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Edmund S. Morgan's, the Puritan Dilemma, the Story of John Winthrop, and  
Newell G. Bringham's Brigham Young and the Expanding American Frontier are  
biographies of two of American's greatest colonists

Edmund S. Morgan devotes almost three-fourths of his biography to the last  
eighteen year's of Winthrop's life. These were the years when Winthrop organized,  
directed and governed the American Puritan Colonies. Fed by Puritans fleeing from  
the excesses of Charles I, politically, and Bishop William Laud, religiously, the colonies  
grew from a population of less than one thousand in 1630 to twenty-thousand during  
the next ten years.

From 1630 to 1648/9 a unique form of self government gradually evolved in New  
England. Before Winthrop died, the charter became the basic governing document for  
the colony. The franchise was extended to include all white males of the colony. The  
Governor and Deputy Governor and the Assistants were all elected by the people and a  
document called "The Body of Liberties" had been written and passed into law. This  
document was the Puritans' American Magna Carta, and spelled out the basic political  
rights of the people. Many of these ideas later appear in the American Constitution.

If the Unity of the colony was threatened, Winthrop could act ruthlessly and  
arbitrarily to eliminate the danger, as in the separatist case of Roger Williams, and the  
Antinomian (a doctrine of personal revelation) danger of the Anne Hutchinson case.

John Winthrop was born January 12, 1588, at Edwardstown, Suffolk, England, into  
an aristocratic family. From his father, Winthrop received practical training in  
running a successful estate. These practical skills were put to good use in America.

Winthrop also received the best possible education for his time. At fifteen he  
spent two years at Trinity College at Cambridge, and he also studied law because he felt a  
knowledge of law would better enable him to do the work which God had set for him.



Sometime before Winthrop left Cambridge he embraced Puritanism, and this changed the entire course of his life. Seeking perfection is a basic Puritan tenet, and after joining the Puritans he struggled to rid himself of the imperfections in his character. By the time he was thirty he had learned his principal weaknesses and had learned how to cope with them. Morgan attributes Winthrop's strength as a leader of men to this early mastery of himself.

The time from Winthrop's birth until he left England for America in 1630, was marked by economic, social and political stress in England. In 1588 England defeated the Spanish Armada, which launched England's growth as a maritime power. It also solidified Protestantism in England. Land consolidation in the 16th century, and a severe depression in 1620, which resulted from the loss of England's European wool market, created within the English population a vast mobile segment of unemployed. Interest in escaping to a possibly better life in America increased.

Economic problems and a worsening political situation triggered the Puritan exodus to America. Persecution of Puritans increased when Charles I came to the throne. Convinced, finally, that emigrating to America was not a form of separatism, Winthrop and one thousand Puritans, in eleven ships, sailed for America in 1630. That winter two hundred settlers died, and about that number returned to England the next spring. In spite of this initial set-back, the New England Colonies were successful from the start. Morgan attributes this success to the brilliant leadership of Winthrop.

Brigham's biography of Brigham Young is perhaps the shortest one ever written of him. Both Brigham's and Morgan's biographies were published by the Library of American Biography, and the publisher limits the number of pages in the book. (Kenzer) In the 219 pages allotted to him, Brigham produced a scholarly, interesting account of Young's life, and although he adequately covered the economic and political aspects of Brigham's life, he also touched upon Brigham's relationship



with his large polygamous family in a sympathetic and sometimes humorous way. By contrast, Morgan's approach to Winthrop's life, concentrated more on issues.

During the seventy-six years of Young's life (1801-1877) the United states was undergoing great economic, social and political changes. The boundaries of the nation were ever expanding. Through purchase and conquest, by 1877 the United States stretched from ocean to ocean. There was only a few years left to "pioneer".

Many techonological advances also made their appearance during these years. America was entering the industrial age. Manufacturing was moving from the home to factories. The cotton gin, the steam boat, the railroad, the sewing machine (invented by Elias Howe, a relative of Brigham's mother), the steel plow, and the grain reaper all put in appearances during these years. Increasing numbers of post offices and the telegraph made communication much faster.

Generally speaking the economy of the United States improved during these years. Three wars and several panics interrupted this general trend. The panic of 1837 and the failure of the church bank in Kirtland threatened to destroy the church in its infancy. Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, who was by then a member of the Council of Twelve Apostles, were forced to flee to Missouri.

Social experiments such as the Oneida colony in Upstate New York found fruitful ground on the frontier, and a displaced youthful population, away from the ties of family, tried to find new roots in some of the popular movements of the day. Women's rights, prohibition, and the anti-slavery organizations movements were some of these. The move for public schools gained momentum. Schools for females increased, as did colleges and trade schools.

Religion was one of the social institutions undergoing change. In upstate New York where Brigham Young and Joseph Smith lived, the area became known as "the burned over area" because of the revivals and religious zeal which swept in waves over



the countryside. New England families who had been Puritans for generations now became Baptists and Methodists.

In the setting of this general religious excitement, a new American religion appeared on the New York scene--The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Popularly known as the Mormon church, the church was officially incorporated in 1830 at Palmyra, New York. Bringham presents the church's official view that the Book of Mormon was translated from a set of gold plates containing the sacred writings of an ancient American civilization--the ancestors of the American Indians. These plates were delivered to Joseph Smith by an Angel, who instructed him to translate them into English. Translated, the record was published as the Book of Mormon in 1830 and accepted as holy scripture on a par with the bible by the body of the church that same year.

After the official organization of the church in 1830, missionaries were sent out immediately to spread the news of the restoration. A book of Mormon was left with Phineas Young, Brigham's brother. Even after an initial affirmative response, it took two years of careful study before Brigham, his wife Miriam and most of his brothers and sisters, their husbands, and his Father, John, and Brigham's stepmother and her son Edward, were baptised into the church in 1832.

This conversion, like Winthrop's conversion to Puritanism, changed Brigham's life. Both Brigham Young and John Winthrop, from the time of their conversion, devoted the rest of their lives to serving God and the people of their churches.

Brigham firmly believed that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and that the church Joseph organized was a "restoration" not just a return to primitive bible principles. Brigham "marveled" when, after his baptism, he was ordained to the office of an Elder, which gave him authority to preach the gospel. Through difficulties in Kirtland, Missouri, and Nauvoo, Brigham's loyalty was unswerving. Brigham had been a member of the council of Twelve Apostles since its organization in 1835. During the



intervening years he had been on several missions in the United States and in England. He had been instrumental in forming many branches of the church in those places.

His biggest trial of faith came when Joseph revealed the revelation of plural marriage to members of the Council in 1841. Brigham later described his shock and dread: "It was the first time in my life that I had desired the grave. . . ."

In the end Brigham complied. He was to eventually marry fifty-five women. By nine of these wives he had forty-four children. Some of the women he married were wives in name only.

Polygamy ultimately almost destroyed the church. Fortunately, Brigham Young died before intense persecution forced the Church to end the practice.

Brigham and his people were the only religious group against which a Republican political platform was directed; the only people a United States army was sent thousands of miles to "quell"; the only state which was denied admittance to the Union because of the practice of polygamy, even though all other legal qualifications were met. When the Saints were in winter quarters at Council Bluffs, preparing to cross the plains to Utah, Brigham was asked furnish 500 volunteers to serve in the army against Mexico. Brigham Young furnished the troops even though the United States had repeatedly ignored or refused appeals for redress for loss of property and life suffered when the saints were forced to leave Nauvoo. The loss of needed manpower delayed his emigration schedule for one year. Four American Presidents took political stands against the Mormons. Of these Millard Fillmore was perhaps the most sympathetic to the Mormons. When Abraham Lincoln was asked what he intended doing about the Mormons, he said: "if Brigham Young will leave me alone, I will leave him alone." And he did. Lincoln had his hands full with the Civil war.

In complete contrast to John Winthrop who was of noble birth, and who had received the best education money could buy, Brigham Young had only the basic reading and writing which his mother taught him, and which was augmented



intermittently by attendance at local schools when such were available, and when he did not have to work to add to his family's meager finances. He always felt this lack.

In spite of the great differences in their backgrounds, John Winthrop and Brigham Young had much in common. In a way one has to admire the organizational genius of Winthrop even more than that of Young. Young had been on the frontier all his life. He was used to hard work. He knew how to hunt, and build a log cabin, and wrest a living when necessary from the wild. By contrast, Winthrop was a poor shot and there was really no one in the Puritan company who had the right gun to shoot wild game. The supplies they had brought with them, and new supplies sent for by Winthrop and which arrived in February, kept them alive through the winter. But Winthrop rolled up his sleeves and showed the Puritans how to build dug-outs and shelters for the approaching winter. If such menial work went against his nature, it did not show.

Brighamurst describes the Mormon Migration to the Great Basin as "The best organized exodus of any body of emigrants going West." Brigham could and did draw on the expertise of mountain men and others who had gone before. at Garden Grove, 150 miles from Nauvoo, he ordered crops planted for those who would follow. Delayed by the loss of men to the Mormon Battalion, he nevertheless built a temporary community at Council Bluffs, in which he housed 3,483 people in 538 log cabins, and 83 sod houses. He divided the people into 22 wards with a bishop over each ward. Schools were organized for the children for the coming winter. Brigham clamped down on all forms of disorderly conduct through a vigilante police force. They had no jail so serious crimes were punished by whipping. Although Brigham had been given the right to camp on Indian lands at Council Bluff by the federal Government, he did not do this until he had negotiated with the Indian tribes on both sides of the river for their permission to do so. He encouraged the Saints to "praise the Lord with singing, with



music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving." This was a far cry from the ascetic Methodism he knew and practiced in his youth.

Although Brigham was moving To Mexico when the exodus began in 1847, the Salt Lake Valley was soon part of the United states. Brigham had the American Constitution and already established methods to guide him in setting up a government in Utah. Winthrop, although guided by common English law, was given almost unlimited power in the governing of the New England Colonies. To the credit of the members of the Company, they did not keep these powers to themselves, but extended them to the freemen of the Church, giving them much more voice in their government than they had enjoyed in England.

Although Winthrop was chosen Governor of the Puritans for most of the years from the time they arrived, until the time he died, he was never the spiritual leader of the colony. The Puritans never intended to set up a theocracy. Brigham was both the civil and spiritual leader for many years. Utah for several years was closer to a theocracy than a democracy. Even when Brigham was removed from the governorship, the territorial Governors knew where the real power was.

Both Winthrop and Young tried to "isolate" their colonies from "the world" so as to keep them from contamination of outside or "gentile" interests, as Brigham called them. Both failed in this respect. Even in Brigham's remote desert location the "world" found the Mormons, as it found the Puritans. But the religious faiths that had led both colonies to seek isolation, left a definite regional impact. The settlements in towns around a church, school, and green, still identifies the New England Village. The Mormon pattern of settlement, with wide streets, laid out on squares, is an identifying feature of the Mormon community. Like the Puritan village, with its many churches, the Mormons have church buildings liberally scattered geographically to serve neighborhoods. Like the Puritan Church, the Mormon ward has its "typical" look. And



the Mormons continue take pride in being a "peculiar" people. They, like the Puritans, attempt to live in the world but not partake of the world.

Both the Puritan and the Mormon colonies spread rapidly into adjoining territories. Except for Rhode Island and New York, most of New England had a definite Puritan identity up to the time of the Revolution. Brigham's state of Deseret once contained portions of Wyoming, Arizona, Nevada, California and all of what is now Utah. The Puritan population of New England grew from less than one thousand in 1630 to twenty-thousand in the next ten years until immigration was stopped by the English civil war. Brigham's great basin kingdom grew in population from 12,000 in 1852 to over 100,000 by the 1870's. One of the factors that increased the population in Brigham's community was immigration through conversions from American areas and also from northern Europe.

There are features of Mormon doctrine that Winthrop would not have agreed with. The "personal revelation" in which Ann Hutchinson believed, is a tenet of the Mormon faith. Mormons believe that a person can receive revelation from God for himself and family, but not for the church in general. Revelation for the Church comes only through the President or Prophet of the church. Also "Presbyterianism" or a pyramidal arrangement of church authority, which Winthrop abhorred, is personified in Mormonism. The Arminianism represented by William Laud, arch enemy of Puritanism, would be at home among Mormons. For Mormons believe that while no one can be saved except through the Grace of God; they believe that His grace is available to all mankind. But the individual must win salvation through obedience to the commandments and through righteous living and service to his fellow man.

John Winthrop would probably have been a political leader in his community even if he had not joined the Puritans or emigrated to America. On the other hand, Brigham Young is said to have confided to his daughter, Susa Amelia, in a conversation shortly before his death in 1877, that everything he had achieved he owed to his Latter-



day Saint faith, pointing out, quote: "But for Mormonism, I would have remained a common carpenter in a country village." Yet, as Bringhurst points out, "Young might have added that he had given the Mormon movement a great deal in return."