

Part 1

Joseph Smith in His Own Time

As scholars look back on Joseph Smith two hundred years after his birth, several historical questions capture their immediate attention. How was Joseph Smith shaped or constrained by his moment in history? How much was Joseph Smith a product of his own time? To what extent can he be explained in terms of the prevailing attitudes of his day? Is it more illuminating to think of him as a critic or as a product of American culture? Should he be seen as an American prophet or in a larger world setting? In many areas of historical inquiry, America as an analytical category has been replaced by transnational analyses that situates everything from the Puritans to abolition in a larger world context; should Joseph Smith be located in a broader framework than the national? After all is said and done, what “world” was the world of Joseph Smith?