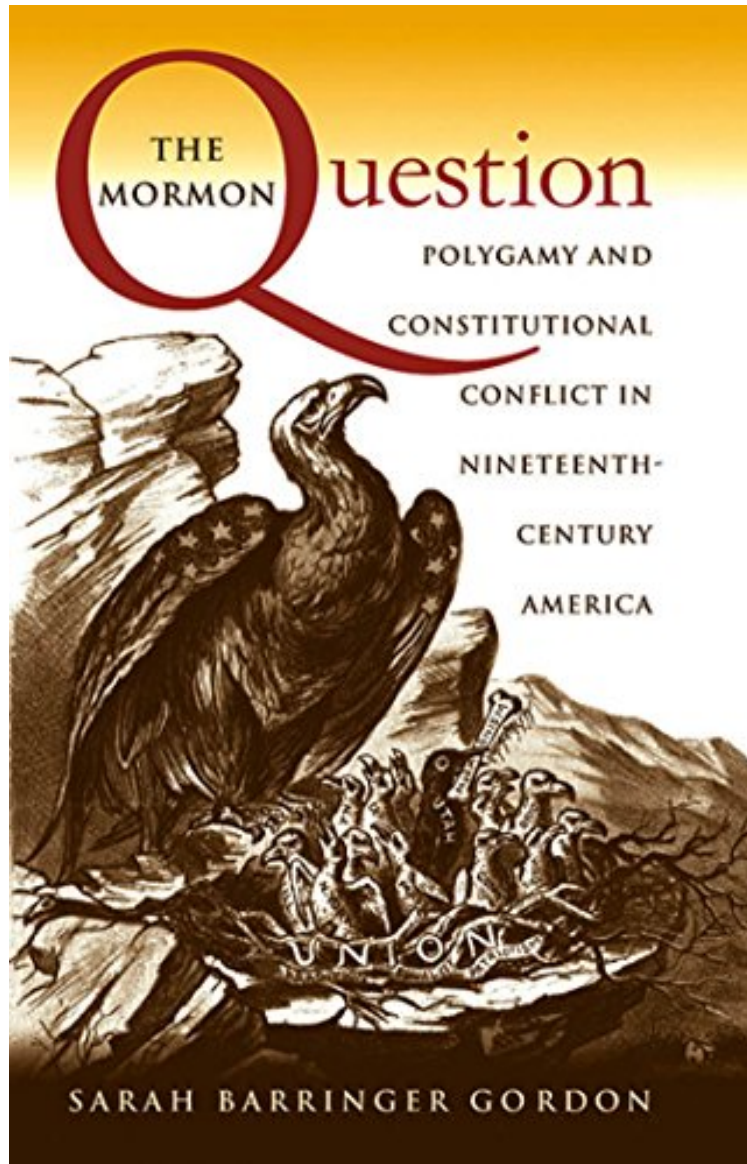


# The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America

*Sarah Barringer Gordon*

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**Sarah Barringer Gordon : The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not a bad read, but definitely not particularly compelling. By CustomerPresents plenty of not-so-widely-known information and historical background. Not a bad read, but definitely not particularly compelling. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Polygamy and constitutional laws are addressed. By Jamin101 This book covered the topic of polygamy and constitutional laws. I used this book for Political Science paper. The book had great information useful for my research paper. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Scholarly. By Not Wireless Gordon's book is an excellent review and commentary on the relationship between polygamy and the constitution. If you are interested in this stuff be sure to buy it.

From the Mormon Church's public announcement of its sanction of polygamy in 1852 until its formal decision to abandon the practice in 1890, people on both sides of the "Mormon question" debated central questions of constitutional law. Did principles of religious freedom and local self-government protect Mormons' claim to a distinct, religiously based legal order? Or was polygamy, as its opponents claimed, a new form of slavery--this time for white women in Utah? And did constitutional principles dictate that democracy and true liberty were founded on separation of church and state? As Sarah Barringer Gordon shows, the answers to these questions finally yielded an apparent victory for antipolygamists in the late nineteenth century, but only after decades of argument, litigation, and open conflict. Victory came at a price; as attention and national resources poured into Utah in the late 1870s and 1880s, antipolygamists turned more and more to coercion and punishment in the name of freedom. They also left a legacy in constitutional law and political theory that still governs our treatment of religious life: Americans are free to believe, but they may well not be free to act on their beliefs.

From Publishers Weekly While numerous studies have examined life in plural marriage, this is the first to explore how the Mormon practice of polygamy transformed the U.S. legal system. Gordon, a professor of law and history at the University of Pennsylvania, deftly handles complicated issues of religion, states' rights, constitutional theory and the separation of church and state. When Mormons fled to Utah in the 1840s, they brought with them a deep suspicion of "local sovereignty," feeling that individual states had persecuted them terribly while a weak federal government did nothing to protect them. In Utah, however, they turned this local sovereignty principle to their own advantage, publicly revealing their polygamous society in 1852 and taking measures to ensure the seamless fusion of church and state. Anti-polygamist legislators, novelists and activists were galvanized to subdue both the Mormons' political power and their polygamous unions even if this meant reversing longstanding constitutional precedent by centralizing power in the federal government rather than the states. Gordon does an outstanding job of clarifying complex legal issues and demonstrating change over time. At no point was the anti-polygamists' eventual victory a foregone conclusion; as this study shows, the Mormons had powerful legal precedent on their side, and they proved to be tenacious opponents until they abandoned the struggle in 1890. Gordon is a fine scholar whose penetrating research and interdisciplinary approach break new ground in the fields of Mormon studies and legal history. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. Sarah Gordon guides us through an underestimated political battle in nineteenth-century America, revealing undercurrents of Christian assumptions and beliefs that challenged the wall of separation between church and state. (Linda K. Kerber, University of Iowa) Gordon is a fine scholar whose penetrating research and interdisciplinary approach break new ground in the fields of Mormon studies and legal history. ("Publishers Weekly") Sarah Barringer Gordon has written an important interdisciplinary study that provides new perspectives on the impact of the Mormon practice of plural marriage on American constitutional thought. (David J. Whittaker, Curator of Western and Mormon Manuscripts, Brigham Young University) Her book is a welcomed addition to the few scholarly studies of one of the most important practices of nineteenth century Mormonism which even today continues to beguile the world. A careful reading of this work by the informed public will help to counterbalance the persistent misconceptions about the LDS church and the current residents of Utah.--Utah Historical Quarterly Gordon's superb study of the nineteenth-century controversy surrounding Mormon polygamy in the United States ought to be required reading for every graduate student in U.S. history, law, and religion. Its organizational structure, effective use of sources, clarity of argument, and excellent prose set a standard of interdisciplinary scholarship to be emulated by all academics.--Journal of Interdisciplinary History Gordon has written a history that is at once erudite, compelling, and remarkably timely.--BYU Studies Sarah Barringer Gordon has written an important interdisciplinary study that provides new perspectives on the impact of the Mormon practice of plural marriage on American constitutional thought. Her careful analysis of both the religious and legal consequences of Mormonism's 'peculiar institution' shows how the sincerity of both the Mormon defenders and their critics remade the American legal consciousness, as each side made its own assertions of religious liberty, the role of marriage in American society and the legal meaning of the 'free exercise' clause of the Constitution. In her deeply researched study, Gordon shows the sincere religious arguments of both sides and, in the process, has produced an important contribution to American legal and religious history.--David J. Whittaker, Curator of Western and Mormon Manuscripts, Brigham Young University Gordon displays grace and restraint in her fair-minded treatment of the Mormons and their detractors. . . . The Mormon Question proves to be a successful defense of the author's provocative assertion that the protracted fight over religious

liberty and the statutes of marriage in the Utah territory fundamentally transformed American legal history and constitutional law.--Pacific Northwest QuarterlyBeautifully crafted. . . . Gordon explores the constitutional and legislative foundations for current debates over marriage, morality, and law. . . . Essential reading.--Journal of American HistoryFormidable research lies behind a fascinating narrative. Sarah Gordon guides us through an underestimated political battle in nineteenth-century America, revealing undercurrents of Christian assumptions and beliefs that challenged the wall of separation between church and state.--Linda K. Kerber, University of Iowa This is a fascinating story, told compellingly and vividly by a scholar uniquely qualified for the task. . . . Gordon's analysis will supply the benchmark for future consideration of the law and politics of domestic relations.--Law and History [Gordon] deftly handles complicated issues of religion, states' rights, constitutional theory, and the separation of church and state. . . . [She] does an outstanding job of clarifying complex legal issues and demonstrating change over time. . . . Gordon is a fine scholar whose penetrating research and interdisciplinary approach break new ground in the fields of Mormon studies and legal history.--Publishers Weekly