of requirements. Prior to release, every film was required to obtain the Production Code Seal (or clearance).<sup>5</sup>

With over 61 percent of the nation attending each week, the movies appeared to be virtually Depression-proof. Schlesinger observes that in the thirties, “Hollywood possessed the nation. It formed our images and shaped our dreams. . . . The movies were near the operative center of the nation’s consciousness. They played an indispensable role in sustaining and stimulating the national imagination.”<sup>6</sup> The enormous popularity of motion pictures and radio led Warren Susman to his description of the thirties as a developing culture of “sight and sound that was of profound importance; it increased our self-awareness as a culture; it helped create a unity of response and action not previously possible; it made us more susceptible than ever to those who would mold culture and thought.”<sup>7</sup>

The all-pervasive influence of movies might have been what concerned President Heber J. Grant when he heard in early 1939 that Twentieth Century-Fox planned a grand scale movie biography of the Church’s second and perhaps most colorful leader, Brigham Young.<sup>8</sup> Up to the late 1930s, Mormons had been the object of often cruel caricature in the nation’s theaters. Beginning in 1905, the American Mutoscope-Biograph Company had produced a nickelodeon show entitled *A Trip to Salt Lake City*, depicting a henpecked polygamous husband trying to give his many children a drink of water in a jostling Pullman car. Cecil B. DeMille, later a friend of Heber J. Grant and David O. McKay, was the director-general of Famous Players-Lasky studio, which in 1917 released *A Mormon Maid*, a depiction of Danite bands intent on blood atonement and sneering Brigham-led Mormon Apostles attempting to add to their Utah harems.<sup>9</sup> *Trapped by the Mormons*, a 1922 British movie prevented from reaching American screens, capitalized on imaginative amorous exploits of

Mormon missionaries in the British Isles, portraying them as mesmeric vampires preying on England's innocent women.<sup>10</sup>

Even though in the mid-thirties the Production Code strictly prohibited any ridicule of religious denominations or their clergy and adherents,<sup>11</sup> some expressed interest in producing motion pictures based on historical aspects of Mormonism.<sup>12</sup> Such productions were never approved because a depiction of polygamy, an illegal and socially unacceptable practice, would necessarily be involved.<sup>13</sup> In efforts to stave off further governmental regulation of the industry because of its all too frequent depictions of "loose sexuality," Hollywood studios opted instead for a resurrection of literary classics such as *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935), and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938).

In the later thirties, despite lingering American isolationism, the threat of war abroad began to have its impact on the types of films produced, especially historical films. "The impact of the war may cause the spate of period works to increase," wrote one feature writer in the *New York Times*. "The past, whether disrupted or serene, is secure."<sup>14</sup> Historical movies seemed to comfort viewers in their feelings of nationalism and patriotism in a world that appeared to be crumbling. There was also a tendency during this period towards expanding beyond the traditional treatment of topics as proscribed by the Production Code. Regarding Hollywood's new approach to potential movie material, *Variety* noted:

No matter how censurable, how depressing, how likely to tread on the toes of political, industrial, or racial groups they are, books and plays are being dug out and gone over with an entirely different eye than in the past. This liberality is not self engendered in these lookers-after the nation's morals, one story editor of a major studio declared this week, but merely the reflection of a greater liberality in the mind of the public itself. It's not, in fact, as has been said, the movies are growing up, but the American public is growing up.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, historical movies of this era were generally not innovative. Formula reigned supreme.<sup>16</sup>

#### BRIGHAM YOUNG—IN THE BEGINNING

The idea for *Brigham Young* came to Darryl Zanuck, vice president in charge of production at Twentieth Century-Fox, from junior writer Eleanor Harris. Her twenty-eight page treatment entitled "Prophets of Empire," submitted to Zanuck through executive producer Kenneth Macgowan in May 1938, began with raids on Nauvoo citizens, the assassination of Joseph Smith, and the evacuation of Nauvoo. Her story concluded with the founding of

Salt Lake City and the seagulls saving the Mormons from the total ruin of their first crop. Since the script dealt with Brigham Young's plural wives, Zanuck, knowing the potential difficulties the Production Code would pose, turned down the suggestion. Harris continued to develop the story on her own time and resubmitted it, only to receive the same criticism from Zanuck—the unfeasibility of portraying polygamy:

There is no way that you can conceivably excuse to audiences of the world the idea of one man having eight or nine bed companions. . . . Brigham Young has been used as a standard vaudeville joke for years and it is going to be awfully tough to try to explain to the public that he slept with more than one woman because of religious or economic problems.<sup>17</sup>

Sometime in the few months spanning late 1938 and early March of 1939, a theater owner in Kansas with "considerable influence over exhibitors" and claiming to have ties to LDS church leaders sent Zanuck a nine-page treatment of the Mormon story. This treatment apparently convinced Zanuck that such a movie could be done successfully in spite of the fears over polygamy.<sup>18</sup> Immediately, Zanuck's mind focused on his new project. He assigned Eleanor Harris and another writer in Fox's employ, James Woolley, "not now a Mormon,"<sup>19</sup> to work up a treatment, until a "big name" writer could do the final screenplay. Two other studio writers were also temporarily assigned. Zanuck apparently liked the writers' treatment of polygamy, once thought too censurable, and further instructed Macgowan:

The polygamy angle should not be ducked. To do so would rip all semblance of authenticity from the story. It should be hit hard and deliberately. To make the story of Brigham Young and Mormonism and dismiss or timidly handle polygamy would be like making *Alexander Graham Bell* without the telephone, *Jesse James* without guns, or a Columbia picture without [director Frank] Capra. Fifty percent of the young potential audience would go to see the picture hoping to be able to nudge their companions and giggle a bit over their own knowledge of pornographic implications. To deny them this would be to cheat them, defraud them of something savory.<sup>20</sup>

Zanuck became cautious again about the story's approach to polygamy, particularly after reading a letter sent to Sidney Kent, president of Fox, by President Heber J. Grant, who had read the announcement of the film in the newspapers. President Grant indicated that he was ready and willing to offer assistance to the studio, if only to avoid another slanderous Hollywood fictionalization:

Where an historical character has been so colorful as was Brigham Young, and where so much lurid untruth has been written about such an one, it is not always easy to get at the exact truth which underlies his life—truth which such a Company as your own would wish to have at its disposal before making a film.<sup>21</sup>

The same day he wrote to Kent, President Grant also sent a letter to Will Hays, whom Grant had invited to Salt Lake City in 1918 to sell war bonds when Hays was an official of President Wilson's Liberty Loan drive. Grant confessed that he was "not at all sure as to how you are really connected to the production of pictures," but thought that Hays's

high sense of justice and fair play will see to it that the slanders and vilifications of the past are not dished out again to a public that is sometimes not very discriminating and that is too frequently receptive and even gullible in the matter of unsavory and sensational stories however baseless they may be.<sup>22</sup>

In a return letter, Hays assured President Grant that Twentieth Century-Fox had a high reputation and that Kent and Zanuck would receive his suggestions with "sympathy."<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, it was decided that Louis Bromfield, a novelist of note at that time, would write the original story on which the script would be based. Bromfield, whose Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Rains Came* (1937) became a hit Zanuck film in 1939 starring Tyrone Power, was a logical choice.<sup>24</sup>

#### VARDIS FISHER AND *CHILDREN OF GOD*

While Bromfield was on his way by train from Ohio to meet Zanuck in Hollywood, he read a stack of unsigned book manuscripts in connection with his position as one of three judges for the Harper Brothers Prize for 1938–39. One of the manuscripts was a lengthy saga of the Mormons, encompassing somewhat the same period as Zanuck's new film project. The novel, which Bromfield judged the winner and persuaded Zanuck to buy screen rights to, was *Children of God* by Mormon-born Idahoan Vardis Fisher, who was later judged by Alfred Kazin to be America's last authentic novelist of the frontier.<sup>25</sup> Acknowledged to be the "most widely read of Fisher's books,"<sup>26</sup> *Children of God*, subtitled *An American Epic*, carried the Mormon story from Joseph Smith's boyhood up to Wilford Woodruff's 1890 Manifesto and the official end of plural marriage. The book earned considerable praise on its release; Carl Van Doren wrote that it "neither exalted the Mormons as their own pious tradition did nor abused them in the tradition of their

ignorant enemies.”<sup>27</sup> It was also criticized in later years for being historically inaccurate.<sup>28</sup> *Children of God* enjoyed prodigious sales upon publication in 1939 and was abridged in two installments in *Reader's Digest* in 1940. The alleged connection between this book and the developing script for *Brigham Young* was of great concern to President Grant and his handpicked liaison with the studio, Elder John A. Widtsoe.

Elder Widtsoe, in a letter critiquing one of the seven major drafts of the screenplay, wrote to executive producer Macgowan that *Children of God* was

well written, entertaining and often brilliant, [but that its] mixture of facts and fancy, of sober knowledge and imagination, of attempts at fairness and acceptance of exploded myth, leaves with the reader a complete misunderstanding of motives, events and accomplishments. Intended to be an historical novel about Mormonism, it has become a biased and incomplete novel about polygamy.

Elder Widtsoe concluded that Fisher's portraits of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young were “caricatures” and that the “job [of writing the book] was too big for the author, especially after his series of neurotically-impelled writings.”<sup>29</sup>

Even though Elder Widtsoe kept him apprised of the script developments, President Grant expressed frequent concern in his journal and in correspondence about the potentially unfavorable influence of Fisher's book on the film's story. In August 1939, he wrote in his journal, “I thought I would buy a copy of it [*Children of God*], but Brother [Alfred E.] Bowen said he didn't think it would be worth my while to even read it, that it is simply rotten.”<sup>30</sup> Two months later, President Grant confided in a letter that “I have lived in fear that perhaps there might be something in the picture that would be unfavorable to Brigham Young, because of the man who has been writing the scenario [Louis Bromfield] has endorsed a book that I think is about as mean as the devil.”<sup>31</sup>

In late October 1939, President Grant, J. Reuben Clark, and John A. Widtsoe journeyed to Los Angeles for a reading of the script by Lamar Trott. President Grant's journal entry for 27 October records in a hopeful vein that “Brother Clark, Brother Widtsoe and I were well pleased with the Script. We think there should be slight changes made, all of which they agreed to make.”<sup>32</sup> However, just three months later *Children of God* still haunted him: “I had a miserable night's rest last night. I didn't get to sleep until after twelve o'clock and then slept only a short time. I got up and then went back to bed, but couldn't go to sleep. I felt ashamed of myself that I would allow such a thing as the book *Children of God*

to keep me awake.”<sup>33</sup> John A. Widtsoe, similarly concerned over the effect Fisher’s novel might have on the script, noted to Trott at the conclusion of a detailed three-page critique of one of the script drafts:

I wonder a little, if Mr. Bromfield who helped adjudge the Harper prize to the indecent book known as *Children of God*, was Fisher’s picture of the Mormons. Literature needs its Will Hays, also. Decent people even in this century cannot be fooled into believing that true literature blossoms from indecency. Man’s many centuries proves the contrary. This, however, is but a passing expression. . . . Should you wish to discuss any of these matters with me, I shall be glad to run down to Los Angeles; unless you come up here and beard the Mormon lions in their own den.<sup>34</sup>

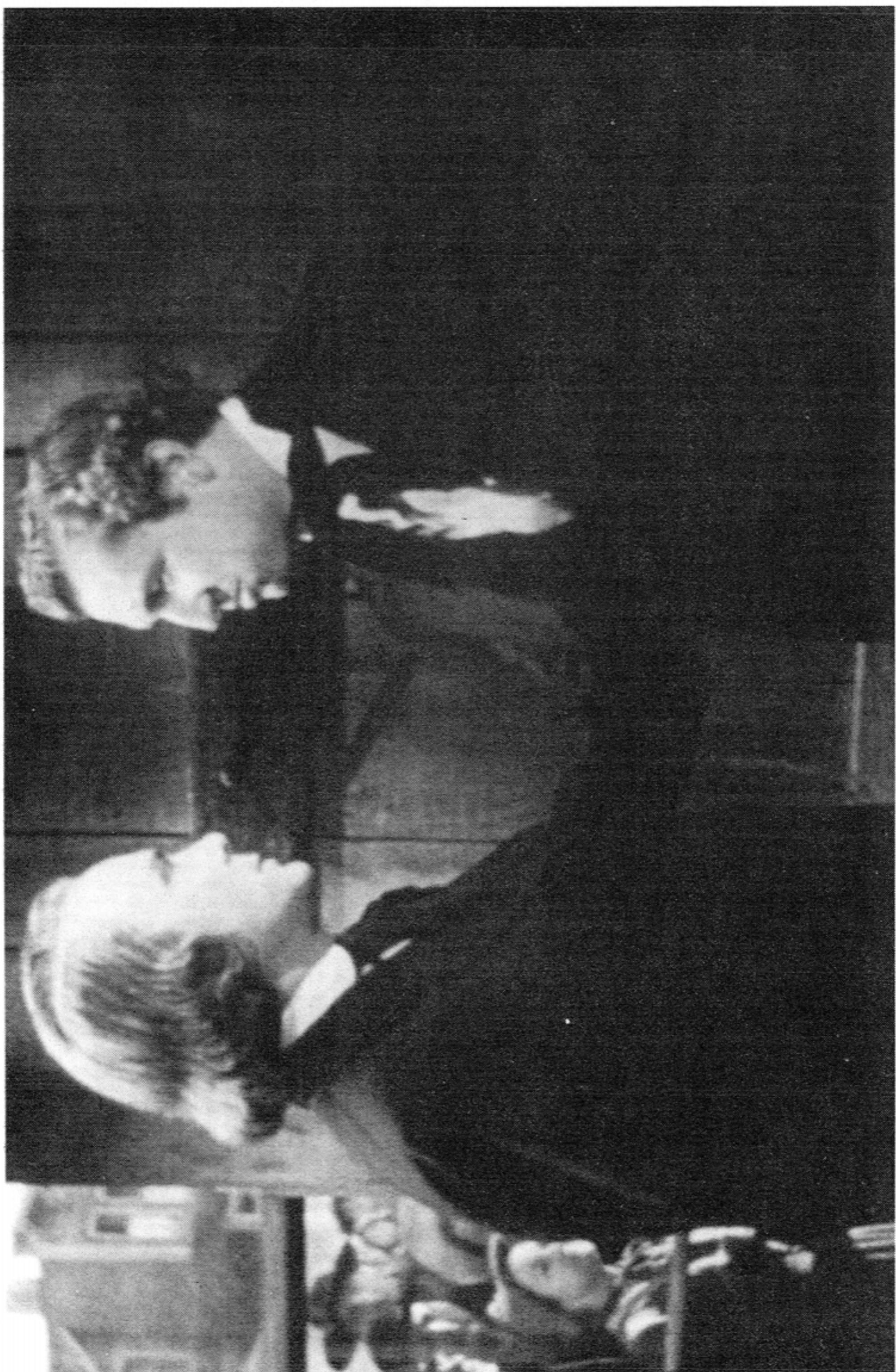
While President Grant and Elder Widtsoe repudiated the book, Weston Nordgren, writing in the Church missionary publication *Liahona: The Elders’ Journal*, suggested that “in spite of its anti-Mormon character, the book has stirred up considerable interest in Mormon doings, which will probably be useful publicity for the present picture.”<sup>35</sup> In fact, Fisher’s book had little impact on the final story or characterizations of the film.<sup>36</sup>

The studio kept in close contact with Church representatives during the production stages. Only a week after arriving in Los Angeles, Louis Bromfield journeyed to St. George, Utah, where he met John A. Widtsoe, who took the novelist on a four-day motor tour through Utah. In Salt Lake City, Bromfield was treated to a lunch with three then-living daughters of Brigham Young and an evening organ recital in the Tabernacle. The pair were joined by President Grant on the last day as they visited Emigration Canyon. Widtsoe’s diary records as the topic of discussion each day: “B. Young all the way.”<sup>37</sup>

In April 1940, after five full months of work on seven major revisions of the script, *Brigham Young* was before the cameras for more than two months of extensive shooting, mostly on location in California but also in Utah.<sup>38</sup> Veteran action director Henry Hathaway directed the film, which included a very expensive cast of Fox’s top stars: Tyrone Power as Jonathan, the young Mormon scout; Linda Darnell, a studio newcomer, as Zina, the non-Mormon “outsider”; Vincent Price, recruited from Broadway, as Joseph Smith; Dean Jagger, also from the stage, as Brigham Young, the title role that launched a successful Hollywood career; Mary Astor as Mary Ann, Brigham’s “main” wife; John Carradine as Porter Rockwell; veteran movie villain Brian Donlevy as Angus Duncan, Brigham’s continual adversary for power; and Jane Darwell, who earlier that year had played Ma Joad



Courtroom scene showing major antagonist character Angus Duncan (Brian Donlevy), Joseph Smith (Vincent Price), and Brigham Young (Dean Jagger) following Young's eloquent appeal for Smith's life.



Courtroom scene, following Smith's conviction, where Smith tells Young, "I want you to take care of my people."



Courtroom scene, close-up favoring Brigham Young as he is commissioned by Joseph Smith to take over the Church.



Flashback during Brigham Young's courtroom defense of Joseph Smith where he recounts meeting Smith for the first time. Note that both are standing eye-to-eye, visually foreshadowing Young's similar role as successor to Joseph Smith.



Brigham Young, in his cabin beneath portrait of Joseph Smith, near the end of the film, prays that he has not misled the pioneers into the Salt Lake Valley. Young equates in this scene the potential failure of Joseph Smith's vision of the Mormon's future and his own hopes for the pioneers.

in Zanuck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, as Eliza Webb, a Mormon killed by a mobber's bullet. Nine-time Academy Award winning musician Alfred Newman wrote an atmospheric score that tastefully used the Mormon hymns "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning" and "Come, Come, Ye Saints" in key scenes. The finished film, nearly two hours long and costing \$1,485,000, was among the most expensive motion picture made by Twentieth Century-Fox up to that time. The subtitle *Frontiersman* was added to attract eastern audiences who might otherwise consider the movie to be entirely religious (see advertising mat illustration).<sup>39</sup>

#### REACTIONS

The depictions of polygamy in the movie were brief, limited to the occasional appearance of four wives of Brigham Young and to Zina taunting Jonathan when he proposes marriage: "How could you get to loving one wife more than all of the others?" In another brief scene, while on their way back to Council Bluffs for the remaining settlers, Porter Rockwell and Jonathan compute how large Salt Lake City would be if every man had a certain number of wives. When Jonathan asks, "How will we get that many women?" Porter replies, "Oh, that's no problem. Women convert easy." *Time* magazine's review summed up the film's lack of emphasis on polygamy when it captioned a studio-generated photograph of Dean Jagger surrounded by twelve women in pioneer dress with "Brigham Young: only the publicity department gave him his fair share."<sup>40</sup>

Fox public relations head Jason Joy journeyed to Salt Lake City for a 13 August 1940 private screening for President Grant and his counselors. Following the screening, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported that President Grant said, "I thank Darryl F. Zanuck for a sympathetic presentation of an immortal story. I endorse it with all my heart and have no suggestions to make for any changes. This is one of the greatest days of my life. I can't say any more than 'God bless you.'"<sup>41</sup> The star-studded premiere in Salt Lake City on 23 August seemed to ratify that endorsement. Zanuck, Tyrone Power, Linda Darnell, Dean Jagger, Louis Bromfield, and other Fox dignitaries hosted the seven-theater premiere.

The national release of *Brigham Young* occurred one month later in New York City's prestigious Roxy Theatre, in Los Angeles at Grauman's Chinese Theatre, and at San Francisco's Paramount Theatre to essentially favorable, if not enthusiastic, reviews. "It is the major picture of the year," wrote the critic for the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>42</sup> Popular movie columnist Louella Parsons praised it as



An example of the studio-generated newspaper advertisements that indicate some of Twentieth Century-Fox's hopes for attracting a wide audience to *Brigham Young*.

“the best picture ever to come out of the 20th Century-Fox Studio and one of the best pictures this reviewer has ever seen.”<sup>43</sup> “*Brigham Young*,” wrote a critic in the *Los Angeles Daily News*, “is one of those rare distinguished motion pictures which makes up in two hours for every sin of mediocrity committed in Hollywood. . . . [It] is the best Twentieth Century-Fox production since *Grapes of Wrath* and a credit to the entire industry.”<sup>44</sup> Of the sixty reviews I have surveyed from daily newspapers, industry trade publications, and national magazines, not more than five could be classified as negative. *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther was the only dissenter among the highly profiled film critics, declaring, “[The] picture is much more tedious than Brigham’s life must have been.” The lack of screen time on polygamy caused him to conclude that “it’s too bad that *Brigham Young* had to be so monog—we mean monotonous.”<sup>45</sup>

The film industry trade papers were nearly unanimous in praising the film, citing it as “a stirring saga of the Mormon people that has epic sweep and is gripping screen fare”<sup>46</sup> and “one of the really worthwhile pictures of the year.”<sup>47</sup> Both *Newsweek* and *Time* carried positive reviews and *Life* chose *Brigham Young* as its “Movie of the Week.”<sup>48</sup> A half-hour radio adaptation (performed by Tyrone Power, Linda Darnell, Mary Astor, and Dean Jagger, all of whom flew to New York for the film’s east coast premiere) was aired nationwide as the season opener for the Kate Smith Show.<sup>49</sup>

The commercial success of the film is not easy to determine because of conflicting box office records and wartime conditions in Europe that restricted film distribution abroad.<sup>50</sup> Traditionally, the trade paper *Variety* tracks a given film at key theaters for the first few weeks of its initial run. During that time, trends are established and a reasonable estimate can be made of the success of a picture. On the West Coast, *Brigham Young* had an average first week’s gross but fell considerably during the second week. Seattle’s opening was deemed “very disappointing” by *Variety*, but Portland’s reception was “very strong.” San Francisco’s earnings were judged “fair,” and Denver’s receipts were “well above average.”<sup>51</sup> Chicago’s grosses were very low and Omaha’s “average.” The reception in Memphis prompted the paper to say, “Mormon leader has more wives than customers in these parts.”<sup>52</sup> On the East Coast, opening engagements earned average returns in Boston but were very low in Providence, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. New York City’s box office grosses were average, but in Baltimore *Brigham Young* received “consistent day and night trade, pointing to a most satisfying figure.”<sup>53</sup>

Subsequent published references to the box office take for *Brigham Young* have reflected the disappointing trend suggested by the first two weeks of *Variety*'s initial reports.<sup>54</sup> Yet Maynard Smith, who wrote a 1953 dissertation on the films of Lamar Trott, claimed to have had access to Twentieth Century-Fox financial records (no longer available at the studio) and reported that the total box office returns from *Brigham Young* exceeded four million dollars.<sup>55</sup> This figure would indicate that the movie was a better than average success for the studio.

While the national and regional press, including editorials in the Salt Lake City papers, were predominantly enthusiastic about *Brigham Young*, President Grant worried about the reactions of the general Church membership. Truman Young, a San Francisco attorney and a great-grandson of Brigham Young, voiced a general criticism of many in the Church:

It is a sympathetic and entertaining film, if not an epic. [However,] Brigham Young is characterized as altogether too vacillating in the screen portrait. He may have had some doubt of his ability as the perfect leader. But he felt called to aid his people, first in saving their lives and then in finding a peaceful haven for settlement.<sup>56</sup>

In the film, for example, when asked if his decision to leave Nauvoo was a revelation, Brigham's reply in the affirmative contradicts his discussion with Mary Ann minutes earlier when he complained to her that when he asked the Lord if he was to be head of the Church "The Lord didn't say anything."<sup>57</sup> In another scene when the Mormons are packing up to leave Nauvoo, Mary Ann utters a prayer complaining that "this is an awful thing he's asking us to do. And right now, in his heart he's not half as sure as he makes out to be."<sup>58</sup> In yet another scene, when Duncan's subversive efforts get the best of him, Brigham confesses to his wife, "Sometimes, I wonder if I'm being punished for saying the Lord told me to take charge."<sup>59</sup> Despite such scripted dialogue, however, the visual images throughout the film and the favorable linking of Joseph Smith to Brigham Young convey the impression that Brigham is unquestionably Joseph's successor (see frame enlargements).

At the October 1940 general conference of the Church, President Grant responded to what he felt was the prevailing criticism:

I have heard some little criticism of it, but we cannot expect the people who do not know that Brigham Young was in very deed the representative of God upon the earth, who do not know of his wonderful character, to tell the story as we would tell it. There is nothing in the picture that reflects in any way against our people. It is a very marvelous and wonderful thing, considering how people

generally have treated us and what they thought of us. Of course, there are many things that are not strictly correct, and that is announced in the picture itself. It is of course a picture and we could not hope that they would make a picture at their expense, running into a couple of million dollars, to be just as we would like it.<sup>60</sup>

#### HEBER J. GRANT AND MORMONISM IN THE THIRTIES

President Grant, of course, had agreed to the now criticized Brigham Young vacillations during the various stages of script development. That he did so is revealing about the nature of the man who led the Church for twenty-seven years and who attempted (largely successfully) to build bridges between the broader American and the Mormon cultures. Heber J. Grant succeeded to the presidency of the Church in 1918, upon the death of Joseph F. Smith. At that time, the Church was experiencing the changes that came with the new century, its culture, and more recently the difficulties in obtaining a senatorial seat for Reed Smoot. In the words of Frank W. Fox, President Grant's task was to "transform the Mormon Church from a small sect cloistered away in the Rocky Mountains to a national, and eventually international, religious movement with a universal message." This transformation would be effected by the Church's "coming to terms with the United States politically, socially, culturally (to some degree), and above all spiritually. It had to reconcile its own sense of mission with the existing sense of national purpose, to the end that it might become a working force in American life."<sup>61</sup> By the 1930s this transformation had largely been accomplished, with results that Thomas Alexander characterizes as "nothing less than miraculous. Mormons were now working together in social and community betterment causes such as prohibition, non-partisan government, the development of parks, and a multitude of other social and cultural causes."<sup>62</sup> The Church Security Plan (or Welfare Plan, as it became more popularly known) provided a great boost to the Mormon image of thrift, industry, and traditional American values. National magazines reflected this changing attitude in the late 1930s, largely to the credit of President Grant, Henry D. Moyle, Reed Smoot, J. Reuben Clark, Jr., and others whose business and civic involvements brought the Church closer to the American mainstream.<sup>63</sup> By the time *Brigham Young* was released, readers of America's newspapers and magazines were offered pages of information on the Church and its history. In addition to the *Reader's Digest* condensation of Fisher's *Children of God*, the seven million readers of the *American Weekly* were treated to a twelve-part biography of Brigham Young.<sup>64</sup>

President Grant's efforts to accommodate the needs of the filmmakers is evident in the diplomatic tone of a letter he wrote to Kenneth Macgowan in August 1939, before the first draft screenplay was completed:

I hope we shall not appear to you to be overanxious, and we have no disposition to be oversensitive, but we are tremendously concerned that this picture shall be a true picture, and while we are not, any of us, playwrights, or dramatists, or Movie technicians, we can appreciate the war which must constantly go on in one preparing a picture, between the highly dramatic and the sober fact.<sup>65</sup>

On a similar note, John A. Widtsoe wrote to Macgowan: "We [Widtsoe and Lamar Trott] have worked very carefully on the script, and hope that the suggestions on the copy may be considered favorably by you. However, we shall support you in the final decision, whatever it may be."<sup>66</sup>

Very early in the story-treatment stages, Church officials seemed very flexible in adapting history for the needs of the film, even to the extent of inserting the Hole in the Rock episode into the crossing of the plains.<sup>67</sup> President Grant also quelled potentially embarrassing moments. When George D. Pyper, the eighty-year-old Sunday School president and historical advisor on the set, intruded once too often with suggestions on historical accuracy, President Grant calmed studio executives saying, "Don't pay too much attention to that brother. We've got to have box office in this picture."<sup>68</sup>

The picture of Brigham Young as a man uncertain about his calling was evidently part of the idea of the film from the beginning. In connection with a suit lodged against Twentieth Century-Fox by Eleanor Harris (a junior writer assigned to work with Bromfield on the story), the credited writer of the film, Lamar Trott, recounted in his deposition that *Brigham Young* was

a story of a man, an individual, who started out to found a religious community, who sought the help of God to do so, and who didn't find the physical answer to his prayer *but who said that he had done so and on the strength of that led his people in to this valley where they almost starved to death and then he sought forgiveness*, and finally found his people saved by what the Mormon people believed to be a miracle in the form of the sea gulls that came and killed the crickets that were eating their food.<sup>69</sup>

Louis Bromfield, in his deposition, took credit for the "structure and basic ideas" embodied in the final screenplay as filmed, "including the basic dramatic idea on which the whole story is founded, that Brigham Young, without consciousness of revelation or divine assistance assumes control and leadership of his people

and finally appeals to God when he is defeated and his people are in danger of death by starvation.”<sup>70</sup>

Darryl F. Zanuck, in his deposition, confirmed that President Grant, for dramatic reasons, had approved the fictional characterization of Brigham Young that had disturbed so many of his Church members:

So, as a matter of fact, President Grant of the Mormon Church, when he saw the film and as to this particular line in the characterization of Brigham Young, said that while it was not true to the life of Brigham Young, however, it seemed to him it was essential to the situation which Brigham Young knew, and while it was not true he felt that it was a thing that was dramatically essential and so the Mormon Church permitted us to keep it in the picture.

The whole issue of whether the film was true or not in their minds—in the minds of the Mormon Church, was based upon one rather illuminating quality in his character. In other words, Bromfield created the approach and the basic idea of the whole film was built around the character of the man who consciously misleads his people, leading them to believe he is constantly in touch, and he knows, he knows all the time that he is not in touch with God, but at the finish when everything is lost and he faces failure he appeals once more to God and God answers his appeal, and the theme being that all the time he was actually in touch with God although he didn’t know it.

That was the big side of the whole film and that made the picture.<sup>71</sup>

The question of the film’s “truth” and the attitude of Church officials toward historical accuracy help us to understand the forces that finally formed and developed the story as presented to the public. M. R. Werner noted at the film’s release that the film either telescoped key events in Mormon history (such as the expulsion from Nauvoo) or clearly fabricated episodes (Brigham Young, at the time of the cricket infestation and arrival of the seagulls, was in Council Bluffs, not in the Salt Lake Valley, as portrayed in the film; gold was not discovered in California in 1846 as the film maintained, but two years later).<sup>72</sup> Apparently, President Grant and other Church officials working with Twentieth Century-Fox were satisfied as long as a positive image of the Church emerged through the fiction.

#### *BRIGHAM YOUNG AND WORLD AFFAIRS*

Seen in the context of the late 1930s, the image of the Mormons as a persecuted people was a timely parallel to the persecution of the Jews in Europe, particularly in Hitler’s Germany. The creative artists directly and indirectly responsible

for the storyline of *Brigham Young* were each, in one way or another, not only acutely aware of the persecutions abroad, but vocal if not active in favoring some kind of involvement by the United States in alleviating those conditions. Just prior to Fox's purchase of the screen rights to *Children of God*, Vardis Fisher wrote a lengthy letter to his literary agent encouraging her to approach Zanuck on his behalf for the job as technical advisor on the film:

I don't believe any other person is more familiar with the essential facts of Mormon history and especially with the spirit of it than I am. Above all I should wish to point out to Mr. Zanuck the remarkable opportunity not only to portray one of the most dramatic chapters in American history, but also, and more importantly, to make the portrayal implicitly an antidote to the increasing spread of Fascism and anti-Semitism in this nation. Practically everyone who has written of Mormonism has, in my opinion, missed the spirit of the movement. Above all else, that *movement was an almost century-long struggle to find a refuge for conscience and human liberties*. My novel is the only book that has made that the theme and driving force of the movement. As one actively interested in the Committee for United Action against Fascism and anti-Semitism in this country, I am deeply interested also in the opportunity to make of the Mormon motion picture a powerful, even though implicit, agent in the defense of human liberties in this nation. . . . The theology was only the *raison d'être* of that struggle.

Fisher concluded the letter by offering to be employed in an anonymous capacity, "not because primarily of the money or because I have any ambitions toward Hollywood, but because I am vitally interested in the threat to human liberties in the world today and should like to see the Mormon story produced in a way to make it an implicit voice against persecution and reaction."<sup>73</sup>

Louis Bromfield, who had a "lifelong interest in the Mormons,"<sup>74</sup> was similarly concerned with the conditions of fascism in and out of the United States. "Whether or not Bromfield has political aspirations, few Americans have been more active in the anti-Fascist cause," wrote an anonymous author for the 1944 edition of *Current Biography*. Bromfield was on the executive board of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe and a sponsor of the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born. Speaking of fascism, Bromfield said that "it cuts across all nations. We have plenty of fascist-minded people right here in the United States—the kind who think 'the Fascist-Nazis would put the poor people in their place and protect my property and investments.'"<sup>75</sup> Even Eleanor Harris, whose story "Prophets of Empire" had initially set Zanuck's mind in motion on

the eventual *Brigham Young* project, referred to world conditions in an early memo on her story: "With our eyes on today's headlines, nothing could be more topical than the story of the persecuted people who left their country because they must . . . [w]hose only guide was hope . . . and who, in the midst of desolation, built a triumphant Empire!"<sup>76</sup> (ellipses in original).

Darryl F. Zanuck was no stranger to topical stories that appealed to the public. In his first story conference for *Brigham Young*, he compared what he had in mind to two earlier films: *The Covered Wagon*, a pioneer epic made in 1923 by Paramount, and *The House of Rothschild*, one of Zanuck's first productions at Twentieth Century Pictures. Released with great success at the box-office in 1934, *The House of Rothschild* dealt with the persecutions in Europe of the famous Jewish banking family. Veteran actor George Arliss, borrowed from Warner Brothers, played the lead role of Nathan Rothschild. Screenwriter Nunnally Johnson wrote a hateful tirade against Jews for the part of the anti-Semitic rabble-rouser Ledrantz, played by Boris Karloff. Arliss, as Nathan Rothschild, in return, delivered a stinging denunciation as the high point of the film. At the time *The House of Rothschild* was in production, Hitler had come to power in Germany. In his book on Zanuck, Leonard Moseley writes:

From a purely commercial point of view, it was a controversial movie to be making at this time. But if Joe Schenck and the bookers at United Artists were apprehensive about this, Zanuck, on the contrary, was stimulated by the prevailing conditions, and felt that here was a page-one film if there was one, its story brought bang up to date by the happenings in Nazi Germany. . . . Zanuck believed that the controversial aspects of it would attract rather than repel movie-goers.<sup>77</sup>

Zanuck was right. *The House of Rothschild* was the biggest hit of the new company's brief existence.

In his instructions to executive producer Kenneth Macgowan in the first story conference on *Brigham Young*, Zanuck established the connection between *The House of Rothschild* and his Mormon saga with one eye on history and the other on contemporary events: "Introduce your characters and the cause to which they are pledged. They have just finished the building of their Tabernacle. Then show the start of the persecution and the pogroms, paralleling the situation in *House of Rothschild* and what is happening abroad today."<sup>78</sup>

Under the skilled pen of Fox's top scriptwriter, Lamar Trott,<sup>79</sup> *Brigham Young* was furnished with a courtroom scene similar to the dramatic scene in *The House of Rothschild*

denouncing intolerance, this time religious rather than purely racial. The courtroom scene is the highlight of the film and is followed by the assassination of Joseph Smith. In the final script, Brigham Young is introduced to the viewer in his stirring ten-minute defense of the Mormons in a scene which includes flashbacks of his first meeting with Joseph Smith. His concluding statement to the jury is a dramatic close-up with Joseph Smith visible over his shoulder:

Now, gentlemen, I'm not asking you to believe a single thing Joseph Smith said. But I do ask you, let him believe it—let me believe it, if we want to. Your forefathers and mine came to this country in the first place for one great reason—to escape persecution for their beliefs, and to build a free country where everybody might worship God as he pleased. That's what brought the Puritans to Massachusetts, the Quakers to Pennsylvania, the Huguenots to South Carolina, the Catholics to Maryland. And when they'd found what they were after, they fought a war to hold onto it, and they drew up one of the noblest documents ever written—the Constitution of the United States—to govern free men. And the very first words they put on that piece of paper guarantees to every man the right to worship God as he pleases—and prohibits Congress, *or anybody else*, from ever doing anything to take away that right. You can't convict Joseph Smith just because he happens to believe something you don't believe. You can't go against everything your fathers fought and died for. And if you do, your names, not Joseph Smith's, will go down in history as traitors. They'll stink in the records and be a shameful thing on the tongues of your children!<sup>80</sup>

The popular press did not miss the implications of Brigham's speech, nor that the message of the film was a very contemporary one. "Religious liberty, with the U.S. Constitution as its backer, is made a serious and coherent theme in the film's motivation," wrote a California reviewer.<sup>81</sup> Philip K. Scheuer, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, commented that "[a]ll this happened but a century ago. Yet many of us, pausing to take stock at the close of *Brigham Young*, may well find ourselves asking, 'Can such things have been? Did we do this?'"<sup>82</sup> The *Motion Picture News*, a publication of the Women's University Club of Los Angeles, concluded in their review of *Brigham Young*, "It is difficult for us to believe that they [Mormons] were persecuted in Missouri and Illinois with the savage bigotry of present-day Nazism, but such was the case."<sup>83</sup>

The widely-received message of tolerance, and the courtroom scene that explicitly made the point, also reflected contemporary social and judicial attitudes. The trial scene, developed and written by Trott, was wholly fictional and meant to send its message in a minimum of time, which is the essence of any

dramatic presentation. Yet Trott's (and Zanuck's) Brigham Young argued a defense that would not have been appropriate in the 1840s. The federal constitutional guarantee of free exercise of religion was a legally recognized concept in the late 1930s, but not in the 1840s.

Comparing the fictionalized trial of Joseph Smith as portrayed in the film to the actual trial of Joseph's alleged assassins in 1845 adds insight to the actual legal arguments of the time. According to Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, both Mormons and Gentiles in Hancock County contended in court primarily over "higher law" and "popular sovereignty" and not the First Amendment and its religious guarantees:

The murders and trial at Carthage exposed some basic issues that divided Mormon and non-Mormon in Hancock County. In its own way, each group was committed to the written laws of state and nation, yet each paid allegiance to another law they deemed higher than these. The source of the Mormons' higher law was the revelations of God; its spokesman was their prophet. But with source and spokesman vested in the same individual, the anti-Mormons feared a potential tyranny. The anti-Mormons also appealed to a higher law, but its sources were diffuse and its spokesmen many. Their sources were the Bible, reason, and individual conscience—reliance on God but also "nature." . . . As a minority in the state, the Mormons had to respond to the will of the majority, subject only to the limited and remote guarantees of the written constitution. In their case those guarantees proved insufficient to preserve either their prerogatives as the elected majority or their rights as a participating majority.<sup>84</sup>

Federal Constitutional guarantees were "remote" in states in the 1840s because First Amendment guarantees of religious freedom were not then binding upon the states and were interpreted as a protection from the possibility that the federal government would establish a national religion. The Fourteenth Amendment, originally ratified in 1868, "extended to states the limitations imposed on the federal government by the Bill of Rights," among which were freedom of religion and of assembly.<sup>85</sup> But it was not until the mid-1930s under the New Deal that the Supreme Court began ruling in favor of protecting minority individuals and organizations (religious or otherwise) against the power of the state.

The timeliness of the message of *Brigham Young*, particularly where contemporary court decisions were concerned, was discussed in a review in the *New York Mirror*:

And, incidentally, to all those officials of various towns who have been chasing out that fantastic sect known as "Jehovah's Witnesses," this department particularly recommends Brigham Young's defense speech at Joseph Smith's trial for treason. It's the kind of Americanism that some of us are sometimes inclined to forget.<sup>86</sup>

Between the time early in 1938 when *Brigham Young* began serious story development and the eve of its premiere in Salt Lake City in late August 1940, war had been declared on Germany by France and Britain, Germany had invaded the Netherlands, and France had fallen. Bombs were falling nightly on London even as audiences in Salt Lake City, New York, and Los Angeles queued up to see Zanuck's saga about Brigham Young.

Would *Brigham Young* have been produced if world conditions had not been what they were in the late 1930s? Perhaps. The story was inherently dramatic and was certainly qualified in terms of sweep and spectacle. Yet the matter of polygamy seemed to be an insuperable obstacle, even to Zanuck, until he was convinced that another element—the theme of religious or racial tolerance—outweighed the liabilities. Zanuck's attraction to the theme of tolerance, in a world where its rarity made headlines, combined with his interventionist posture,<sup>87</sup> provided fertile social soil from which *Brigham Young* emerged to be favorably received by its viewers.

The modern message of *Brigham Young*, then, addressed current concerns and anxieties about intolerance and persecution. To President Grant and his 700,000 Latter-day Saints, tolerance and acceptance were themes that needed underscoring, particularly in the theaters that had only a few years before projected the unfavorable stereotyped images of nineteenth-century polygamy. By dedicated, continuous involvement in the drafting and production of the film and through wise compromises, President Grant and other Church leaders did much to insure the eventual success of *Brigham Young* in its positive portrayal of the Church's early history. With that objective having been accomplished, it was a relieved Heber J. Grant who declared after the preview showing of *Brigham Young* in Salt Lake City, "This is one of the greatest days of my life."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>“Film Epic Thrills Audiences,” *Deseret News*, 23 August 1940, 6.

<sup>2</sup>See James V. D’Arc, “When Hollywood & Vine Met at Temple Square,” *Mountainwest* 5 (April 1979): 31–33, 35.

<sup>3</sup>M. R. Werner, “Brigham Young Seen as Screen Material,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 September 1940, sec. 6, p. 10. Werner’s biography *Brigham Young* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925) was the only significant non-Mormon biography of the Mormon church president and was consulted by Twentieth Century-Fox writers in researching the film.

<sup>4</sup>“The motion picture *Brigham Young* pictured President Young wondering if he was called of God. The picture showed him vacillating, unsure, and questioning his calling. In the climax of the play he is shown wavering, ready to admit he had not been inspired, that he had lied to them and misled them. . . . But there was nothing vacillating or weak about Brigham Young. He knew he was God’s leader” (Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1975], 29).

<sup>5</sup>See Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), 109–82, for a lengthy discussion on attempts at motion picture censorship beginning in the early 1900s; pages 233–56 cover the establishment of the Production Code, the Catholic Church’s Legion of Decency, and various state censorship boards. Jack Vizzard, *See No Evil: Life inside A Hollywood Censor* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), is an informative personal account of a member of the Production Code board; see also Murray Schumach, *The Face on the Cutting Room Floor* (New York: William Morrow, 1964).

<sup>6</sup>Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “When the Movies Really Counted,” *Show* (April 1973): 77.

<sup>7</sup>Warren I. Susman, “The Thirties,” in *The Development of an American Culture*, ed. Stanley Cohen and Lorman Ratner (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1970), 192–93. The make-up of the movie audience that supported the Production Code and the institutionalized goals of Roosevelt’s New Deal is described in Ralph A. Brauer, “When the Lights Went Out—Hollywood, the Depression, and the Thirties,” in *Movies as Artifacts: Cultural Criticism of Popular Film*, ed. Michael Marsden, Jack Nachbar, and Sam Grogg (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1982), 25–43.

<sup>8</sup>See Richard Alan Nelson, “A History of Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals in the Anti-Mormon Film Era, 1905–1936” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975), 221–31, on President Grant’s correspondence to Senator Reed Smoot concerning *Trapped by the Mormons* as an example of his concern over public images of Mormons through motion pictures.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. Many of the findings in Nelson’s thesis were condensed with additional information on sound-era portrayals on film and television into Richard Alan Nelson, “From Antagonism to Acceptance: Mormons and the Silver Screen,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10 (Spring 1977): 58–69.

<sup>10</sup>See James V. D’Arc, “The Way We Were,” *This People* 6 (August-September 1985): 44–45; and James V. D’Arc, “The Mormon as Vampire: A Comparative Study of Winifred Graham’s *The Love Story of a Mormon*, the Film *Trapped by the Mormons*, and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” (Paper delivered at the Mormon History Association meeting, Oxford, England, 9 July 1987).

<sup>11</sup>“No film or episode may throw ridicule on any religious faith. Ministers of religion in their character as ministers of religion should not be used as comic characters or as villains. Ceremonies of any definite religion should be carefully and respectfully handled” (Production Code, as reprinted in Vizzard, *See No Evil*, 370).

<sup>12</sup>The files of the Production Code Administration reveal that in 1935 Joseph I. Breen, head of the administration, met with representatives of Universal Pictures to discuss their idea for a film about Brigham Young and the Mormon trek to Utah. The studio representative was “particularly insistent that the story he had in mind would have about it no suggestion of loose sex, lovemaking, or marriage-making.” Breen expressed no concern “except the natural difficulty which readily presents itself and which, of course has to do with the question of polygamy.” Also, the “sensitiveness of the Mormon Church communicants” to such a film must be dealt with by a studio making the picture. The studio representatives claimed to have engaged one Harvey Gage “a great-grandson of Brigham Young . . . whose mother is now the official archivist of the Mormon Church” to write the screenplay. Apparently, Universal went no further than preliminary discussions with their plans for a feature film on the Mormons (see Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., Production Code Administration File, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences Library, Beverly Hills, California). Columnist May Mann reported another apparently abandoned film project by Hollywood producer E. B. Derr that was to have begun in 1937. She also reported that Cecil B. DeMille, Paramount, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer had been interested in doing a film on the Mormons but “the present need is for concentrated action” (May Mann, “Events in Mormon Pioneering of Salt Lake Will Be Chronicled in Hollywood Production,” *Deseret News*, 26 December 1936, 3).

<sup>13</sup>“Polygamy is considered as multiple adultery under the Code, and, therefore any story dealing with this theme must have sufficient compensating moral values to permit its dramatization on the screen. It may not be treated in a favorable or glamorous light, and no details of the intimate life of a colony devoted to polygamy may be portrayed on the screen. It must be shown as illegal, wrong, and subversive of the standards of a Christian society” (Olga J. Martin, *Hollywood’s Movie Commandments: A Handbook for Motion Picture Writers and Reviewers* [New York: H. W. Wilson, 1937], 174).

<sup>14</sup>Douglas W. Churchill, "Hollywood Goes Historical," *New York Times Magazine*, 4 August 1940, 22. "Hollywood's current preoccupation with American history springs partly from a nationwide resurgence of patriotism (which in turn springs from U.S. revulsion at events in Europe), partly from realization that Americans enjoy pictures based on fact" ("Dodge City Has Dodge City Premier That Dazzles Kansas and Half the West," *Life* 6 [17 April 1939]: 68). This article also discusses the success of screen biographies of historical figures and reports that films on the life of Abraham Lincoln and Brigham Young were in production.

<sup>15</sup>"Liberalizing the Screen," *Variety*, 13 March 1940, 3. All citations to *Variety* unless otherwise stated are to the New York City edition.

<sup>16</sup>Churchill, "Hollywood Goes Historical," 7, 22. In an assessment of historically oriented feature films up to that time (1940), Churchill concluded that "[i]n the main, the films are focused on the great man, the individual who stands at the crux of historical events." Then he listed three traits common to nearly all of these films: "Many of the directors hold that in a biographical film details are inconsequential as long as the spirit and purpose of a man's life are faithfully articulated. Secondly there are numerous external pressures [relatives, special interest groups, descendants of famous figures] who bring the luckless producers into court on the flimsiest provocations. Finally there is the necessity of catering to the popular concept of history. . . . The public wants the objects of its adoration and veneration to be shown as heroic." In the case of *Brigham Young*, all the above factors were strictly met.

<sup>17</sup>Darryl F. Zanuck to William Dover, Memorandum, 8 September 1938, Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation Archives, Beverly Hills, California (hereafter cited as Fox Archives).

<sup>18</sup>Julian Johnson [head of Fox's story department] to Kenneth Macgowan [associate producer on *Brigham Young*], Memorandum, 8 March 1939, Fox Archives. See also Eleanor Harris v. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, United States District Court for the Southern District of New York (1942), Civil 10-221, Deposition of Darryl F. Zanuck, 19 August 1941, Beverly Hills, California, 11-12. All documents herein cited in the court case are located in the Federal Archives and Records Center, Building 22-MOT, Bayonne, New Jersey.

<sup>19</sup>Kenneth Macgowan to Darryl F. Zanuck, Memorandum, 22 March 1939, Fox Archives. Macgowan also claimed that Woolley had written a six-thousand-word pamphlet for the Salt Lake City Chamber of Commerce on Mormon history and "knows a lot [about Mormon history] that hasn't made its way into books."

<sup>20</sup>Darryl F. Zanuck to Kenneth Macgowan, Memorandum, 22 April 1939, Fox Archives. The treatment by writers Eleanor Griffin and William Rankin described by Zanuck in the memo as "amazingly well thought out" was not among the documents in the Fox studio collection. Zanuck in the same memo also indicated that top Fox scriptwriter Lamar Trott would be assigned to *Brigham Young* after completing work on his current project, *Drums along the Mowhawk*, directed by John Ford, which was subsequently released in late 1939. Both *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell* (1939) and *Jesse James* (1939) were produced and released by Twentieth Century-Fox.

<sup>21</sup>Heber J. Grant to Sidney R. Kent, 22 March 1939, typescript, Fox Archives.

<sup>22</sup>Heber J. Grant to Will H. Hays, 22 March 1939, typescript, Fox Archives.

<sup>23</sup>Will H. Hays to Heber J. Grant, 27 March 1939, typescript, Fox Archives.

<sup>24</sup>Other films adapted from Bromfield's novels were *One Heavenly Night* (United Artists, 1931), *Night after Night* (Paramount, 1932), *The Life of Virgie Winters* (RKO, 1934), *It All Came True* (Warners, 1940), and *Mrs. Parkington* (MGM, 1944). See David D. Anderson, *Louis Bromfield* (New York: Twayne, 1964); Morris Brown, *Louis Bromfield and His Books* (Fair Lawn, N.J.: Essential Books, 1957); John Bainbridge, "Farmer Bromfield: Famous Novelist Preaches the New Agriculture on His Malabar Farm," *Life* 25 (11 October 1948): 111-22.

<sup>25</sup>Alfred Kazin, "Our Last Authentic Frontier Novelist," *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, 27 August 1939, 3.

<sup>26</sup>Joseph M. Flora, *Vardis Fisher* (New York: Twayne, 1965), 132.

<sup>27</sup>Carl Van Doren, *The American Novel 1789-1939*, rev. and enl. (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 363.

<sup>28</sup>David Brion Davis, "Children of God: An Historian's Evaluation," *Western Humanities Review* 8 (Winter 1953-54): 49-56. Robert A. Rees noted the criticism received of many novelists who wrote on Mormon historical themes, including Fisher, but explained through an example from *Children of God* how convincingly a good novelist can dramatize oftentimes plodding history as frequently written by professional historians ("'Truth is the Daughter of Time': Notes toward an Imaginative Mormon History," *Dialogue* 6 [Autumn-Winter 1971]: 19-22).

<sup>29</sup>John A. Widtsoe to Kenneth Macgowan, 7 September 1939, Kenneth Macgowan Collection, University of California at Los Angeles (hereafter cited as Macgowan Collection).

<sup>30</sup>Heber J. Grant, Journal, 26 August 1939, typescript, 139, Library-Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

<sup>31</sup>Heber J. Grant to Charles Zimmerman, 22 October 1939, typescript, in Heber J. Grant, Journal, 183.

<sup>32</sup>Heber J. Grant, Journal, 27 October 1939, 198-99. There is no record of what the "slight changes" were.

<sup>33</sup>Heber J. Grant, *Journal*, 9 January 1940, 6.

<sup>34</sup>John A. Widtsoe to Lamar Trott, 13 November 1939, 3–4, Macgowan Collection.

<sup>35</sup>Weston Nordgren, *Liahona: The Elders' Journal*, 9 July 1940, 55. Nordgren also wrote a favorable article about the upcoming film in the Church's official magazine (Weston Nordgren, "Brigham Young," *Improvement Era* 43 [November 1940]: 532–33, 547).

<sup>36</sup>While director Henry Hathaway pasted pages from *Children of God* in his shooting script for atmosphere, the only similarities between the finished film and Fisher's novel "were in the way of dialogue" (Kenneth Macgowan to Harry Brand, Memorandum, 30 April 1940, Fox Archives). Also, according to George Wasson, one of the assistant secretaries at Fox, Macgowan's feelings were that "[i]f we were to look at this picture with an unbiased view I am certain that we would find the present story entirely historical in background, which contributes 50% of the story, probably 5% Eleanor Harris, 5% dialogue from Vardis Fisher's *Children of God*, 5% Louis Bromfield, 5% Henry Hathaway's directorial changes, and 30% Lamar Trott's story development" (George Wasson to Edwin P. Kilroe, Memorandum, 21 August 1940, Fox Archives). See also Henry Hathaway's shooting script for Brigham Young in Henry Hathaway Collection, American Film Institute, Louis B. Mayer Library, Hollywood, California; and Henry Hathaway interview by James V. D'Arc, 9 July 1983, Los Angeles, California, in author's possession.

<sup>37</sup>As quoted in G. Homer Durham to James D'Arc, 28 September 1979, letter in author's possession. Durham, at the time of writing the letter, was managing director of the Church Historical Department. The Widtsoe Papers remain closed, but Elder Durham quoted the passages dealing with the Bromfield-Widtsoe trip from Widtsoe's diary from April-June 1939.

<sup>38</sup>See James V. D'Arc, "The Saints on Celluloid: The Making of the Movie *Brigham Young*," *Sunstone* 1 (Fall 1976): 11–28, for a production history of the film.

<sup>39</sup>See Mary Astor, *A Life on Film* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), 147. The Twentieth Century-Fox publicity department also chose, in addition to adding "Frontiersman" to the title, to attract Eastern audiences to the film by dealing with their perceived preoccupation with Brigham Young's many wives. It also favorably compared *Brigham Young* with other well-known western epic films *The Covered Wagon* (1923), *The Iron Horse* (1924), and *Cimarron* (1930), the only western film to receive an Academy Award. The advertising mat illustrated here is from a studio-generated "campaign manual" or pressbook sent to newspaper editors and theatre owners. These "camera ready" advertising mats were then used in local newspapers to advertise the film. This advertisement appeared in the *New York Times*.

<sup>40</sup>*Time* 37 (7 October 1940): 63.

<sup>41</sup>"High L.D.S. Officials Preview 'Brigham Young,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 14 August 1940, 8.

<sup>42</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, 21 August 1940. In Mary Astor, Scrapbook, Archives and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as Mary Astor Scrapbook).

<sup>43</sup>*Los Angeles Examiner*, 21 August 1940, Mary Astor Scrapbook.

<sup>44</sup>Virginia Wright, *Los Angeles Daily News*, n.d., Mary Astor Scrapbook.

<sup>45</sup>Bosley Crowther, *New York Times*, 21 September 1940, Mary Astor Scrapbook. Crowther expanded on his desire to see more polygamy in *Brigham Young* when he wrote a feature article on historical films. He admitted that there was an almost inherent dilemma in such motion pictures, for "when a picture does strive to make a more adult point [beyond textbook platitudes], the effort is likely to lead to a dissipation of dramatic values. . . . A shade less Brigham and a shade more Brigham would have made for a livelier picture." Crowther admired the efforts made by the producers of *The Howards of Virginia* (Columbia, 1940) and *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (RKO, 1940), but was disappointed with *Brigham Young* and *Gone with the Wind* (Selznick-MGM, 1939) (see Bosley Crowther, "The American Ideal: How Profound Is the Effect of Filmed History on the Popular Mind?" *New York Times*, 29 September 1940, sec. 10, p. 3).

<sup>46</sup>Review, *New York City Film Daily*, 27 August 1940, Mary Astor Scrapbook.

<sup>47</sup>Review, *Silver Screen*, November 1940, 98, Mary Astor Scrapbook.

<sup>48</sup>*Time* 37 (7 October 1940): 63; *Newsweek* 18 (23 September 1940): 151; *Life* 9 (23 September 1940): 59.

<sup>49</sup>"Kate Smith's Radio Tieups for 'Rockne' and 'Brigham Young,'" *Variety*, 11 September 1940.

<sup>50</sup>A sizable portion of the highly publicized budget of two-and-a-half-million dollars for *Brigham Young* went to advertising to "compensate for the loss of numerous foreign markets by pulling greater attendance in this country," as noted in "Advertising News & Notes," *New York Times*, 20 April 1940, 22. However, in the spring of 1941 the film was released in England. It was initially feared by the British Board of Film Censors that it might be "pro-Mormon propaganda," but it ultimately passed with few cuts and received essentially favorable reviews (James C. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors: Film Censorship in Britain, 1896–1950* [London: Croom Helm, 1985]: 76); also "Mormon Trek Impresses British: Screen Story of Brigham Young Is Cause for Commend in English Press," *Deseret News*, 10 May 1941. As of 15 May 1940, the following areas were totally "frozen" out of film distribution: Japan, Korea, France, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Manchukuo. Those "50% frozen" were England, Scotland, and Australia. Partially frozen, interpreted to mean very little, if any, distribution: Germany, Poland, and Rumania. Most of Africa, Saudi Arabia, Iran, India, Afghanistan, and China were unrestricted. The trade paper cautioned exhibitors, however, that where Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg were

concerned "overnight events make the situation doubtful [for continued distribution to those areas]" ("Restricted Film Markets Chart," *Variety*, 15 May 1940, 8). Foreign markets accounted for up to 35 or 40 percent of a given film's total gross income.

<sup>51</sup>*Variety*, 11 September 1940, 8; 18 September 1940; 2 October 1940, 11; 25 September 1940, 10, 11.

<sup>52</sup>*Variety*, 2 October 1940, 9; 25 September 1940, 10.

<sup>53</sup>*Variety*, 25 September 1940, 9, 10; 2 October 1940, 9; 18 September 1940, 11.

<sup>54</sup>"Brigham Young—Frontiersman was one Tyrone Power epic which flopped, much to Zanuck's disappointment" (Aubrey Solomon, "A Corporate and Financial History of the 20th Century-Fox Studio" [Beverly Hills, Calif.: American Film Institute Center for Advanced Film Studies, 1975], 78–79). Tony Thomas and Aubrey Solomon, *The Films of Twentieth Century-Fox: A Pictorial History* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1979), 18; Dennis Belfonte with Alvin H. Marill, *The Films of Tyrone Power* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1980), 20.

<sup>55</sup>Maynard Smith, "A Survey of the Screenplays Written by Lamar Trott with Emphasis on Their Acceptance by Professional and Non-Professional Groups" (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1953), 265. Smith recorded that he had access to the financial statements of Twentieth Century-Fox and the company's treasurer, Fred L. Metzler. Total receipts for *Brigham Young*: \$4,294,500, against a cost of \$1,485,050.17, that more than paid expenses of production and distribution. Smith, in a telephone interview with the author on 10 June 1986, confirmed that he had personally seen the financial records at the behest of Mr. Trott and with the cooperation of Mr. Metzler. Press claims, and even studio press releases, consistently maintained that the budget was \$2,500,000, but in view of studio budget sheets, such figures were another example of the studio's overworked publicity department.

<sup>56</sup>Fred Johnson, "A Mormon Eyes 'Brigham Young,'" *San Francisco Call-Bulletin*, 5 October 1940, Mary Astor Scrapbook.

<sup>57</sup>Lamar Trott, from the story by Louis Bromfield, "Brigham Young" unpublished screenplay (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, n.d., but probably 13 April 1940 shooting final), 44.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>60</sup>Heber J. Grant, "Gratitude for Faith of People," in Conference Report, October 1940, 96. Added emphasis was given to President Grant's concern as this address was reprinted on the "Editor's Page" of the Church's official magazine, the *Improvement Era* 43 (November 1940): 654.

<sup>61</sup>Frank W. Fox, *J. Reuben Clark: The Public Years* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press and Deseret Book Co., 1980), 443.

<sup>62</sup>Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 308.

<sup>63</sup>Dennis Leo Lythgoe, "The Changing Image of Mormonism in Periodical Literature" (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1969), 177–86, covers the treatment of the Church welfare program in national publications. See also Richard O. Cowan, "Gentile Attitudes towards Mormons, 1890–1947" (Master's thesis, University of Wyoming, 1960). For a Mormon perspective on the Church welfare plan and the Church operations during the 1930s, see James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), 515–34; and Leonard J. Arrington and Wayne K. Hinton, "Origin of the Mormon Welfare Plan," *Brigham Young University Studies* 5 (Winter 1964): 67–85. For a critical evaluation from a non-Mormon perspective, see Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, *America's Saints: The Rise of Mormon Power* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1984), 70–71, and John Heinerman and Anson Shupe, *The Mormon Corporate Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 180–95.

<sup>64</sup>*American Weekly*, 16 June–1 September 1940.

<sup>65</sup>Heber J. Grant to Kenneth Macgowan, 30 August 1939, Macgowan Collection.

<sup>66</sup>John A. Widtsoe to Kenneth Macgowan, 13 November 1939, Macgowan Collection.

<sup>67</sup>In proposing this treatment, Bromfield admitted that this would be historically inaccurate but declared, "but the Church officials [who would have been President Grant and Elder Widtsoe primarily] are in favor of adapting history and putting it in here" (Louis Bromfield with the collaboration of Eleanor Harris and James Woolley, *Brigham Young*, 26 July 1939, Treatment, 148).

<sup>68</sup>Reported by Thomas Brady, "Profits vs. Prestige," *New York Times*, 28 July 1940, sec. 9, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup>Eleanor Harris v. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, Deposition of Lamar Trott, 20 August 1941, Beverly Hills, California, 14 (emphasis added).

<sup>70</sup>Eleanor Harris v. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, Deposition of Louis Bromfield, 29 August 1940, as quoted in Deposition of Louis Bromfield, 23 October 1941, New York, 2. Harris lost her suit, which sought equal credit with Bromfield for the film's story rather than the "Story Research" credit given her by the studio on the film's release prints (see Eleanor Harris v. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, Civil 10–221, 2 January 1942, decision rendered by Henry W. Goddard, District Judge, United States District Court Southern District of New York).

<sup>71</sup>Eleanor Harris v. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, Deposition of Darryl F. Zanuck, 19 August 1941, Beverly Hills, California, 23–24.

<sup>72</sup>M. R. Werner, "Brigham Young Seen as Screen Material," *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 September 1940, sec. 6, p. 10.

<sup>73</sup>Vardis Fisher to Elizabeth Nowell, 5 June 1939, typescript copy in Fox Archives. Zanuck did not retain Fisher (even in an anonymous capacity) because "Louis Bromfield has been spending a great deal of time with President Grant, the present head of the Mormon Church, and the Mormon Church has already supplied us with several technical advisors that they feel will do a good job for us and I cannot, at this late date, start bringing in another one" (Darryl F. Zanuck to Julian Johnson, Memorandum, 8 June 1939, Fox Archives).

<sup>74</sup>Morrison Brown, *Louis Bromfield and His Books* (Fair Lawn, N.J.: Essential Books, 1957), 90. Prior to the film's release, Bromfield remarked to a reporter, "I just couldn't resist having a chance to say my say about old Brigham Young who, in my mind, was one of the most heroic of American figures" (Grace Wilcox, "Nothing Grew Except Courage," *Detroit Free-Press*, 4 August 1940).

<sup>75</sup>Alma Rothe, ed., *Current Biography 1944* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1945), 68. The response by other Hollywood studios to the growing awareness of fascism both foreign and domestic is discussed in Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, *The Hollywood Social Problem Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 200–223.

<sup>76</sup>Eleanor Harris to Kenneth Macgowan, Memorandum, 30 March 1938, Fox Archives.

<sup>77</sup>Leonard Moseley, *Zanuck: The Rise and Fall of Hollywood's Last Tycoon* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948), 140–41. See also Tom Stempel, *Screen Writer: Nunnally Johnson* (San Diego: A. S. Barnes, 1980), 47–50.

<sup>78</sup>*Brigham Young*, "Memorandum of Discussion with Mr. Zanuck," 22 March 1939, 1, Fox Archives.

<sup>79</sup>Lamar Trott was responsible for many successful films for Twentieth Century-Fox, whether working in collaboration or alone. His impressive credits include *In Old Chicago* (1938), *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), *The Ox-Bow Incident* (also as coproducer, 1943), and *The Razor's Edge* (1946). Maynard Smith's 1953 master's thesis is the only extensive study of Trott and his film works; see also Maynard Terebo Smith, "Lamar Trott," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, ed. Randall Clark, in vol. 44 of *American Screenwriters* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1986), 392–99.

<sup>80</sup>Trott, "Brigham Young," 26–27.

<sup>81</sup>"Brigham Young Hit Film of Adventure," *San Francisco Call Bulletin*, 27 September 1940.

<sup>82</sup>"Mormon Epic Fills Vast Canvas in *Brigham Young*," *Los Angeles Times*, n.d., Mary Astor Scrapbook.

<sup>83</sup>*Motion Picture Reviews* 15 (September 1940): 3.

<sup>84</sup>Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 210, 214.

<sup>85</sup>William H. Marnell, *The First Amendment: The History of Religious Freedom in America* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 149. "The limitation imposed by the First Amendment admits of little debate and has occasioned none. Congress has never shown the slightest inclination to establish a religion. The limitation imposed by the Fourteenth Amendment admits of endless debate and has come close to eliciting such. The question of applicability to specific situations depends on how the Supreme Court justices currently interpret the generalized phrases of an amendment couched in terms to invite dispute" (150).

<sup>86</sup>Kenneth McCaleb, "Brigham Young," *New York Mirror*, 15 September 1940, 14. McCaleb is alluding to a series of cases beginning with *Lovell v. Griffin* (1938), in which the courts struck down local laws prohibiting the distribution of Jehovah's Witnesses literature.

<sup>87</sup>Zanuck's production of *A Yank in the R.A.F.*, released in September 1941, portrayed Tyrone Power as an American flyer and also sympathetic participant in Britain's fight against the Germans. The story was also written by Zanuck under his pseudonym Melville Crossman. Significantly, the film's preparation, production, and release occurred well before America's formal entry into the war, and earned from *Newsweek* a slap for prowar propaganda: "From the isolationist point of view, this production that was photographed here and in England with the cooperation and approval of Lord Beaverbrook, British Air Minister, the R.A.F., and the United States and Canadian Governments, is supercharged with propaganda" (*Newsweek* 19 [6 October 1941]: 60). For Zanuck's interventionist sentiments prior to World War II, involving the Spanish Civil War, see Russell Campbell, "The Ideology of the Social Consciousness Movie: Three Films of Darryl F. Zanuck," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3 (Winter 1978): 51.