



Brigham Young

Brigham Young, ca. 1864. Courtesy Brent F. Ashworth.

Guest Editors' Introduction

Richard L. Jensen and Jed Woodworth

“Let us now praise famous men,” a line from *Ecclesiasticus*, a second-century B.C. Jewish text, directs attention to renowned leaders of ancient Israel. James Agee and Walker Evans’s 1939 publication, taking this same phrase for its title, alludes to common men and women whose silent deeds of heroism have been overlooked.¹ In Brigham Young, second president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, these two images combine. A man of humble New England heritage, limited in formal schooling but mighty in public speaking, Brigham Young rose to prominence as a leader of tens of thousands. Yet even today, many of his silent, heroic deeds have gone unrecognized.

June 1, 2001, marked the bicentennial of President Young’s birth, and in commemoration this issue of *BYU Studies* features four essays and two edited documents about Brigham Young. Shorter versions of the essays were first presented at symposia sponsored by the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, Brigham Young University, in 1998 and 1999.

We begin with a document that introduces Brigham Young’s assessment of Mormonism. A little-known Eastern periodical posed the question, “What is the mission of the Mormons?” and later published Brigham Young’s 1869 answer and his conclusion that “a happy, contented and united people” evidenced Mormonism’s divine origins.

Next, Elder John K. Carmack invites readers to see Brigham Young as an Abraham-like figure whose fatherly concern guided the Saints in their “Western Canaan.” While he finds the widely accepted comparison of Brigham Young with Moses “apt,” Elder Carmack locates the “fullest and most memorable” comparison in Abraham, the patriarch who established a covenant people in a new land. This comparison provides an insightful way of considering the entire scope of President Young’s ministry as a leader of the Latter-day Saints for three decades.

Dean C. Jessee continues with the theme of fatherhood. He argues that Brigham Young’s “strong sense of mission” guided his actions at home. Jessee’s portrayal of President Young as a parent shows a side of this pioneer prophet—a resolutely kind and attentive father—that may seem surprising in view of his public image as the “Lion of the Lord.” The tender words and acts that emerge in these paragraphs bring readers closer to understanding how very busy people can balance both public and private duties.

Jill Mulvay Derr investigates another dimension of family in Brigham Young's life. Writing on the relationship between Brigham Young and Eliza R. Snow, President Young's influential wife, Derr explores their relationship as poet and prophet, husband and wife, and president and presidentess. Derr shows how together these two established a model for a working partnership between men and women in the early history of the Church.

Although in many ways Brigham Young rejected the restrictive Puritanism of his own upbringing, he emphatically denounced the reading of novels. Richard Cracroft assesses the basis for that rejection. Arguing that Brigham Young's stance is best accounted for by his dislike of anything that would "distract" from the "central mortal purposes" of becoming a Saint and building Zion, Cracroft contextualizes antinovel views in American history. Cracroft's discussion suggests that what may yet be learned from President Young's views has as much to do with priorities in life as it does with novels themselves.

Concluding the material on Brigham Young is a newly discovered document written by Leopold Bierwirth, a German-American merchant, who recorded his impressions of Brigham Young while traveling through Salt Lake City in 1872. Donald Q. Cannon introduces the document and provides helpful footnotes for this insightful account.

Together, these essays and documents illuminate Brigham Young in ways that will help readers renew their appreciation for the rich legacy of his ministry. As a leader of modern Israel, Brigham Young's strong commitment to building God's kingdom has motivated Church members then and now. And as a husband, father, and teacher in his own family and throughout the Church, his words and actions give cause for introspection and emulation.

Let us now praise the name of Brigham Young!

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1. Ecclesiasticus 44:1; James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939).