

The Hidden Moderate Utah: The Political History of the War within the Mormon/Republican Relationship

By Benjamin Borg

As one of the “reddest” states in the Union, Utah is often presumed a foregone conclusion electorally alongside other strong Republican states. However, Utah does not share the same political history as other “Bible Belt” states; since the 1890 renouncement of polygamy by the LDS Church, there exists a moderate impulse that guides Utah down a unique political course, in which being a traditional red state is not necessarily so certain. This paper attempts to demonstrate this by showing the historical fight against right-wing extremists in Utah, the greater success of Mitt Romney and other Mormons nationally in blue states than in red states dominated by conservative evangelicals, and the more recent attempt by the Democrats and the LDS Church to engage moderate Utah Mormons with both parties.

Based on national and local electoral history, the common conclusion is that in the past 50 years, the state of Utah has been one of the most reliably conservative and Republican states in the nation. Congressional newspaper *The Hill* noted in 2009 that Utah was the “reddest state” in America, a state where “[i]t does not pay to be a Democrat” (Wilson, 2009). This paper, however, proposes that a closer analysis of state culture and history will show that although voters in Utah are ostensibly Republican and conservative, government and religion have intertwined in ways not easily comparable to the other “reddest” states. In understanding the political dynamics within Utah, this paper will attempt to re-categorize the political and historical context of the state, in spite of the prevailing assumptions that national observers hold.

In the last century of state history, Utah has been defined by a course of moderation set forth by leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one that strives for independence from extremist political influence, especially from the extremist right-wing, further creating the unique political landscape of the state as compared to the “Bible Belt” states that represent the conservative Republican mainstream. One might think of politics in Utah as a “molecular” structure containing multiple “atomic” influences that create a stereotypical Utah voter: Mormon, conservative, Republican, and moderate combined. These individual political atoms can arise from interpretations of official LDS doctrine, engagement of national political debates and ideology (those not specifically native to Utah or LDS), and immersion in the the unofficial but no-less potent LDS culture that absorbs both doctrine and national politics and tries to make sense of them all. This “molecule,” however, is weaker than

assumed. To be a Mormon politically is to be a moderate, yet to be a Republican (nationally) is to be unabashedly conservative. The bonds that hold this political molecule together are modest, but remain intact because few seek to reexamine them.

To be clear, this paper will not attempt to conclude that voters in Utah—Mormon or otherwise—do not currently hold allegiances to either the Republican Party or conservative values, or that any Democratic victory in the state is necessarily easier to obtain than previously thought. Certainly, a state that has not had a Democratic senator in the last 34 years and has only had one Democratic congressperson in the last 14 years has solid

ties to the Republican Party and its conservative platform, even if only by routine. However, this political cohesiveness is not to be mistaken as identical in content and application to other “red states,” in particular the Southern “Bible Belt.” Indeed, “the Confederacy is the Republican Party” (Ardell, 2009), yet Utah and the Mormon Church are not part of the this region, in history or ideology. There is a powerful schism between Utah Republicans and national Republicans, as well as within Utah Republicans themselves. This schism arises primarily on matters of religious faith, but it is also rooted in historical conflict.

“This paper...proposes that a closer analysis of state culture and history will show that although voters in Utah are ostensibly Republican and conservative, government and religion have intertwined in ways not easily comparable to the other ‘reddest’ states.”

MITT ROMNEY’S UPHILL CLIMB

Before establishing the roots and nature of this schism, this paper will show empirical data revealing that the schism exists in the modern political arena and examine some of the more noticeable ways in which it is manifested. Utah’s political base is comprised largely of Mormons, the majority religion

of the state at 62.2% (Canham, 2012) and the historical home and operating base of the LDS Church. On top of simple demographics is Utah's status as the second-most religious state (Meyers, 2012), meaning that LDS religion and culture greatly influences the politics of the state—for example, “most of the [Utah] Legislature is LDS” (Meyers, 2012). It is hard to separate the state of Utah from the Mormon Church at large when considering how the two intertwine with politics.

This means that Utah Mormons—regardless of political persuasion—seem to be at odds with the remainder of the nation's conservative population, as they have shown great distrust with the Mormon faith, both in the past and present. Many Evangelical Christians that make up the base of the national GOP—44% of Republican primary voters—hold the “mainstream view” that Mormonism is a “cult” (Kornacki, 2011). Polling at large backs this claim further. A 2007 Gallup telephone interview poll showed that when presented with possible non-traditional attributes of presidential candidates (ostensibly mirroring the then-potential 2008 presidential candidates), specifics such as being Catholic, black, or Jewish, traditionally thought to be roadblocks to a candidate becoming president, were met with relatively microscopic resistance; over 90% of all voters claim to have been willing to vote for presidential candidates with these attributes in the 2008 election. However, voter willingness took a sharp dip when the subject of a Mormon candidate was raised. Only 72% of all voters stated they would be willing to vote for a Mormon presidential candidate, by far the lowest percentage of the three organized religions presented to voters. This number dropped lower when limited to responses by self-professed conservatives, who expressed a willingness of only 66%. While higher than other qualities listed in the poll, such as multiple marriages, homosexuality, and atheism, Gallup noted that out of all the qualities recorded over a 70-year period (polling in 1937, 1977, and 2007), Mormonism was the only quality that did not gain acceptance over the years, dropping from 75% willingness in 1967 to 72% willingness in 2007 (Jones, 2007). A 2006 Rasmussen poll showed that national acceptance for Mormon candidates was even lower with Evangelical Christians, with 53% stating outright that they would not consider voting for a Mormon candidate (Rasmussen, 2006), and 2008 polling data showed that when “Romney's Mormon faith is brought to the front of [Republican and GOP-leaning] voters' minds, it has a clear negative impact” (Clement, 2011).

The issues that the conservative Republican voting base hold toward Mormons is best reflected in the recent political history of Mitt Romney. Romney gave an August 2007 radio interview with Iowa radio station WHO, “a regular stop for GOP presidential hopefuls,” that quickly became a “heated discussion” with Romney, who was “agitated at being forced to defend what he and his church stand for” (Martin, 2007). Even after Romney received support from conservative commentators Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter, and Laura Ingraham “telling their listeners to back [Romney]” in the 2008 primary season, “[t]hese loud voices...were thoroughly ignored” by the conservative base (Dickerson, 2008). Four years later, the 2012 election cycle has so far not diminished Mitt Romney's problems with evangelical voters that constitute the voting base of the Republican party, a process in which “Romney's success [in GOP primaries and caucuses] has been inversely proportional to the percentage of evangelicals voting in a given state,” many who believe that the Mormon faith is a “cult” (Murphy, 2012). Though Romney is poised to secure the 2012 GOP Presidential nomination, it was only because of a field of weak alternatives to Romney that would allow a “party dominated by the South with an intensely conservative core...to nominate a moderate from Massachusetts” (Stewart, 2012).

Embedded in both the 2007 Gallup poll and Mitt Romney's primary experiences in 2008 and 2012 is the revealing empirical truth that Mormons fare better nationally with liberals and Democrats than conservatives and Republicans. In the Gallup poll, this paper previously stated that only 72% of voters were willing to vote for a prospective Mormon presidential candidate; yet compared to only 66% willingness for conservatives, liberals expressed a 75% willingness to vote for a Mormon, comparable to 77% willingness with moderates (Jones, 2007). In Romney's political career, his sole election to a major political office was his 2002 gubernatorial win in Massachusetts, widely perceived as one of the most liberal states in the country, much as his Mormon father George Romney won two gubernatorial elections in 1962 and 1966 in “blue state” Michigan. Though not a successful campaign, Mitt Romney's 1994 Massachusetts Senate campaign against incumbent (and state/liberal icon) Ted Kennedy resulted in the slimmest margin of victory in Kennedy's senate career. Indeed, it has been suggested that Romney's best chance at winning the White House was

“Embedded in both the 2007 Gallup poll and Mitt Romney's primary experiences in 2008 and 2012 is the revealing empirical truth that Mormons fare better nationally with liberals and Democrats than conservatives and Republicans.”

through becoming a Senator from Massachusetts, the theory being that Romney could easily win in Massachusetts and use a term in the Senate to show his conservative credentials to the Republican voting base (Roff, 2009). That a Mormon Republican would have to become elected in a nominally-liberal state simply so he could have the platform to later prove himself to conservatives shows the roadblocks that Mormon candidates face from national Republican voters.

Yet, this should not necessarily be the case. While 2011 polling suggested that Republicans at large have warmed to the idea of a Mormon president more than Democrats, the LDS Church has stated that when non-Mormons “become more familiar with the church and its members, they become more relaxed about [them]” and are more willing to vote for them (York, 2011). This has only shown itself to be true in the “blue states” in which the moderates therein have accepted the Romney family, such as in Massachusetts and Michigan.

It should be noted that from an electoral perspective, the only place that Mitt Romney has had greater success in winning competitive campaigns than these blue states has so far been the state of Utah, as exemplified by the 2008 presidential primary. According to CNN's 2008 presidential primary coverage, Romney's victory in Utah with 90% of the Republican primary voting base was by far the greatest margin of victory in the 2008 Super Tuesday primaries, as well as Romney's highest showing in a 2008 state primary, ahead of Massachusetts's 51% victory and Michigan's 39% victory. Continuing this trend of success in “blue states,” the 2012 GOP presidential nomination results had Romney's highest showings coming from traditional Democratic strongholds, such as Massachusetts and Washington, D.C., with Romney gaining over 70% of the primary vote in both, an even better showing than the 62% received in Mormon-saturated Idaho (CNN, 2012). In fact, Mitt Romney has won the primary or caucus during the 2012 GOP Presidential Nomination race in every state that went to Barack Obama in the 2008 Presidential Election (that has held their election as of April 2012) with the exceptions of Colorado, Iowa, and Minnesota, for a total of 20 out of 23 states that Obama won in 2008.

George and Mitt Romney are not the only Republican politicians who have found success in blue and blue-leaning states. Senator Dean Heller of Nevada and Representatives Wally Herger and Buck McKeon from California are current Mormon Republicans serving in Congress from states that went blue in 2008. In fact, the only Republican Mormon elected from a state that is not Utah or Idaho (the states with the most traditionally large Mormon population) is Representative Jeff Flake of Arizona. Meanwhile, there are four Mormon Democrats in Congress, including Senator Major-

ity Leader Harry Reid from Nevada and Representative Jim Matheson from Utah. Therefore, seven out of 15 Mormon U.S. congressmen are either themselves Democrat or elected from a blue state (Weaver, 2011). While Republicans representing red states form the majority of Mormon congressmen, many owe their electoral victories to Democratic voters, blue state voters, or both.

UTAH DEMOCRATS: ENDANGERED SPECIES

In spite of the divide between Utah Mormon Republicans and the rest of the nation's conservative Christian Republicans, the electoral prospects for Democrats in Utah elections are met with a mixture of dismissal and casual ignorance. In the 2010 midterm elections, moderate "Blue Dog" Democratic Congressman Jim Matheson—the aforementioned solitary Democratic congressman from Utah in the past 14 years—was accidentally labeled a Republican by ABC television anchor Rick Klein, who after quickly correcting the mistake, offered the excuse that "in my defense, 'Utah Democrat' is hard to say" (Burr, 2010). During the same midterm election season, election forecast blog *FiveThirtyEight* stated that Democratic Senate candidate Sam Granato had "zero chance" at winning the 2010 election in Utah (Canham, 2010); this bleak outlook was more bluntly stated by a blogger at popular Democratic blog Daily Kos, who categorized Granato's chances by including him in a list called the Dead Girl/Live Boy List. This list was named as such under the premise that in order to for the Democratic nominee to have a chance to win, the Republican candidate in the race would have to be colloquially "caught in bed with either a dead girl or a live boy" ("horizontalrule," 2010). Though Utah was only listed as the sixth toughest race out of 12 (for comparison, the number one entry on the list was the uncontested John Thune reelection bid in South Dakota), the Utah Senate race was the highest ranked election in which the Republican presumed to win was not running for re-election. Even a blog dedicated to electing Democrats nationwide did not like the chances of defeating the then-unknown Republican Mike Lee, noting, "Utah remains a very red state after all" ("horizontalrule," 2010).

At this point, let's review. On the one hand, the prevailing political wisdom nationwide is that Democratic chances in Utah are hardly worth considering. Yet, the evidence on a national level shows that Mormon Republicans find greater electoral success in traditionally liberal states (Utah notwithstanding), and continually run into harsh resistance from the Evangelical Christians that are a prominent part of the national Republican base. If one were unfamiliar with American politics, one might be confused as to why Mormon Republicans would want to be part of a party whose base distrusts them so profoundly, and one might likewise be surprised that this relationship is considered so dependable that even the opposition party's base considers it a foregone conclusion. The question then becomes, how did this Utah Mormon/Republican relationship become what it is, and more specifically, what is its true nature?

REPUBLICANS AND MORMONS IN UTAH: A HAPPY MARRIAGE?

The political history of the Republican Party in Utah is very similar in its path to that of the history of the LDS Church, and no issue has set the tone for how Mormons (and Utah at large) interact with the rest of the country as has polygamy. It was on this issue that the United States federal government put the Utah territory under non-LDS control, "[d]riven largely by a revulsion against plural marriage" (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 323). This revulsion held plural marriage "as a brutish practice on par with slavery"

(Krakauer, 2003, p. 6), a sentiment so strong that Republican presidential candidate John C. Fremont promised, if elected, to combat the "twin relics of barbarism—Polygamy and Slavery" (Ibid.). Indeed, "no aspect of [Mormon] history makes the church more defensive than 'plural marriage'" (Krakauer, 2003, p. 5). It was thus the Church's public rejection of polygamy, "more than anything else, that transformed the LDS Church into its... present-day iteration" (Ibid., p. 7).

However, on a partisan level, the handling of the issue of polygamy not only defines the mainstreaming of the Church, but also shows close alignment with the moderate partisan development of the state. The original political intents of the Mormon Church in the state of Utah were theologically radical. Joseph Smith "envisioned a theocracy" for Mormon rule, and Brigham Young "presided over both sides of the wall, simultaneously being church president and governor of the Utah Territory" (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 323). However, with the pressure to join the Union through statehood, the Church began to moderate Utah politics by "balancing political affiliations" (Ibid., p. 334) in a seemingly arbitrary manner. Monroe McKay, federal judge and cousin of former Church President David O. McKay, recalled "popular folklore" in a 1999 interview that former Church President Wilford Woodruff told LDS bishops to divide the members of their wards "evenly to the two national political parties" (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 334). The bishops then "used the central aisle as the division point, and assigned half the house to one party and the other half to the other" (Ibid., p. 334).

The partisan relevance of this story becomes clearer when coupled with the fact that it was Woodruff who wrote the 1890 Manifesto that began the LDS Church's formal disapproval of polygamy. The story places the Mormon break from polygamy and the non-partisan nature of the state of Utah at the feet of the same man. Admittedly, the folklore as told by Monroe McKay is unverifiable in both its authenticity and its attribution to Woodruff (the story is also attributed to Apostle John Henry Smith) (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 334). Yet, it cannot be dismissed that a person with such connections within the Mormon Church would tie this "popular folklore" to a man who began the Mormon Church's break from polygamy, albeit reluctantly and "with broken spirit" (Krakauer, 2003, p. 252), and thus its immersion into broader America.

While we see that Utah's political history holds religious directives toward non-partisanship, it also shows a different and unique connection to the Civil War, the event that has arguably most influenced the nature of the current political and partisan divide in this country. Joseph Smith had made statements that seemed to predict the Civil War, and Mormons felt that "the dissolution of the Union vindicated their prophet's statements" (Holzapfel, 1994). However, though Utahns agreed with the Confederate stances on state sovereignty, "the people in Utah never really seriously considered supporting the Confederacy," and "on numerous occasions they affirmed their loyalty to the Union" by assisting the Union militarily (Holzapfel, 1994). This loyalty was marked by the popularity Abraham Lincoln received when it was reported that he had said, "[y]ou go back and tell Brigham Young that if he will let me alone I will let him alone" (Ibid.). Young himself sent a message to Lincoln, stating "Utah has not seceded, but is firm for the Constitution and laws of our once happy country," illustrating the Mormons' "profound regard for and belief in the divine nature of the U.S. Constitution" (Ibid.).

This alliance with the Union separates Utah from the Confederate culture that otherwise dominates the Republican Party's Southern "Bible Belt" base. The Southern states largely took roost in the Democratic Party in response to Civil War grievances, voting for "Dixiecrat" candidates up

"In spite of the divide between Utah Mormon Republicans and the rest of the nation's conservative Christian Republicans, the electoral prospects for Democrats in Utah elections are met with a mixture of dismissal and casual ignorance."

until President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, whereupon Southern party allegiances switched to the Republican Party. Johnson is reported to have said at the signing, “there goes the South for a generation” (Noah, 2004). This political switch in response to the Civil Rights Act stems from Confederate slavery and Jim Crow racial tensions, a switch that did not affect the state of Utah. Coincidentally, Mormons have had their own racial issues with blacks in Utah, although these issues stemmed from revoked church policy barring black men from serving in the LDS priesthood. A quote from Brigham Young, though not official Church doctrine and later condemned by the Church, best explains some members’ rationalization behind it, that “God marked Cain with blackness and cursed him so he would forever be persecuted” (Ramirez, 2005), and therefore the skin of African descent should be viewed in a similar fashion. There is a “prolonged Mormon debate over whether the ban resulted from divine doctrine or inherited historical racism” (Horowitz, 2012), but while the similarities with Confederate-influenced southern racism may be apparent, this is now an outdated interpretation that no longer applies to either modern Mormon doctrine or culture, and is one the LDS Church has attempted to make amends for.

Indeed, when compared to the overtly racist 60s Southern power brokers such as Bull Connor and George Wallace, the Mormon Church comparably comes across as civil rights pioneers. The Church stated in 1970 that the priesthood ban was simply a religious issue, not a civil one, and that black Utahns had “full constitutional privileges as a member of society” in spite of the ban, denying any claims of segregation, for Mormons “know something of the suffering of those who are discriminated against” (Time, 1970). The Church even hinted of “a revelation will one day open the priesthood to Negroes—just as a revelation ended polygamy during a critical confrontation with the U.S. Government in the past century” (Ibid.). This came to fruition when the policy was reversed in 1978, with Church leader N. Eldon Tanner declaring that “all worthy male members of the Church” could hold the priesthood.

Furthering the Church’s willingness to self-moderate on this issue was the acceptance by David O. McKay of an invitation from Lyndon B. Johnson to serve on a national committee in response to the passing of the Civil Rights Act. Though McKay had private concerns about the wisdom of the Act’s passing, he nonetheless wrote to Johnson, “I decided when national difficulties crossed your path that I would attempt to lighten your load whenever possible” (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 71). In response to 1965 protests by the NAACP concerning Utah’s lack of laws protecting minority civil rights, McKay upgraded a pro-civil rights statement written by Apostle Hugh B. Brown to “official” status, a statement that, in part, read: “We would like it to be known that there is in this Church no doctrine, belief, or practice that is intended to deny the enjoyment of full civil rights by any person regardless of race, color, or creed” (Ibid., p. 69).

In spite of these differences between Utah Mormons and national Republicans that might have been created by this unique history, there are many issues by which Utah Mormons align with the Republican Party, because its positions “are similar to LDS Church positions” (Walch, 2007). The Mormon Church espouses the principle of “free agency” or personal choice and association, for “it is the only way in which humankind can progress toward internalizing godlike qualities” (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 41). This principle has influenced Mormon culture in Utah politically, and it has traditionally disapproved of Communist-style governments, and to a lesser extent disapproved of labor unions, especially compulsory union membership. The use of “closed shops,” when a business only employs

union members, was of particular issue during the turn of the 20th century, as they “prevent men from working who do not belong to labor unions,” and thus restrict their free agency (Davies, 1994). Utah passed a “right to work” bill in 1955 that prevents worker discrimination based on union membership, a culmination of decades of moves by Church leadership that “sought to bring Utah into the American political and economic mainstream” by “becoming integrated into a capitalistic economic system” (Ibid.). The Church abandoned traditional groups such as cooperatives and United Orders, “seen by many as forms of socialism” (Ibid.). In 1961, President McKay wrote a letter to the Chamber of Commerce, specifying that the doctrine of free agency protected “the right to voluntary unionism,” and in 1937 told LDS leaders that “[i]t is un-American when 5% of this nation attempts to force the other 95% along a particular line of action” (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 325). Utah Republicans cull this sentiment not from a broad anti-union tendency, but rather an emphasis on compulsory union membership, and that the principle of free agency stems from a desire to moderate and assimilate into the American mainstream. This history, though similar to the American labor movement at large, nonetheless developed in “relative isolation” (Davies, 1994).

The concept of free agency, and the larger issue of personal choice, extends to other issues that align the Mormon Church with the Republican Party. Writing in his 1990 *Ensign* article “Covenants,” now-President of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles Boyd K. Packer lamented the teaching of evolution, in that it promoted the idea that “man is only an advanced animal,” and that “[m]oral laws do not apply to animals for they have no agency” (Packer, 1990). This issue with evolution is not contingent on scientific concerns or a strict literal interpretation of the Bible, as with many Southern evangelicals.

Likewise, Packer wrote “abortion is not an individual choice, . . . [a]t a minimum, three lives are involved,” presumably that of the mother, father, and unborn child (Packer, 1990). However, Packer stated that abortion is not on par with murder, citing the Doctrine and Covenants 59:6, which states that “Thou shalt not . . . kill, nor do anything like unto it,” with Packer adding “italics added” (Packer, 1990). The Mormon perception on the contrast between abortion and murder allows for a different scriptural interpretation. Indeed, this interpretation allows Packer to allow for “very exceptional cases” where “the wicked crime of incest or rape was involved, or where competent medical authorities certify that the life of the mother is in jeopardy, or that a severely defective fetus cannot survive birth” (Packer, 1990). Though decidedly pro-life, this position is noticeably more moderate and complicated than the 2008 Republican Party platform, which “will not allow for exceptions in the cases of rape, incest or to save the life of the mother” (Seelye, 2008).

Reflecting national sentiments, the issue of communism during the Cold War challenged the Church’s march to moderation. President David O. McKay, a lifelong Republican who preferred to keep his partisan leanings private, believed that the “primary evil of communism was its denial to the individual of free agency” (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 281), and warned that “communist rats are working here in the United States and are gnawing at the very vitals of our government” (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 280). During this period, Ezra Taft Benson, Apostle and Secretary of Agriculture under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, began to rise in political stature in both a local and national scale, largely due to his outspoken anti-communist sentiments. Benson gave similar warnings of communists in America, declaring post-Eisenhower in 1961 of an “insidious infiltration of communist agents and sympathizers into almost every segment of American Life” (Krakauer, 2003, pp. 85-86), which, in the dismayed opinion of Benson,

“In spite of these differences between Utah Mormons and national Republicans that might have been created by this unique history, there are many issues by which Utah Mormons align with the Republican Party, because its positions ‘are similar to LDS Church positions.’ ”

included Eisenhower himself, “a tool of the worldwide communist conspiracy” (Davidson, 2010).

However, despite the anti-communist camaraderie with McKay, Benson wasn't able to convince McKay to lead the Mormon Church to embrace the John Birch Society, the radical right-wing anti-communist group. McKay told Benson, “I have heard about the John Birch Society, and everything so far has been negative” (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 289). Despite this, he did not forbid Benson from allowing his son, Reed, to join the society, which he did. This connection of the John Birch Society with the Benson family “lent the flavor of official church endorsement, a situation that infuriated many Mormons” (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 290). The First Presidency thus felt compelled to speak on the subject, releasing a statement that said, in part: “We denounce communism as being anti-Christian, anti-American, and the enemy of freedom, but we think they who pretend to fight it by casting aspersions on our elected officers or other fellow citizens do the anti-communist cause a great disservice” (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 290). Benson's right-wing extremism also conflicted with the Church's position on civil rights for African-Americans, in light of McKay's aforementioned involvement with President Johnson concerning the Civil Rights Act. Benson had blasted civil rights as a “communist program for revolution in America,” with Martin Luther King, Jr. being the movement's “communist leader” (Corley, 2010).

In spite of these conflicts, Benson and McKay were hardly enemies. McKay “prized his intense loyal support, and shared his deep, visceral disdain for communism” (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 298), and Benson himself would later become President of the LDS Church. However, Benson was undeniably creating problems for the Church with his John Birch connections. When Robert Welch, founder of the John Birch Society came to Salt Lake City for a banquet in his honor, his presence was controversial and upsetting. Utah politician and political guru Robert H. Hinckley, then working in New York for ABC, wrote a letter to McKay noting Welch's “false witness” accusations of communist sympathies toward Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and President John F. Kennedy (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 311). The letter begged of McKay:

I fervently hope that Mr. Welch, the Birch head, will receive no recognition of any sort from you or the Church while he is in Salt Lake City. And I beseech you to require a decision from Elder Benson forthwith as to whether his life will be dedicated to Church or Birch. He is doing the Church a great, great disservice by mixing the two. (Prince & Wright, 2005, p. 311)

Benson was not the only Mormon John Birch follower creating problems for the Church and the state at large. W. Cleon Skousen, former FBI agent and chief of police in Salt Lake City, was making waves of his own. Skousen published a book detailing his theories on communism called *The Naked Communist*, and he became a star in extremist right-wing circles, his works growing in popularity and influence. Yet, “[no] conservative organization with any mainstream credibility wanted anything to do with him” (Zaitchik, 2009). The LDS Church formally disavowed Skousen and his Freeman Institute in 1979 in a statement by Church President Spencer W. Kimball, stating: “[N]o announcements should be made in Church meetings of Freeman Institute lectures or events that are not under the sponsorship of the Church. [This] is to make certain that neither Church facilities nor Church meetings are used to advertise such events and to avoid any implication that the Church endorses what is said during such lectures” (Zaitchick, 2009).

In reviewing the more recent political history of Utah, we see that in

spite of the LDS-led, free agency-inspired resistance of communism, this impulse was nonetheless tempered and moderate in application. The school of thought as espoused by Benson and Skousen, however, is not theological, but rather is conspiratorial, and certainly not moderate. Yet in recent years, it is this strain of political extremism in Mormon Republican circles that has broken free of the constraints of Utah's political moderation, latching onto the national Tea Party movement.

The primary means by which this extremism has returned has been through the TV and radio shows of Glenn Beck. Beck, a convert to Mormonism after fighting substance abuse, has prominently featured the words and writings of both Benson and Skousen on his shows, “reintroducing old ideas...that America's leaders are indistinguishable from America's enemies” such as those espoused by Robert Welch and W. Cleon Skousen (Continetti, 2010). Beck has touted Skousen's book *The 5,000 Year Leap* repeatedly on his shows, described as “the bible of [Beck's] 9/12 movement” (Zaitchik, 2009). Beck wrote, “*The 5000 Year Leap* is essential to understanding why our Founders built this Republic the way they did” (quoted in Continetti, 2010). He has also played clips of quotes from Benson on more than one occasion, remarking, “Ezra Taft Benson knew that serious threat [of Communism.] He saw it first hand. He knew communists were in the government” (quoted in Corley, 2010).

Beck's invocations of Benson and Skousen are not delivered in an irrelevant vacuum. According to Democratic polling firm Democracy Corps, Beck “is the most highly regarded individual among Tea Party supporters [with] an extraordinarily high 75% warm rating, 57% very warm” (Democracy Corps, 2010). It is notable that some of the main voices of the Tea Party movement have been sculpted by major voices associated with, but not endorsed by, the Mormon Church.

The 2010 election of Mike Lee to the U.S. Senate shows the electoral application of the Beck/Skousen/Benson strain of far-right Mormon conservatives, contrary to the historical bend of the Church toward moderation. Lee's positions “appear to be inspired

by the constitutional guru of the Tea Party movement, W. Cleon Skousen” (Rosen, 2010). Lee championed an endorsement from Skousen's son, Paul, on a press release on his campaign website, boasting that Lee “got an ‘A+’ on the ‘101 Questions for Constitutional Candidates’ that are reproduced on the back of the new edition of *The 5,000 Year Leap*,” and that Skousen proclaimed “[w]e need Mike Lee in Washington right now” (Matheson, 2010).

However, Lee's election does not necessarily suggest that Utah has largely adopted the Tea Party/Skousen political platform. Facing anger in response to his vote in favor of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), incumbent Senator Bob Bennett was challenged at the 2010 State Republican Convention in Utah by a host of candidates, including Lee. Lee, the son of former Solicitor General Rex E. Lee and a former clerk to Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, placed first in the first round of the convention with only 28.75%, with Bennett placing third with 25.91% behind fellow challenger Tim Bridgewater with 26.84% (UTGop.org). By the end of the second round, those that had voted for other candidates in the first round had jumped to either Bridgewater or Lee; the second round results had Bennett placing a comparably distant third at 26.99%, behind Bridgewater's 37.42% and Lee's 35.99% (UTGop.org). This placement eliminated Bennett from running for another Senate term as Republican Senator, as he could not be placed on the state primary ballot for Senate nominee.

Though Bennett was clearly swamped by angry convention voters who would have rather voted for anyone but him, a Rasmussen poll conducted with likely Utah GOP primary voters a month prior to the State Convention

“The 2010 election of Mike Lee to the U.S. Senate shows the electoral application of the Beck/Skousen/Benson strain of far-right Mormon conservatives, contrary to the historical bend of the Church toward moderation.”

showed Bennett with a very comfortable plurality of votes, 37% support as compared to 14% for both Lee and Bridgewater (Rasmussen, 2010). This suggests that the more partisan-minded convention voters, numbering in the hundreds, came from a different perspective than the larger group of primary voters, numbering in the thousands. However, rather than recognizing the likely possibility that a small group of Tea Party-influenced convention voters deprived the larger, moderate Utah Republican base of the candidate they preferred, the conventional wisdom of the mainstream media, summarized by CNN, was that Lee's "conservative views...align with those of many Utah voters, who haven't elected a Democrat to the U.S. Senate since 1970" (Acosta & Kapp, 2010). This statement was made despite analysis by the Utah Foundation that showed that in the instance of Lee's victory over Bennett at the state convention, the "GOP delegates [did not] represent the will of the party's voters" (Davidson, 2012).

As it turns out, Lee's views do align with those of some others, most notably his opponent for Senate, Constitution Party candidate Scott Bradley. Lee and Bradley's views are so similar in spirit that Bradley hosted a Skousen-praising essay comparing the two candidates, prefacing:

Both advocate their adherence to the Constitution. Both say they will uphold their oath of office. Both claim reverence for that document. However, since they are two separate human beings, they will not exactly agree on every issue. One will hold to the principles of the Constitution more than the other. The question is, "Which is the better constitutionalist? It is obvious that they are both honorable men. (Bowers, 2010)

In spite of this comparison, the Senate election results did not suggest that Utahns felt the two candidates were comparable. Lee won the seat with 61.56% with Bradley finishing third with a microscopic 5.67% (Utah.gov).

When we look at the empirical data of the convention, primary, and state elections, we see interesting results that should be unpacked to better understand their meaning. Bob Bennett was defeated by a small fraction of the state GOP base at the convention, in clear contrast to the expressed wishes of the polled voters in the upcoming primary. And it seems that once the Republican nominee was set (whether Bob Bennett or another), mainstream Republican voters in the state turned out as expected for their party's candidate, unconcerned with any argument as to who was the better man to enact W. Cleon Skousen's political vision. It can thus be said that the Utah GOP base at large is decidedly more moderate than the partisan state convention voters who deprived the state base of their preferred candidate, yet is still willing to vote for the Republican candidate all the same, without consideration for any third party candidate.

Indeed, in 2012, the Utah Foundation conducted research on Utah voters that showed that increased turnout to both parties' 2012 caucuses—due to Church encouragement for increased political participation, regardless of what party—resulted in "a group of more moderate convention delegates" for the GOP, delegates who were "more representative of voters overall" in contrast to 2010 when "Republican voters and Republican delegates were very different" (Davidson, 2012). Yet, the Mormon representation among Utah GOP delegates increased, from 78% in 2010 to 92% in 2012. So while the Republican partisans who flock to the GOP state convention might debate the theories of Skousen and Benson amongst themselves, Mormon Republicans at large do not carry the same far-right political extremism, and when they show up politically, their moderate politics gains ground.

The state of Utah has clear ties to the Republican Party now, yet the broad interpretation of what it means to be a Utah Republican is better

understood as a product of a "Mormon culture...of moderation and pragmatism" (Stone, 2012), which emphasizes the ideals of free agency, choices, and the importance of the U.S. Constitution. These positions often coincide with the national Republican platform, but differ in historical origin, covering what would otherwise be a strong rift between Utah Mormons and national conservative Evangelicals. One strain of thought, espoused by Ezra Taft Benson, states that one "[can] not see how a person could be both a liberal and a good Mormon" (Corley, 2010). Yet in 2007, the highest ranking Mormon in the U.S. Government, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, gave a speech before a crowd at Brigham Young University that "I am a Democrat because I am a Mormon, not in spite of it" (Walch, 2007). Reid blamed Benson by name as past an example of some past right-wing Church leaders who have unfairly pushed right-wing politics onto Mormon voters, saying that "members of the church are obedient...they are followers in the truest sense of the word" (Walch, 2007). Indeed, the influence of the Mormon Church as a moderate and bipartisan player in Utah politics was revealed during the 2012 party caucuses in Utah, in which the Utah Democratic party saw record turnout, attributed to a letter from the First Presidency which read, "Principles compatible with the gospel may be found in the platforms of the various political parties. We encourage members to attend their precinct caucus meetings" (Perry, 2012).

In an interview for this paper, Craig Janis, LDS Outreach Director for the Utah Democratic Party, agreed with Reid's sentiment, also saying that he was a Democrat because he was Mormon. But Janis stated that LDS doctrine does not specify any particular preference for political ideology, and that Utah's political landscape as we understand it is simply the result of who has traditionally expressed themselves the loudest. He stated that "if you get the masses of LDS people out to get involved in the political sphere, you're more likely to see real, regular LDS doctrine in action."

He stated that LDS doctrine overlaps with Democratic positions such as on immigration, where the LDS Church "has become a decisive player in promoting policies that are decidedly more friendly toward immigrants" than those of national Republicans (Goodstein, 2012). Even on issues such as gay rights, Janis believes that the Church's infamous backing of California's "Prop 8" law in 2008 was simply "naivety"—a "major PR misstep" into a political battle that the Church did not fully understand before it entered, rather than a deliberate attempt to promote any radical anti-gay political agenda. Indeed, in 2009, the LDS Church came out in support of non-discrimination ordinances in Salt Lake City on housing and employment rights of gays

and lesbians, in contrast to the uproar that the Prop 8 debate created. And while Janis says the LDS Church's ordinance position was "absolutely" a political response to the Prop 8 fallout, it nonetheless represented a fair interpretation of official Mormon doctrine, which "does not object to rights regarding hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment rights, or probate rights, so long as these do not infringe on the integrity of the family or the constitutional rights of churches and their adherents to administer and practice their religion free from government interference" (Taylor, 2009).

This kind of political duality on this particular issue—being pro-gay rights with the exception of marriage equality—doesn't surprise Janis, who believes that "if you're actually looking at LDS doctrine, you can't agree with everything in either party. You can be a member of either party, but you have to be a moderate of either party."

"It can thus be said that the Utah GOP base at large is decidedly more moderate than the partisan state convention voters who deprived the state base of their preferred candidate, yet is still willing to vote for the Republican candidate all the same, without consideration for any third party candidate."

CONCLUSION

Harry Reid's visit to BYU recalled a 1968 speech at BYU by then-Presidential candidate Bobby Kennedy, where 15,000 people stood "waiting for a rock star" (Walch, 2007). Reid's Mormon credentials are strong, yet his reception at BYU was comparably tepid. While Reid personally recognizes that "Mormon" and "Democrat" are not exclusive terms, it would be the responsibility of the Democratic Party to prove that to the voters of Utah. The Democratic Party should recognize that Utah's status as a Republican stronghold is misleading, but that there is also a vast moderate voting bloc buried beneath the Skousens and Bensons of the state.

REFERENCES

- Acosta, J., & Kapp, B. (2010, September 07). Does tea party want to defend or change constitution? CNN. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/09/07/acosta.tea.party.constitution/index.html>
- Ardell, D.B. (2009, December 13). The Republican party has become the new confederate states of America. *TPJ Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://tpjmagazine.us/ardell41>
- Bowers, K. (2010). A comparison of the beliefs of Scott Bradley and Mike Lee. Scott Bradley for U.S. Senate. Retrieved from <http://www.scottbradleyforsenate.com/comparebradleywithlee.html>
- Burr, T. (2010, October 15). ABC host apologizes for calling Matheson a Republican. *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/blogs/outofcontext/50282684-64/matheson-klein-republican-abc.html.csp>
- Canham, M. (2010, August 26). Zero chance? *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/blogs/outofcontext/50171885-64/silver-chance-democrat-eight.html.csp>
- Canham, M. (2012, April 15). Census: share of Utah's Mormon residents holds steady. *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/home3/53909710-200/population-lds-county-utah.html.csp>
- Clement, S. (2011, October 20). Will Romney's Mormonism hurt him in Republican primaries? *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/behind-the-numbers/post/will-romneys-mormonism-hurt-him-in-republican-primaries/2011/10/07/gIQA-QCqF1L_blog.html
- CNN. (2008). 2008 Primary results. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/primaries/results/dates/index.html#20080205>
- CNN. (2008). 2008 Primary results. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/primaries/results/candidates/#893>
- CNN. (2012). 2012 Primary results. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/primaries/candidates/893>
- Continetti, M. (2010, June 28). The two faces of the tea party. *The Weekly Standard*. Retrieved from <http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/two-faces-tea-party?nopager=1>
- Corley, M. (2010, June 25). Beck, a self-proclaimed heir to civil rights movement, promotes quotes by anti-civil rights Ezra Taft Benson. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <http://thinkprogress.org/2010/06/25/beck-quotes-benson/>
- DailyKos - horizontalrule. (2010, July 16). The dead girl/live boy list, aka our 12 toughest races [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2010/07/16/884553/-The-Dead-Girl-Live-Boy-List,-aka-Our-12-Toughest-Races>
- Davidson, L. (2010, November 10). FBI files shed light on Ezra Taft Benson, Ike and the Birch Society. *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/csp/cms/sites/sltrib/pages/printerfriendly.csp?id=50349153>
- Davidson, L. (2012, April 17). Poll: Utah GOP delegates more moderate than two years ago. *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/mobile/53932799-68/delegates-democratic-district-foundation.html.csp>
- Davies, J.K. (1994). The Right-to-Work Movement. Manuscript submitted for publication, Media Solutions, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah. Retrieved from <http://www.media.utah.edu/UHE/r/RIGHT-TOWORK.html>
- Davies, J.K. (1994). The Utah Labor Movement. Unpublished manuscript, Media Solutions, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah. Retrieved from <http://www.media.utah.edu/UHE/l/LABOR.html>
- De Groote, M. (2012, March 30). Changing the Mormon image: Behind the scenes of LDS church media efforts. *The Deseret News*. Retrieved from <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/765564530/Changing-the-Mormon-image-Behind-the-scenes-of-LDS-Church-media-efforts.html>
- Democracy Corps (2010, July 19). An ideological Republican grass-roots movement. Democracy Corps. Retrieved from <http://www.democracy-corps.com/strategy/2010/07/special-report-on-the-tea-party-movement/?section=Analysis>
- Dickerson, J. (2008, February 06). McCain not stopped but Romney is not seen as a true conservative. *Slate*. Retrieved from <http://www.slate.com/id/2183810/>
- Egan, T. (2011, June 09). The reluctant Mormon. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/06/09/the-reluctant-mormon/>
- Goodstein, L. (2012, February 02). Romney's tough immigration view is at odds with his church. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/03/us/politics/romney-immigration-position-at-odds-with-mormon-church.html?pagewanted=all>
- Holzappel, R.N. (1994). *The Civil War in Utah*. Manuscript submitted for publication, Media Solutions, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah. Retrieved from <http://www.media.utah.edu/UHE/c/CIVILWAR.html>
- Horowitz, J. (2012, February 28). The genesis of a church's stance on race. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis-of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQA-QZXYfR_story.html
- Jones, J.M. (2007, February 20). Some Americans reluctant to vote for Mormon, 72-year-old presidential candidates. Gallup. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/26611/Some-Americans-Reluctant-Vote-Mormon-72YearOld-Presidential-Candidates.aspx>
- Kornacki, S. (2011, December 14). The GOP base and "the cult of Mormon". *Salon*. Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/2011/12/14/the_gop_base_and_the_cult_of_mormon/

- Krakauer, J. (2003). *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Martin, J. (2007, August 04). Mitt unplugged. Politico. Retrieved from http://www.politico.com/blogs/jonathanmartin/0807/Mitt_unplugged.html
- Matheson, B. (2010, March 25). Reagan White House staffer Paul Skousen endorses Mike Lee. MikeLee2010.com. Retrieved from http://www.mikelee2010.com/docs/pr_032510.pdf
- Meyers, D.W. (2012, March 30). Mormons make Utah nation's 2nd most religious state. *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/53811534-78/religious-percent-utah-state.html.csp>
- Murphy, T. (2012, April 05). Anti-Mormons for Mitt? Mother Jones, Retrieved from <http://motherjones.com/politics/2012/04/anti-mormons-mitt-romney>
- Noah, T. (2004, January 27). Forget the south, Democrats. Slate, Retrieved from <http://www.slate.com/id/2094552/>
- Packer, B.K. (1990, November). Covenants. *Ensign*, 84, Retrieved from <http://lds.org/ensign/1990/11/covenants?lang=eng>
- Perry, S.K. (2012, March 21). LDS Dems credit record caucus numbers to letter from LDS first presidency. *The Deseret News*. Retrieved from <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865552539/LDS-Dems-credit-record-caucus-numbers-to-letter-from-LDS-First-Presidency.html>
- Prince, G.A., & Wright, W.R. (2005). *David O. McKay and the rise of modern Mormonism*. Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press.
- Ramirez, M. (2005, July 26). Mormon past steeped in racism. *The Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/services/newspaper/eedition/chi-blackmormons,0,1972467,full.story>
- Rasmussen. (2006, November 20). Election 2008: 43% would never vote for a Mormon candidate. Rasmussen Reports, Retrieved from http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/top_stories/election_2008_43_would_never_vote_for_mormon_candidate
- Rasmussen. (2010, April 15). Utah GOP enate primary: Bennett earns 37% support. Rasmussen Reports. Retrieved from http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/elections/election_2010/election_2010_senate_elections/utah/election_2010_utah_republican_primary_for_senate
- Roff, P. (2009, August 26). Romney for senate? Succeeding Kennedy could help in 2012. *US News & World Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/peter-roff/2009/08/26/romney-for-senate-succeeding-kennedy-could-help-in-2012>
- Rosen, J. (2010, November 26). Radical constitutionalism. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/28/magazine/28FOB-idealab-t.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all
- Rutenberg, J. (2012, January 07). Huntsman, out of options, bets it all on New Hampshire. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/08/us/politics/ready-or-not-huntsman-faces-his-moment-in-new-hampshire.html?pagewanted=all>
- Seelye, K.Q. (2008, August 30). GOP holds to firm stance on abortion. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/31/us/politics/31abortion.html>
- Stirewalt, C. (2012, April 09). Mitt Romney, after all. Fox News. Retrieved from <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2012/04/09/mitt-romney-after-all/>
- Taylor, S. (2009, November 10). Mormon church backs protection of gay rights in Salt Lake City. *The Deseret News*. Retrieved from <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705343558/Mormon-Church-backs-protection-of-gay-rights-in-Salt-Lake-City.html>
- Time (1970, January 19). Religion: Mormons and the mark of Cain. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,878674,00.html>
- Utah Election Results. (2010). 2010 general election preliminary results. Retrieved from <http://electionresults.utah.gov/xmlData/main.html>
- Utah GOP. (2010). 2010 Primary 1st round results. Retrieved from <http://blog.utgop.org/sites/2010/05/senate-race-1st-round-results/>
- Utah GOP. (2010). 2010 Primary 2nd round results. Retrieved from <http://blog.utgop.org/sites/2010/05/senate-race-2nd-round-results/>
- Vander Plaats, B. (2012, February 22). Mitt Romney can't be trusted so Rick Santorum is more electable. *US News & World Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/debate-club/is-rick-santorum-more-electable-than-mitt-romney/mitt-romney-cant-be-trusted-so-rick-santorum-is-more-electable>
- Walch, T. (2007, October 09). No protests expected during Reid's BYU visit. *The Deseret News*. Retrieved from <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/print/695217006/No-protests-expected-during-Reids-BYU-visit.html>
- Walch, T. (2007, October 10). Reid gets warm reception at BYU. *The Deseret News*. Retrieved from <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/print/695217316/Reid-gets-warm-reception-at-BYU.html>
- Weaver, S.J. (2011, January 08). 15 Mormons serving in U.S. Congress. *LDS Church News*. Retrieved from <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/60334/15-Mormons-serving-in-US-Congress.html>
- Wilson, R. (2009, January 29). Utah is reddest state, Rhode Island bluest. *The Hill*. Retrieved from <http://thehill.com/homenews/news/17982-utah-is-reddest-state-rhode-island-bluest>
- York, B. (2011, June). Anti-Mormon bias persists, notably among Democrats. *The Washington Examiner*. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/peter-roff/2009/08/26/romney-for-senate-succeeding-kennedy-could-help-in-2012>
- Zaitchik, A. (2009, September 16). Meet the man who changed Glenn Beck's life. *Salon*. Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2009/09/16/beck_skousen