Mischievous Puck and the Mormons, 1904–1907

Davis Bitton and Gary L. Bunker

From the inception of Mormonism to well into the twentieth century, Mormons and their beliefs were cartooned and caricatured unmercifully. In the twentieth century Reed Smoot's successful senatorial candidacy revived the cartoonists' interest in Mormonism. Did the ensuing cartoons defuse some of the animosity, intensify antipathy, or leave mixed effects? How did the cartoon portrayal of Mormonism during this period compare with the pre-Manifesto representations? An analysis of cartoons from *Puck,* one of the most popular and humorous of the illustrated weeklies in America, which overlapped the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, throws some light on these questions.

By the opening years of the twentieth century Mormonism was no longer the inflammatory public issue it had been in the 1870s and 1880s. The issuance of the Manifesto by President Wilford Woodruff pacified the public ire, at least for a while. To be sure, the local gentile press viewed the Manifesto with skepticism, and Mormon-gentile tension continued in Utah. Still, the Manifesto ushered in a period of relative peace sufficient to secure Utah's statehood in 1896 and to quiet, to some extent, the staccato attacks of the national media that had persisted over the previous half-century. There were exceptions to this mood, of course: the flurry of excitement over the B. H. Roberts case in 1898–1900,[1] the revival of anti-Mormon propaganda around 1910, and, between those dates, the Senate hearings over the seating of Reed Smoot, which extended from 1904 to 1907. All of these and other events in Utah provoked news articles, editorials, and illustrations. Though the popular press was negative enough, it did not generally carry the bitterness of the pre-Manifesto era. It seemed that some of the old venom was spent. Both Roberts and

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This article is part of a larger project by the authors dealing with pictorial images of Mormonism between 1830 and 1914.

[1]B. H. Roberts was elected in 1898 as a representative from Utah to serve in the United States House of Representatives. However, Roberts' polygamous relations led to his being denied a seat in Congress by a vote of 268 to 50 (see Davis Bitton, "The B. H. Roberts' Case, 1898–1900," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 25 [January 1957]:27–46).

Illustration 1

Smoot often appeared as clowns rather than as representatives of a sinister, threatening organization. And there was a willingness to indulge some mild spoofing of the Mormons, quite different in tone from the most virulent anti-Mormonism of the preceding century.[2]

One of the most valuable examples of the new strain of pictorial representations of Mormons is found in *Puck,* published in New York since 1877.[3] It had started as a German publication but within a year was appearing in English. Henry Cuyler Bunner produced most of the written commentary, and Joseph Keppler, the founder, did many of the lithographs for the weekly until his death in 1894. "What Fools these Mortals be!" was the motto, and sharp satire the magazine's trademark. It was without peer among the humorous illustrated weeklies of its time, although the *San Francisco Wasp, The Judge,* and *Life* all had their moments.

Puck's earlier representations of Mormonism were not always gentle, although it must be said that other religions were also targets. In 1877 *Puck* published one of its most popular cartoons, irreverently poking fun at Brigham Young's death. Other cartoons invidiously symbolized Mormons as snakes or black crows in Uncle Sam's eagle's nest, and dressed Mormons in Turkish costumes. Such satirical cartoons coupled with slashing political and literary criticism combined to make the magazine popular; its circulation was nearly 90,000 during the nineties, not counting the monthly and quarterly versions that republished the best from *Puck.* As it entered the twentieth century, the magazine was well established, and with a different cast of editors and artists, it was ready to take on the foolish mortals of the new century.

After the turn of the century and within the four year period of the Smoot Senate hearings, fifteen cartoons about Mormons appeared in *Puck.* Ironically, although they were doubtless stimulated by the Smoot publicity, only one of them dealt directly with Smoot. This cartoon, the sole exception to the more tolerant, if condescending, mood of twentieth century *Puck* towards the Mormons, appeared on 27 April 1904 with Joseph Keppler, Jr., as the

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[2]On the basis of a content analysis of magazine articles Jan Shipps has calculated that the image of Mormonism was still negative during the generation following the Manifesto (see "From Satyr to Saint: American Attitudes Toward the Mormons, 1860–1960," paper presented at the 1973 meeting of the Organization of American Historians). She did not, however, attempt to measure fluctuations within the period with any precision, and her categories did not allow her to recognize treatments that, as we have found, though still negative, were but mild ridicule rather than biting criticism.

[3]See Frank L. Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1865–1885,* 5 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), 3:520–32.

VOL. LV. No. 1416. PUCK BUILDING, New York, April 20, 1904. PRICE TEN CENTS.

Puck

Entered at N. Y. P. O. as Second-class Mail Matter.

OUT IN SALT LAKE CITY.

ELDER HEAPERHOLMES.—He has been tried by the church and found guilty of bigamy.
ELDER HOLICUS.—Guilty of bigamy?
ELDER HEAPERHOLMES.—That 's the judgment. He 's been married only twice.

Illustration 2

cartoonist (see Illustration 1). Keppler's cartoon was closer in spirit to some of the more hostile cartoons of nineteenth century *Puck.* Entitled "The Real Objection to Smoot," it showed the Senator being wound up with a key by the larger, bearded Mormon hierarchy lurking behind the scenes and draped with Polygamy, Mountain Meadows Massacre, Resistance to Federal Authority, Murder of Apostates, Mormon Rebellion, and Blood Atonement. This was not too gentle.

More typical of the period, however, was the spoofing of a polygamy now seen as more amusing than threatening. Even though the cartoonist S. Ehrhart, a prolific contributor to *Puck,* was best known for his caricatures of the apish-faced Irish immigrant and the "light-fingered Negro,"[4] he was just as comfortable with the theme of the much-married Mormon. His approach was the same for all of these minorities. Whether Irish, Negro, or Mormon, the unpopular were deftly reduced to unattractive stereotypes. His first of four Mormon cartoons during the new century was a full-page, color feature on *Puck*'s cover for 20 April 1904 (see Illustration 2). Ehrhart's lighter touch was characteristic of the cartoons about the Mormons which followed in *Puck.*

Cartoons about Mormonism in *Puck* capitalized on the inevitable complexities introduced by polygamy. Two main humorous devices were used: (1) special technological inventions for Mormons and (2) a tongue-in-cheek analysis of human relations within the social structure of polygamy. Let us first look at the inventions.

Inventing special devices for Mormons was not really a new idea. Artists of the previous generation had pictured huge, multiple baby buggies, an automatic bathing and dressing machine for the seemingly countless Mormon children, oversized containers of paregoric for ailing Mormon families, and even decorative porcelain and bric-a-brac in the large, economy, Utah size. On 21 June 1905 *Puck*'s first twentieth century invention for Mormonism appeared–a very fat "Mormoncase Watch for the Utah Jewelry Trade" (see Illustration 3). In its closed position it was like other watches except for its unusual thickness. In its open position out came the portraits of several wives, the last, of course, being the youngest and most attractive.

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[4]William Murrell, *A History of American Graphic Humor: 1865–1938,* 2 vols. (New York: Cooper Square Publications, 1967), 2:90.

MORMONCASE WATCH FOR THE UTAH JEWELRY TRADE.

Illustration 3

THE AUTOMORMON.

EXPRESSLY DESIGNED FOR FAMILY USE IN UTAH.

Illustration 4

The following year saw the conception of three more inventions. The new age of motor cars led the comic artist Louis M. Glackens to create for publication "The Automormon Expressly Designed for Family Use in Utah" (see Illustration 4). A venerable patriarch was at the wheel, while behind in seven rows of seats were enough wives and children to make up a veritable congregation. On the automobile's front was the model name, a most fitting appellation: "The Smoot."

Even cupid could not be content with the old-fashioned bow and arrow in Mormondom. Instead, he now needed a machine gun (see Illustration 5). The poor defenseless man is shown being hit by a whole volley of arrows with a dozen or more women standing behind the rapid-fire weapon. What makes this cartoon interesting is the substitution of the image of anxious Mormon females in pursuit, for the more usual stereotype of the amorous Mormon male. This clever creation appeared 28 March 1906.

The attempt to provide Mormons with new devices continued in the cartoon "Holding Hands in Utah," 22 August 1906, in which the bearded husband manipulates a multiple hand apparatus that reaches out to his various wives (see Illustration 6). Note the proximity of the younger wives to the contented old gentleman and the baleful looks of the older, more remotely positioned spouses. The allegedly favored status of younger wives was a favorite cartoon theme.

The second major strategy of the *Puck* humorists was to concentrate on polygamous human relations. The entire sequence of courting, wedding, and honeymoon and the subsequent problems of marriage were satirically treated. Pestering mothers-in-law, forgetting anniversaries, forgetting family members' names, caring for sick children during the night—these situations which had long been exploited in the comic portrayal of marriage and family life were magnified and given new life by polygamy.

Two cartoons with courtship themes were published in 1906. The first, a full-page color cartoon entitled "Midsummer Night Dreams," which appeared on 25 July, showed various styles of courtship in different cities (see Illustration 7). In proper Boston the couples held hands at a proper distance. In Philadelphia it was a more tender and closer situation, the young man's arm around his sweetheart. In Chicago, where women were thought to be brazen, she was attacking the delighted youth. At the divorce colony in Dakota (the Reno or Las Vegas of 1906), two couples were seated side by side, with an ingenious switching of spouses. Salt

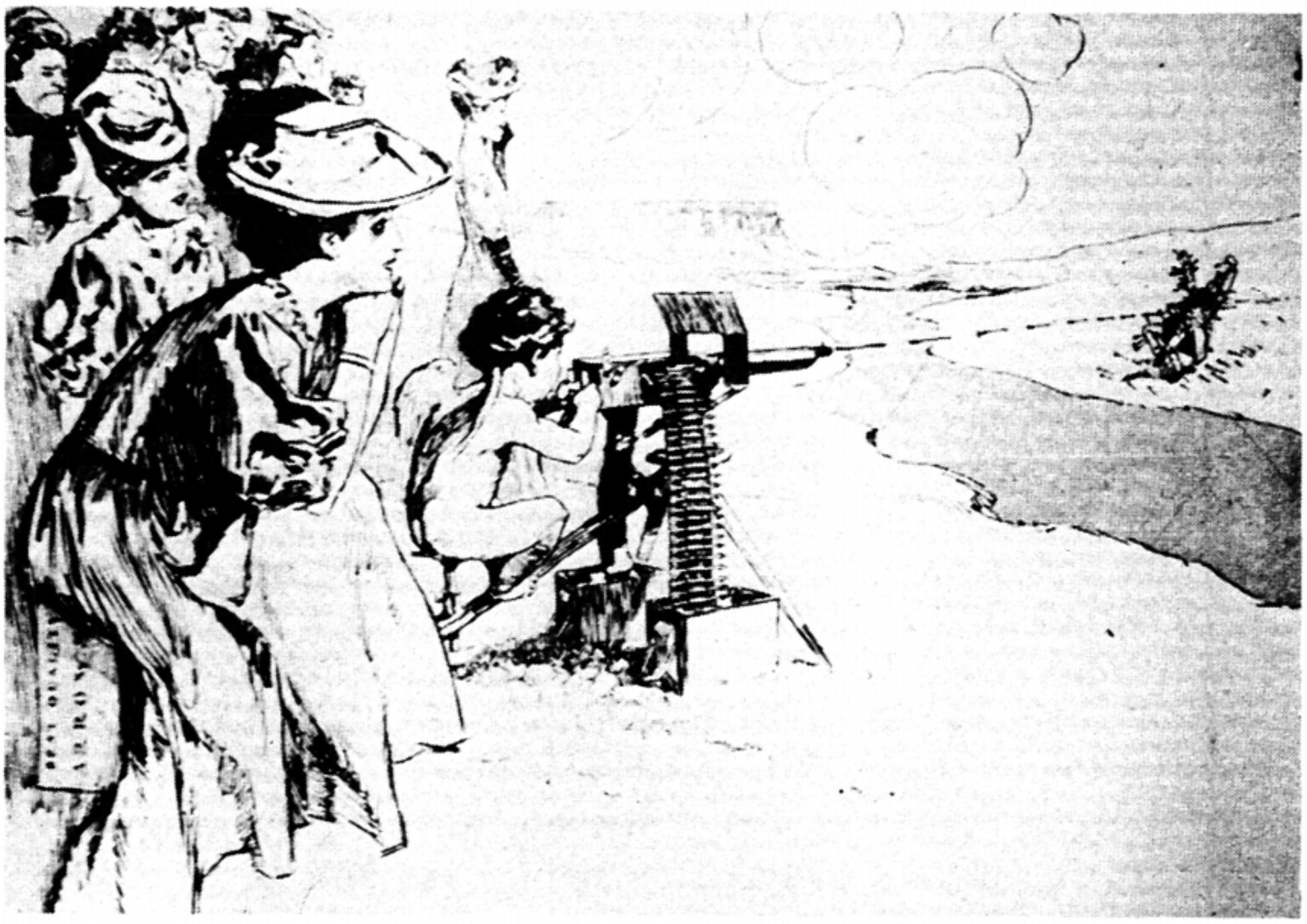


Illustration 5

Illustration 6

Lake City, not surprisingly, completed the varied picture of "love, American style" by showing the young man being kissed and nuzzled from three sides. A few months later another cartoonist, Albert Levering, chose a proposal scene, portraying a bearded Mormon suitor on his knees assuring his prospective bride, "My dear, there isn't the slightest doubt–twelve can live as cheaply as one."

Courtship, of course, eventually led to the wedding altar. L. M. Glackens (18 April 1906) used this setting to contrive one of the wittiest images in the history of cartooning Mormons (see Illustration 8). There was striking incongruity between the caption–"A Quiet Wedding In Utah: There were present only the immediate families of the bride and groom"–and the drawing, depicting a capacity crowd filling not only the main floor of a large hall, but the two balconies as well. Juxtaposing two incompatible thoughts, verbal and visual, Glackens created what Arthur Koestler has called "bisociative shock," the essence of humor.[5]

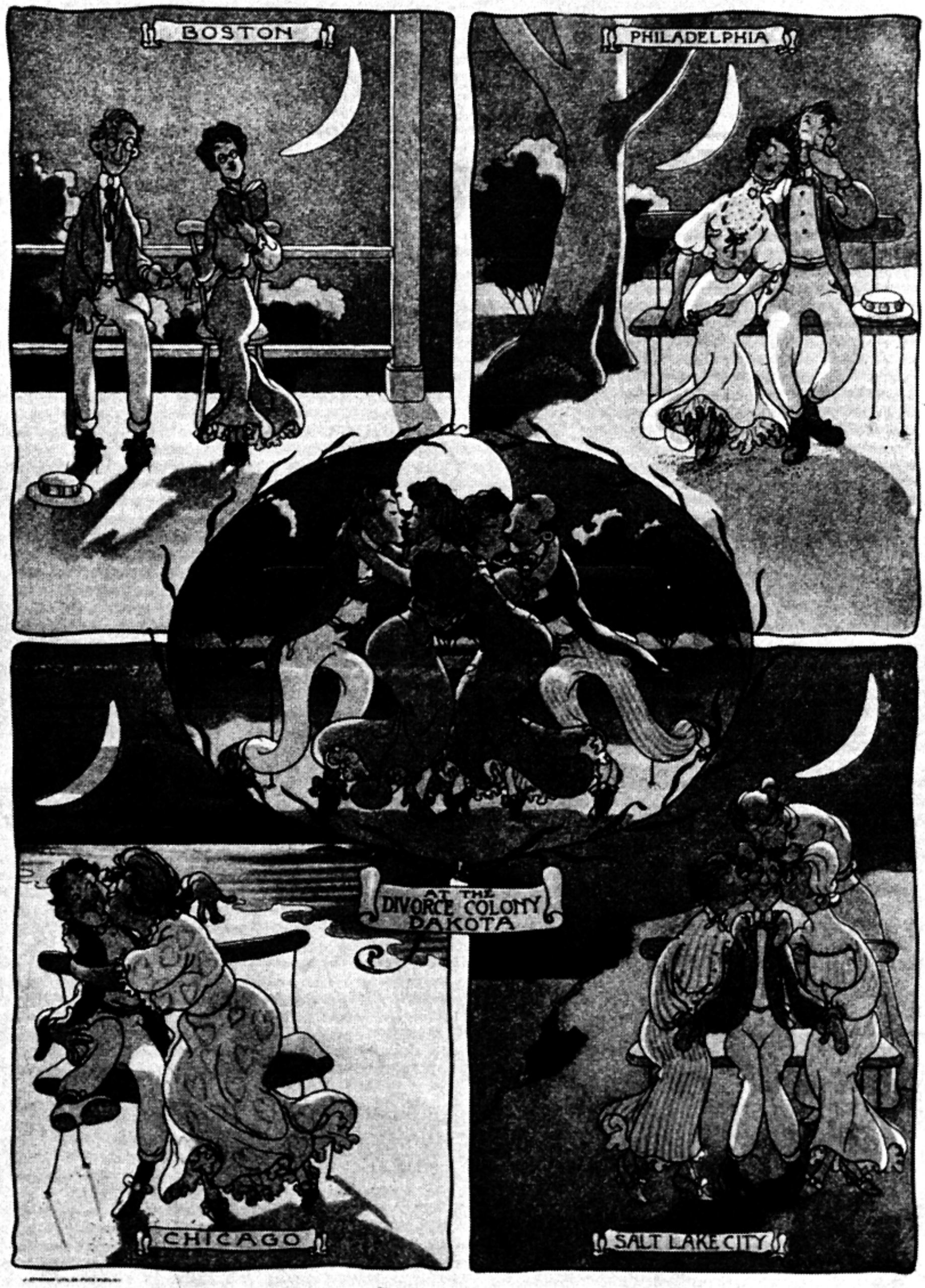
If Mormon courtship was sometimes idealized by imaginative illustrators, the images of marriage among the Mormons redressed the imbalance. Even the honeymoon was beset with problems. On 16 May 1906 Fred E. Lewis drew a chagrined, newly-married Mormon couple at the train unexpectedly joined by the husband's other wives, who said, "This makes your fifth wedding trip, Pa; and as we've only had one apiece, we thought we'd come along with you and Tootsie-Wootsie."

The mother-in-law theme was not very original either in general or for Mormons in particular. However, it was then, as now, effective material for the humorist. Ehrhart drew a polygamist husband seated on the porch surrounded by eight attractive, happy wives. Coming up the walk toward the house are several militant, crotchety older women befitting the mother-in-law stereotype. Dropping the newspaper (*The Daily Bigamist*) in amazement, the husband says, "Shades of Joseph Smith! What the ***!!" In "gentle chorus" his wives reply: "Only a surprise for you, dearie. Our mothers have come to spend a month with us" (see Illustration 9).

Another old theme was refurbished and returned to action. Brigham Young had often been the subject of earlier cartoons poking fun at his supposed inability to recognize one of his wives or children.[6] Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, by now a stan-

[5]Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 91–92.

[6]For an early version of this theme see *Harper's Weekly*, 21 February 1857: "I am told by an eyewitness of the scene, that Brigham, walking down the street, a few days since, met a little boy re-



MIDSUMMER NIGHT DREAMS.

Illustration 7

dard part of American life, supplied a new social context for an old idea. The office boy announced, "Your wife wants you on the phone, sir." The proverbial Mormon, seated at his desk and surrounded by pictures of wives numbers one through eight, answers: "Boy, how many times must I tell you to get the name and number of the person who calls up?" (see Illustration 10). Clutter on the desk and the office floor adds to the negative image.

Thirty years of illustrating Mormons off and on in *Puck* ended with the seating of Senator Reed Smoot in 1907. Three cartoons during the last year of the Smoot hearings put their final touches on the Mormon image. The first, published on 9 January 1907, parodied polygamy by having "Elder Studdorse" invite a friend to his silver, tin, and wooden wedding anniversaries within a two week period (see Illustration 11). The surname Studdorse, borrowed by Ehrhart from one of Albert Levering's earlier cartoons, served as an obvious collective symbol for lust (studhorse), to characterize the stereotyped Mormon behavior pattern. Other Mormon names in the cartoons–Elder Muchmore, Elder Heaperholmes, Elder Holikuss, Mr. Mormondub, Obadiah, Tootsie-Wootsie, and Elder Saltlake–did not carry the same connotation of lust but did help to turn their subjects into figures of ridicule. Similar motives were responsible for the labeling of other minority groups (e.g., Rastus, Aunt Jemima, and Sambo).[7]

On 13 March 1907 J. S. Pughe presented a heavy-set, cane-in-hand, apologetic Mormon male at the door of wife No. 5 at 11:30 p.m. Only in Utah would "Obadiah's" explanation for coming home so late be plausible: ". . . whooping cough, measles, teething, mumps and twins." The final cartoon, inspired by the forthcoming Halloween celebration, appeared on 23 October 1907. With the help of Halloween folklore, Gordon Grant, the artist, saw another chance to make light of polygamy. "On the Halloween night, if one holds up a candle and looks in a mirror, the face of one's future husband or wife will be seen."[8] Sure enough, an eager

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turning from the mountainside with a few cows, which he had been herding. Struck with something in his appearance, the Prophet stopped and called out, 'Here, sonny! Tell me, now, whose son you are.' The little curly-headed urchin answered, 'Ma tells me I'm Brother Young's son, but you ought to know who I am.' The seer knew not his own child!"

[7]See E. B. Palmore, "Ethnophaulisms and Ethnocentrism," *American Journal of Sociology* 67 (January 1962):442–45; and Wilmoth A. Carter, "Nicknames and Minority Groups," *Phylon* 5 (Third Quarter, 1944):241–45.

[8]Several other variations of this theme were part of the folklore of the day. For example, "If you stand in front of a mirror at twelve o'clock on Halloween, the man you are to marry will look over your left shoulder" (Wayland Hand, ed., *North Carolina Folklore,* 7 vols. [Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1961], 6:599).

Illustration 8

Mormon male with candle in hand stood in front of a mirror full of attractive, youthful, female faces. The cartooning of Mormons in *Puck* ended on a familiar theme.

What were the overall effects of mischievous *Puck?* Were Mormon-gentile tensions increased or was there evidence of accommodation? Based in part on a comparative analysis of cartoons in nineteenth century *Puck,* we believe that the effects of *Puck* were mixed. On the one hand, there is evidence of a reduction in tension and a guarded accommodation. On the other hand, there are also elements of apprehension, even hostility, as popularly held stereotypes were distilled in picture form by cartoonists of national stature. Let us first look at the evidence in favor of accommodation.

Twentieth century *Puck* cartoons of Mormons were on the whole less polemical, less serious, and less personal than those of the preceding generation. With the one exception already noted, there was little advocacy of political or social action against the Mormons. Rather than treating the specifics of the Smoot case, these cartoonists were content to deal with the generalized, though mythical, Mormon. This was a significant departure from the explicit support found in many earlier *Puck* illustrations for legislative, executive, and judicial sanctions against the Mormons. If the more light-hearted spirit of the twentieth century cartoons was not necessarily a manifestation of outright goodwill, neither was it as heavy as the humor of the past, which had emphasized some of the more destructive elements of the image of Mormons– the subversive, hostile, autocratic, and lascivious Mormon. Other components of these older stereotypes were perpetuated, though, as a rule, not nearly so blatantly. Mormons were more laughable, more harmless. The Mormon as buffoon was at least to some degree more socially assimilable than the Mormon as Destroying Angel or Danite. Only one personalized, pictorial attack appeared in the pages of the *Puck* of the new century (see Illustration 1), as opposed to several instances in the previous century. A reduction in the number of polemical, serious, and personalized cartoons in twentieth century *Puck* combined with the disappearance in *Puck* of cartoons with Mormon themes after the seating of Smoot, provide some evidence for accommodative concessions by the national press.[9]

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[9]There is also some possibility that relatively nonhostile cartoons may have inhibited some aggression against the Mormons. Some contemporary empirical evidence supports the general idea (see Robert A. Baron and Rodney L. Ball, "The Aggression-Inhibiting Influence of Nonhostile Humor,"

Illustration 9

Illustration 10

BLISS IN UTAH.

ELDER SALTLAKE. — Well, brother, this is indeed a h
onth for you.

ELDER STUDDORSE. — True, brother ; I celebrate my s
edding on Thursday, my tin wedding next Saturday, and
ooden wedding a week from Wednesday. Drop around.

Illustration 11

But it would be a mistake to consider the new century's caricature of the Mormons in *Puck* as innocuous. Koestler has reminded us that among the indispensable characteristics of most humor is "... an impulse, however faint, of aggression or apprehension," which "may be manifested in the guise of malice, derision, the veiled cruelty of condescension, or merely as an absence of sympathy with the victim of the joke."[10] Inherent in the comic treatment of Mormons was a mood of condescension. Humor continued to set Mormons apart as a distinct cultural (some even suggested racial) species. Such a difference has been the major pretext for prejudice from the beginning of time. To be sure, humor dressed the hostility in culturally acceptable clothing, protecting the creator and the consumer from charges of malicious intent. But what was thought by many to be benign humor, as in the case of the Sambo and minstrel images portraying blacks,[11] was actually profound tragedy. If the cost exacted from Mormons for being so pictured was not so great as for blacks, the dynamics were the same.

Even when the motives of the illustrator were essentially benevolent, the reader would normally extract meaning from the cartoon consistent with his values and experience. Now most people's direct experience with Mormons had been slight, but for several decades they had been bombarded by anti-Mormon images, conditioning them in a tradition of stereotypic thinking. For most people complex categories of thought about Mormons or Mormonism simply were not available. And the cartoon emphasis on cultural peculiarity did not require complex thinking or subtle differentiation; they could be, and doubtless were, read according to the existing simplistic and distorted images of Mormons.

Puck's twentieth century influence was thus a curious mixture of gradual accommodation and the perpetuation of some "time-honored" stereotypes of Mormons. *Puck* amused and entertained thousands in its time. Although some of the humor was first-rate and brought pleasure even to some Mormons, it also brought disgust and pain. Mischievous *Puck* was just that—mischievous.

Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 10 [January 1974]:23-33). Of course, there were significant exceptions to a more accommodative humor, especially at the local level. The Salt Lake *Tribune* was as polemical, serious, and personalized as ever. It was easier then, as now, to be benevolent at a distance. One must also remember the other side of the coin: "A chosen people is probably inspiring for the chosen to live *among*; it is not so comfortable for outsiders to live *with*" (Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971], p. 24).

[10]Koestler, *The Act of Creation,* p. 52.

[11]Cf. Joseph Boskin, "Sambo: The National Jester in the Popular Culture," in Gary B. Nash and Richard Weiss, ed., *The Great Fear: Race in the Mind of America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp. 165-85.