

*"A Peculiar People": Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America*, by J. Spencer Fluhman. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012. 229 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover, \$34.99 e-book.

Reviewer A. R. Blair is professor emeritus of history at Graceland University. He has held various offices in the John Whitmer Historical Association and the Mormon History Association.

J. Spencer Fluhman's book goes beyond the usual treatments of anti-Mormonism. Rather than recounting the strained and often violent history of Mormonism or merely listing the various forms anti-Mormonism took, he proposes that anti-Mormonism reveals a deep fissure within American society as it has struggled to define the nature of religion. The author contends that the failure of the U.S. Constitution to define religion, the new, confusing religious freedom in the nation, and the early orientation toward Protestantism that was challenged by the variety of denominations and non-Christian religions combined to create an uncertainty about what was and was not "religion." Mormonism was a crucial element in creating the tension and was influenced by it as well. Although the making (defining) of religion and anti-Mormon attacks continued, the official abandonment of polygamy in 1890 gave an opening for Mormonism to be tentatively accepted as a "religion," although not "Christian" in the minds of many.

Anti-Mormonism, Fluhman shows, was expressed in a variety of ways. Attacks continued through time with changing emphases. The attacks exposed an underlying intolerance even as they proclaimed the nation's religious freedom. Early attacks claimed that Mormonism was a counterfeit religion and focused on Joseph Smith as an "imposter," "charlatan," or "fake." The Book of Mormon was cited as an example of his chicanery and profiteering. To explain Mormonism's rapid growth, opponents charged converts with delusion, a kind of mild insanity. Members seemed normal in most respects but in religion were susceptible to a master deceiver and to spurious spiritual experiences. Clergy of the dominant Protestantism admitted that Christ and his disciples had performed miracles and had spiritual experiences but were wary of too much "enthusiasm," as practiced by false leaders. Another source of antagonism was the Mormon propensity to vigorously engage societal issues such as slavery, Indian relations, and voting. Anti-Mormons believed that Mormon theology fostered violence. The Mormon vision of a holy city of "Zion," with its economic, political, and even military elements, along with Smith's short-lived candidacy for president of the United States, and Mormon control of the Territory of Utah, "proved" Mormons' treasonous tendencies.

In the postbellum period, polygamy became the dominant, almost exclusive, issue. It was a moral issue, linked to Mormon "Orientalism," "barbarism," voting rights, and Utah statehood. Conflicting streams in society, such as evolutionary science and a growing awareness of the variety of world religions, led to a more liberal interpretation of how "religion" might be defined. The abandonment of polygamy in 1890 helped open the doors to Mormonism being included as a religion, but at a potential cost of its distinctive characteristics.

Fluhman purposely does not discuss how movements such as anti-Catholicism, anti-Shakerism, and anti-Spiritualism also contributed to the making of American religion; and Iowa readers will find only one reference to its history. Augustus C. Dodge found that anti-Mormonism reflected an un-American "incapacity of American citizens to comprehend either their duties or rights." Dodge held that Mormons were "doubtless in gross error," but that they were "gradually diminishing before the intelligent and enlightened Christianity of the day" (108). Although the book is not directly about Iowa history, Iowans will find it to be a stimulating discussion of the course of religion in America.

This review can only hint at the richness of Fluhman's interpretive work. The index is useful and the bibliography is extensive, but many illustrations are impossible to read and more irritating than helpful.

*Making Freedom: The Underground Railroad and the Politics of Slavery*, by R. J. M. Blackett. The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013. xii, 122 pp. Notes, index. \$27.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Galin Berrier has been adjunct instructor in history at Des Moines Area Community College. He is the author of the chapter "The Underground Railroad in Iowa" in *Outside In: African-American History in Iowa, 1838-2000* (2001).

This slender volume grew out of a series of lectures R. J. M. Blackett delivered in March 2012 at Pennsylvania State University—the fruits of a decade-long effort "to try to make sense of the political turmoil that followed in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Law by looking at how communities on both sides of the slavery divide organized to either resist or support enforcement of the law, and how slaves either entered or influenced the debate over the future of slavery by the act of escaping" (x). Although the book ostensibly focuses on the entire borderland from Maryland and Virginia in the east to Missouri in the west, most of the events discussed occurred in southeastern Pennsylvania.