

movement to challenge Slave Power, and were rewarded with the legislation they wanted in the Homestead Act, Morrill Act, and the eventual creation of the USDA.

Kingdom of Nauvoo: The Rise and Fall of a Religious Empire on the American Frontier, by Benjamin E. Park. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020. 336 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$28.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Brady G. Winslow is a secondary school history teacher in Fremont, CA. His research focuses on the receptivity to Mormonism in the upper Mississippi Valley from 1830 to the 1860s, and he is the author of "David W. Kilbourne: The Creation of an Iowa Anti-Mormon" (*Annals of Iowa*, 2019).

In west-central Illinois on a curve in the Mississippi River there is a small town of two thousand residents called Nauvoo. While unassuming today, in the 1840s Nauvoo was a bustling city that at its height in 1845 boasted a population larger than that of Chicago. Nauvoo's population swelled under the leadership of the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith who made the city his church's headquarters as he attempted to build the kingdom of God on earth. The rise and fall of this religious community is the subject of Benjamin E. Park's *Kingdom of Nauvoo*.

Park, a historian and scholar of American religion, chronicles the Mormons' seven-year sojourn in and around Nauvoo from 1839 to 1846. While plenty of scholarly and devotional works have been written about the Saints' stay in Illinois, Park writes for a general audience, bridging the gap between the academic and the popular, combining his historical expertise with elegant prose to narrate this fascinating episode for lay readers. Drawing upon previously unavailable sources, he discusses the Mormons' political and social experimentation, which set them at odds with their non-Mormon neighbors. Park argues that the rise and fall of Nauvoo illustrates the still tenuous nature of American democracy only a few generations after the founding of the United States.

In the book, Park explains how prior to establishing Nauvoo state and federal governments had failed the Saints in their community-building efforts in Missouri. When the Mormons settled in Illinois, they looked for more aggressive ways to protect themselves. They secured a city charter from the Illinois legislature. Believing that the document "granted them the political sovereignty they had long coveted," they interpreted the charter in ways that brought them into conflict with non-Mormons (55). Becoming increasingly frustrated with American democracy and what they viewed as its failures, Joseph Smith and his followers looked to create a theocracy. Ultimately this proved too much for non-Mormon

Illinoisans who murdered Smith and eventually forced the Saints to flee the state.

In recounting the story of 1840s Nauvoo, Park contests two misconceptions. First is the idea that Mormonism's religious and sexual experimentation diverged from American society and culture. Such a view obscures the fact that the Saints were not the only group in antebellum America to experiment in these ways. Even if the Mormons were more radical than other groups in addressing societal problems, these efforts were cultural backlashes, attempts by the Saints—like other groups—to make sense of the democratic upheavals going on around them.

The second misconception Park addresses is the notion that Mormonism has been, is, and will continue to be a patriarchal religion that greatly restricts the lives of women. While acknowledging that polygamy was a repressive practice, Park contends that the “women in Nauvoo were able to exert power and influence rarely seen anywhere in America at the time, and did far more to shape Mormonism, and to dissent from its emerging orthodoxy, than is commonly assumed” (6). He demonstrates this through his discussion of the formation of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo and its members' efforts to oppose polygamy at the same time that Joseph Smith and other leaders secretly expanded the practice. Mormonism may be patriarchal, but Park shows how Mormon women in Nauvoo asserted authority and contributed in meaningful ways to the evolution of their religion.

Readers of the *Annals of Iowa* will learn little about Iowa in *Kingdom of Nauvoo*. Although several thousand Saints lived (at least for a time) directly across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo in southeastern Iowa Territory, anti-Mormonism developed there as it did in Illinois, and Mormons who fled Illinois trekked across Iowa on their way to the Great Basin, Park's analysis focuses on the Prairie State. Nevertheless, much can be learned from Park's approach in *Kingdom of Nauvoo*. He takes the short-lived Mormon experiment on the banks of the Mississippi River and illuminates the story's broader importance to American history, revealing that “Nauvoo and its failure matter” because “it concerned the limits of American democracy” (278). Scholars of Iowa and the Midwest would do well to explore the wider significance of state and local occurrences.