

B.H. Roberts, Moral Geography, and the Making of a Modern Racist

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By

Clyde R. Forsberg Jr.

and Phillip Gordon Mackintosh

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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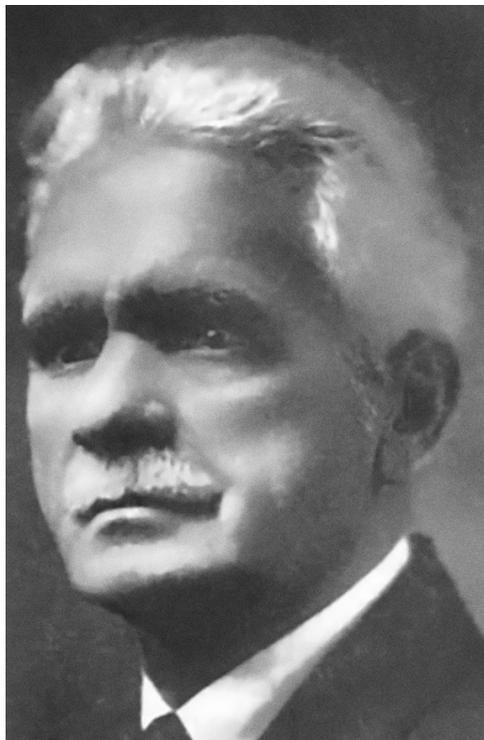
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ISBN (10): 1-5275-7846-1

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7846-3

to
Kohl, Kynan, Acacia, and Attila

this is your father at his intellectual best,
and that's saying something...



Brigham Henry Roberts ca. 1933 (Public Domain).¹

This is no easy book. In order to understand it, you may have to wrench your mind rather violently out of your accustomed ways of thinking. There is no attempt ... to understate, to gloss over, to doll up, or make harsh facts pleasant for the tender-minded. The facts ... presented here are in their starkest form, their crudest manifestation; not because the authors want to shock you, but because the environment out of which those facts spring has so wrought them.

—*Richard Wright, Introduction to Black Metropolis (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962, xix)*

¹ File: Brigham Henry Roberts2.jpg. Wikimedia Commons. Wikipedia.org Accessed January 16, 2022.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brigham_Henry_Roberts2.jpg

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to her about the fruits of the garden, without arousing suspicion or alarm in her (Yahuda 1933, 201; ftnt. 2). Yahuda's higher-criticism revision of Eve and the Serpent in Eden would not have sat well with the biblical literalist, Smith, had he spent some time reading Yahuda's *The Language of the Pentateuch in Its Relation to Egyptian* (1933). (Right) "An Egyptian Picture of a Scene on the Banks of the Nile, Which was the Egyptian Idea of Paradise, and Corresponds Closely, According to Dr Yahuda, to the Description of the Garden of Eden."

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writers know intimately the emotional creditors of their trade: loved ones. They're inconvenienced, frustrated, burdened, and sometimes hurt by our distraction and inattentiveness, withdrawal and invisibility, and irrational allegiance to our manuscripts. And yet our loved ones remain steadfast. They listen, encourage, even urge and steer us. How wonderful—and how unfair that it's only the writers' names on the cover of our publications and not theirs. Thus, Clyde and Phil owe an unpayable debt to Cholpon Alieva and Jeannie Mackintosh, for forgiving us our complications—and blank stares—and loving us unconditionally. Clyde spreads wide his arms to hug Casy and Attie for their beaming and vocal love throughout their young lives, and doting on their dad through tribulations and triumphs, peerless happiness and inconsolable sadness. And he would use his immeasurable understanding of the world to thank Cholpon for helping him become a better Clyde.

Completing *B.H. Roberts*, Clyde would want to thank his indecipherable mother, Virginia Swasey Forsberg, for teaching him the role of contradiction and uncertainty in human affairs. She tutored Clyde at a young age in the convolutions and paradoxes of B.H. Roberts, and the Mormonism that spurred an intellectual sojourn that ended too abruptly, stopping his inimitable thinking on both philosophical nemeses. Clyde would necessarily thank his international colleagues for their friendship, moral support, and intellectual stimulation throughout his career, including Eileen Barker, Susan Curtis, Massimo Introvigne, Danny Jorgenson, Bill Morain (especially for the Foreword), Gordon Pollock, and many others whose identities are unknown to Phil, and to whom he sincerely apologizes.

Phil is perennially grateful to his home department, Geography and Tourism Studies (G&TS) at Brock University, and to his colleagues and students who buoyed him through a medical crisis, between 2019 and 2021, that threatened to silence him for good. He is especially thankful for his thoughtful Chair, Prof. Michael Pisaric, G&TS's indefatigable and empathetic administrative coordinator, Virginia Wagg, and the professor-advocacy of the Dean of Brock's Faculty of Social Sciences, Dr. Ingrid Makus. Completing this book would have been unimaginable without Michael Driedger's moral and intellectual encouragement. As always, Phil thanks his intellectual and academic mentors, Richard Dennis, Clyde

Forsberg, Peter Goheen, Anne Godlewska, and Deryck Holdsworth. And he is beholden to his one-time UTSC colleague, Minelle Mahtani (now UBC), for teaching him how to think about “race” and geography—also Andrew Baldwin, Laura Jean Cameron, and Audrey Kobayashi. Phil’s love and appreciation for Jeannie—his sage, muse, copyediting “advisor” (all oversights in the text are Phil’s), and best friend—has no end. Cheers to Bill Morain for our digital friendship. Knowing Bill was there “just in case” made finishing *B.H. Roberts* without Clyde possible. Thanks also to Cholpon, Spring, Kohl, and Kynan for helping Phil get some of the biographical details right. Finally, hugs and kisses for his long-time musical friends *cum* family, Bill Evans and Linda Stella. Bill’s own near-death medical crisis meant that Clyde, Bill, and Phil simultaneously put their families and friends through hell and, alas, only two of them are left standing.

B.H. Roberts, Moral Geography, and the Making of a Modern Racist is primarily a source criticism and, so, another we-can’t-thank-you-enough belongs to two digital giants of the twenty-first century: the *Internet Archive* (archive.org) and *Wikipedia*. As a universal historical primary-source archive, the Internet Archive is a human and digital marvel, and simply eased our text-acquisition burden which, in a book like this, was onerous indeed (please click the “Donate” link the next time you are there). Accordingly, we must also thank all those archivists and librarians who digitized the hundreds of volumes we downloaded—and read (some only partially, we confess). How do we praise *Wikipedia* in way that has not already been articulated? A crowd-sourcing magic, *Wikipedia* allows the world’s myriad thinkers to share the world’s knowledge, for free, *as it should be*—and what could be better than that? Consider donating to *Wikipedia*, too. Full disclosure: we make modest monthly contributions to both, because such open sharing of knowledge is social justice in practice.

Finally, we applaud our diligent and exacting research assistant, Jared Balla (whom we are thrilled to cite in a footnote!); Linda Stella for her photoshopping magic; and Phil’s almost-son, Jamez Townsend, for his fabulous cover art—evoking Roberts’ own belief that *The Truth, the Way, the Life* was “a lofty flight into the realms of thought and feeling.” Of course, we demonstrate exhaustively that his was flight on the rickety (and abhorrent) wings of Victorian, Edwardian and Interwar “race” science.

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY
OF PROFESSOR CLYDE R. FORSBERG, JR.,
1957–2021¹



Figure A. Professor Clyde R. Forsberg, Jr.

¹ Clyde's AUCA departmental photo, *circa* 2012. His students so admired him that one of them stole this photo. The theft generated a moment of good natured rivalry, his colleagues griping that their photos remained un-pilfered!

If at the sight of a portrait of a beloved and venerated friend no longer existing in this world, our heart is filled with sentiments of love and reverence; if we fancy him present in the picture, still looking upon us with his wonted tenderness and affection, and then indulge our feelings of love and gratitude, should we be charged with offering the grossest insult to him that of fancying him to be no other than a piece of painted paper?

—*Anonymous Hindu scholar (in Max Müller 1876, xvii)*

Thanks, Clyde. B.H. Roberts, Moral Geography, and the Making of a Modern Racist (B.H. Roberts) testifies of your extraordinary intellect and generosity—and to my gratitude to you for sharing with me the skills and the opportunity to rewrite and finish it. Our readers likely know you didn't live to complete the book. You knew you wouldn't. If you recall, it was about four weeks before you died that you asked me to help you with the manuscript. You thought I should write the Foreword. Then you reconsidered, perhaps as the immediacy of your declining health torqued harder. "Please agree to be co-author," you wrote on 27 January, 2021; and, when I dubiously acquiesced the next day, you wrote jubilantly: "I can't express in words how happy I am to have you on board with this!" This thrilled me, in part because I had already presumed to revise the Intro (we had that kind of writing relationship). When you read the first few pages of revisions you insisted I co-author the book: "Will you go through and rewrite every chapter like you're doing the Introduction? ... It's a tonal question I think, and you're better at that than me—by a country mile," you kindly fibbed on 28 January. You always say I'm the better writer. Perhaps—you're by far the better thinker!

I intuited immediately the method scratching your madness: you really wanted me to inject the entire manuscript with critical moral geography. Why else enlist a scholar with no formal experience in Mormon history and theology to pilot a book (in your absence), on those very subjects, to completion and publication? Yes, I had once been "a Mormon;" this was how you and I met, I think in 1979, in Calgary (what a long time ago) but you also shepherded me away from Mormonism's influence a decade or so later (remember that huge sheaf of photocopied Mormon history readings you gave me and which I bunged into an orange binder and read until they disintegrated?). How odd that you started as my older brother's friend, not mine. You both went on missions for the LDS church and, whereas my brother's mission reinforced his commitment, yours turned you "apostate" (a perfectly apt term for dissenters, from the Greek "apostates" or "runaway slave" (OED) and you were beholden to none). Then an interregnum: I spent a decade traveling as pop musician as you played jazz and studied theology—what a contrast. We met again in the parking lot

behind Watson Hall (the humanities building) at Queen's University in 1993. We stood beside that impossibly rusted out Volvo of the Shakespeare prof who wrote for the Kingston Whig Standard, catching up, neither of us aware the other had been accepted to Queen's for our graduate studies. You loved that I had an English degree that terminated in a Geography Ph.D. I withered before your unfathomable facility for American religious history and theology, philosophy, and your vast comprehension of Victorian literature—really, your ken of all things intellectual and cultural. You mastered everything you fancied, from jazz horn (trumpet) and piano to cabinetmaking, from car repair to playwriting, from theology to the history of science, from staging plays and “jazz theatre” to publishing numerous books with well-regarded publishers. I wanted so much to emulate you.

On 8 February, 2021—21 days before your death (I just shuddered thinking that)—you wrote, “I’m not dead yet.” On the 11th, this: “Let’s chat. Can’t type anymore.” And that was that: no emails, no two- or three-word bursts of encouragement and, worst of all, no vetting of the chapters I was sending. This was agony. We managed only two video chats, alas, one week apart, the first starting with: “It’s so good to see you. I’m dying.” You broke my heart, buddy, and I raced into denial, trying to persuade you that you weren’t. You being you, you went along with it, knowing a reality I couldn’t face. Soon we were, as always, laughing and cussing about our long and complicated Mormon pasts.

“If I don’t make it finish the book. It’s good, Love,” you managed near the end. I’ll never know what you think of our work, now, but of this I’m certain: you’d tell me you love me just for doing it, for being a good “friend.” That is your highest compliment—not sure if you realize that? It means you have allowed someone into your rarefied orbit (I know, but it made you laugh, eh?), but not as a favour to the lucky friend, rather as a pleasure to you.

...

I like to think this closeness, and Clyde’s remarkable curiosity, enabled me to convert him to geography in the last dozen years of his life (I am by training an urban and cultural historical geographer). It simply became important to Clyde to filter religion and fraternalism through environmental determinism and cultural-historical geography (see Mackintosh and Forsberg 2009, 2013; Forsberg and Mackintosh 2021)—and he devoured the work of the historian of geography, David N. Livingstone, (Clyde was also a devout New Historicist, as will become apparent). I will suggest Clyde had been priming himself to be a geographer for decades—since we played together in a jazz trio in the 1990s. He had finished his Ph.D. when

I was starting my doctoral studies, and he used the opportunity of our weekend house-gig at a club in Kingston, Ontario, between sets, to school me on the argument of my dissertation. I tell my own grad students it was the coolest grad seminar ever scheduled: weekends, sitting in a club with a glass of wine as Clyde good naturedly but doggedly reworked my graduate-level comprehension of Victorian this and that. Yet my geography dissertation on evangelicalism and city planning in Victorian and Edwardian Toronto captured his capacious imagination and, over time, he declared himself a geographer—in the lobby of the Royal York Hotel, at the Social Science History Association conference in Toronto, 2014, as it happens. He was done with history and he thought geographers were “good eggs” in the main.

I also think Clyde’s musings merged with the geographical because his own life had been one long experiment with cultural geography: living as an American to his pre-teens, then a Canadian for the next 30 years (married to Spring Morrison (now Lewis), and father to Kohl and Kynan Forsberg), then as a Kyrgyz, then a Turk, then a Taiwanese, then a brief (but folly-filled) flirtation as a Saudi, again a Kyrgyz, and again a Turk (which landed him in prison, as a “foreign” professor, during the 2016 coup attempt against the Erdogan government (see Forsberg 2017)), then a Kyrgyz in the final iteration of his peripatetic-self—which made Cholpon, his partner, and their young children, Casey and Atti, honorary geographers (and multilinguists), too. Clyde’s mantra became “anywhere but the West” (I know a few “liberated” North Americans for whom this applies). As an informal anarchist, he despised the West’s thrall to liberal democratic capitalism (he understood neoliberalism as simply more of the Victorian-classical-liberal-laissez-faire same albeit hyper-driven by financialization and environmental ruin). He knew geography matters—intimately. I hope my injections of the geographical into his theological and philosophical thinking would have met his redoubtable approbation.

Our good mutual friend and colleague, Michael Driedger (Mike and Clyde studied at Queen’s together), consoled me in my sadness—and panic—after Clyde’s passing, and noted that I’m not rewriting the book: “Clyde has put the meat on the bones and you are, so to speak, putting the skin on the meat,” he said. We laughed at that grisly but appropriate analogy—but I would later discover there was a proliferation of moments in Clyde’s only draft where the clay seemed disinclined to cleave to the armature. In that regard, my fingerprints liberally smudge the text. To those who know me, you’ll intuit the many dramatic changes I made with Clyde’s approval—and without it (just the knowledge that he trusted my instincts). Let me, however, make this clarion point: *this is Clyde’s thinking* and

anyone who knew him will, with little effort, hear his voice speaking the words they are reading—just as I imagine they will hear Clyde’s guffaw in the epigraph to the Introduction, below (!).

Clyde asked me to co-author *B.H. Roberts* not just out of habit, but because he knew me as another history- and anarchy-minded social-justice kindred spirit. Issues of “race” beguiled us as we aged and we began to think of our scholarship more as critical historical geography and social advocacy—in much the same way late-Victorians and Edwardian Social Gospel academics conceptualized their role as advocates for social justice in a time of *laissez-faire* and Social Darwinism, two pernicious discourses the twenty-first century vilely recapitulates with thoughtless exuberance. Of course, Clyde’s and my motivations hardly ape postmillennialists, but we understood/understand that to be truly relevant to all people who share this planet, we must reject workaday understandings of the past and use historiography actively to promote equality, democracy, and social justice—and in *B.H. Roberts*, #BlackLivesMatter. He became the social-science cliché he once sniggered at as a grad student. He transmogrified into a “do-gooder” as Clyde would call social scientists—I remember his excitement sharing a reference, fifteen years ago now: Patrick Baert’s (2005) *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*; subjective understanding was to be our new ethos. He struggled initially—those of you familiar with him know why. As his son Kohl remembered at Clyde’s memorial, his dad couldn’t suffer fools (I always laughed at his hammer t-shirt; he was, by the way, an expert cabinet maker, who supplemented his teaching income in Canada through woodworking) (Figure B). His uncanny intellect, his clearwater view of every possibility, and a radiographical intuition that made him a formidable and highly skeptical audience member in a conference session; it was simply impossible for him *not* to voice an objection or salient thought. Yet, in the end, Clyde proudly sported the “social justice warrior” moniker—in the purest ethical sense of the phrase—even if he never said it aloud (to me, anyway).

This made him an extraordinary teacher. Unlike most Ph.D.s., Clyde had a teaching degree, one of many degrees and skills he collected in his arresting life. I know he could teach because I sat in on his lectures from time to time and he thrilled me in a way most university lecturers do not. Of course, we also presented co-authored papers and no one could answer a post-presentation question with the confidence, engagement, and surreptitiously pedagogical logic of Clyde Forsberg. His teaching-magic: he made his classes relevant right where his students lived, in their hearts. He gave them not abstract and abstruse information which students typically jettison the moment they leave the classroom (and need to relearn from their notes before



Figure B. Clyde, wearing his “hammer” t-shirt, and Phil taking questions at 17th International Conference in Historical Geography, Warsaw, Poland, 2018 (Permission of Jeannie Mackintosh).

the exam), *but lessons for life*. And they loved him for it. Look at Clyde’s GoFundMe page (set up by his childhood friend and jazz-horn-player comrade, Rob Frayne (founder of the Canadian jazz tentet, Chelsea Bridge, which included Clyde in the 1990s). You will see numerous students offering what they could to help save Clyde’s life. How heartwarming—especially when you realize that these poor Kyrgyz students pledged relatively huge amounts of money to their dear “Professor Clyde,” given the scandalously low wages in Central Asia. What a testament. Unsurprisingly, he won the AUCA’s Senate “Best Teacher Award” for 2020–21 (he also won a teaching award in Turkey just before his unconscionable imprisonment).

Clyde’s other and *most important* persona—jazz musician—must complete this abridged intellectual prose-sketch of my late friend. Jazz for Clyde was existential: “To be clear—I do not ‘like [jazz].’ I LOVE IT. Jazz and the trumpet are who I am. History is something I do.”² Jazz is anarchic. It both created and cemented Clyde’s convictions—equality, fairness, anti-

² AUCA News. 2013. “American Studies Week: Clyde Forsberg”. Accessed May 17, 2021. https://www.auca.kg/en/auca_news/1066/

capitalism, social and environmental justice. He despised “the soul killing” academy and its liberal democratic capitalist enablers. For him, a Ph.D. was only one tool in the box of knowledge-invention that helped him in his disruption of a profoundly anti-democratic and inequitable capitalist “system,” which necessarily included the LDS Church. Playing on stage with Clyde, hearing his unique “voice” in his horn and piano improvisations, explained to me his love for jazz as the great equalizer. Jazz in the early days was a swinging and bopping “deranger” of racial apartheid in North American cities, of the segregation of Blacks from White spaces and places. As Clyde would say, jazz was a loud “f*** you” to White supremacy and its spatial illogic—this was the moral of his jazz theatre play, “Not Black and White.” That’s why jazz mattered to Clyde, and few knew its history and purpose better than he did. He was even writing a jazz history when he died, *Джаз в Кыргызстане: A Jazz History of the Central Asian Republic of Kyrgyzstan*.

Let me end this with one thought: Clyde had one of the most analytical and incisive minds I have ever encountered, and when he was a younger, pugnacious academic he could and did use his intellect like a rapier—often deservedly so. Those privy to Clyde’s biography know the LDS Church’s egregious and immoral response to a childhood family crisis, and why Clyde felt compelled to spend his life exposing the LDS leadership and its acolytes as a menacing confederacy of self-deceived occultists and patriarchal zealots. Hence his revelry in pinking the backsides of uncritical Mormonism-apologists—provoking, usually, a sustained and equally aggressive *ad hominem* response (see, for example, the risibly unironic review (Duffy 2006) of *Equal Rites* (Forsberg 2004)). Clyde spoke often of the adeptness of Mormon scholars at shooting messengers, the consequence of their defend-Mormonism-at-all-costs methods. This, even when they look for all the world like members of a cult bent on defaming the skepticism, revisionism, and democracy-defending legitimacy of academic social history and its slighting of the so-called “faithful history” of Mormons—a bizarre term that allows Mormons to publish farcical statements about putative anti-Mormon “absurdities ... appearing under the imprimatur of a university press” (Duffy 2006, 24; also Bushman 2004). With this, Clyde retires “to Bedlam,” like Dickens’ Ebenezer Scrooge. But where Scrooge was narrow-minded and mean, Clyde was open and inquisitive. His vulnerable heart only waxed more tender as we grew old.

FOREWORD

WILLIAM D. MORAIN, MD

Brigham Henry Roberts, surely the preeminent Mormon intellectual of his time, was at once a historian, prolific writer, politician, faithful LDS member, and polygamist. His presidency of one of his church's "Quorum of Seventies" and his oratorical giftedness provided him a level of esteem few could match along the Wasatch Front. And the fact that he was expelled from Congress for his plural marriage practices made him easily the most famous Mormon in the America of his day.

Though his widely heralded six-volume *Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century 1*,³ is considered Roberts' most important work by most, he himself favored his 1928 *The Truth, The Way, The Life (TWL)*, whose publication would be theocratically suppressed for almost seven decades by church authorities.

Roberts had been so keen to begin research on *TWL* that he persuaded his superiors to grant him a six-month leave of absence in 1927 to sequester himself in New York City with the assistance of a personal secretary. With his broad interest in all-things science, he envisioned creating a credible bridge between the natural world and Mormon theology. Thus surrounded by his vast eclectic library and close proximity to the American Museum of Natural History, he began what would become an 847-page assemblage of ideas. At the time *TWL* was written, it was regarded by its ecclesiastical sponsors as blasphemy; today it is largely consigned to the domain of sophistry.

With an undercurrent of geographical racism, which was *de rigueur* for the Mormonism of his day, Roberts declared that the fossil record had unequivocally demonstrated that humans had lived prior to Adam and Eve. And whoever those ancient folks were, they must have disappeared by some cataclysm before fair-skinned Adam and Eve could be divinely deposited from some alien location.

Former Mormons Clyde Forsberg and Phil Mackintosh have accepted a formidable challenge in undertaking the dissection of the origins of Roberts'

³ Published in Salt Lake City by LDS Church/Deseret News, 1930.

thought processes as he drafted *TWL*. The result, *B.H. Roberts, Moral Geography, and the Making of a Modern Racist*, is perhaps the longest-ever book review of a Mormon work and, with close to 900 citations, certainly the most highly referenced. Combining Forsberg's historian/theologian background with that of Mackintosh's in geography, the two have mined this grueling lode to the fullest.

In pursuing the many sources from which Roberts drew, Forsberg and Mackintosh started by perusing his personal library and bibliography. There they noticed the predominance of anti- and post-Darwinian authors who leaned toward creation-science principles or "theistic evolution." In addition, many were authored by clearly agnostic sorts with a strong anti-Evangelical and anti-religious orientation. The complete list included such notable figures as William James, Andrew Dickson White, Thomas Paine, Joseph Priestly, John Stuart Mill, and even Benito Mussolini, to say nothing of some randy novels found lying about.

Certainly the major theme Forsberg and Mackintosh found among Roberts' sources and in his *TWL* itself was a deep predisposition towards racism with a Eurocentric leitmotif. Forsberg and Mackintosh's inference is correct that Roberts adhered to the Genesis story over Darwin because an Afro-genic origin of humankind was inconsistent with the self-evident nobility of those with fairer skin. Roberts' solution to the conundrum was to deny White humanity's ancient evolutionary origins by spiriting into the Garden of Eden a couple of Caucasian extraterrestrials. This would be too much for the Mormon hierarchy to stomach.

But if that was all Forsberg and Mackintosh had to offer, it could have been completed in a third of this book's length. What we are fortunately offered instead is an expansive overview of the entire field of Darwinian, Mormon, geographical, racist, and theological epistemology drawn from among the world's wisest and its most unwitting. The collaboration of this pair of scholars has been akin to adding two and two and getting sixteen. Readers must be prepared to commence a sweeping journey through the ferocious squabbles arising out of a gentle naturalist's 1859 book that challenged the prevailing consensus of humankind's origins. B. H. Roberts' dubious *TWL* is only the center ring of this book's full manifestation of erudition.

Speaking personally (as a noncredentialed Mormon historian), I came to know and revere Clyde Forsberg through my editorship of the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* (and through him Phil Mackintosh). Clyde was a gifted writer whose every manuscript contribution to the journal demonstrated his remarkable scholarship and eclectic knowledge base. As a prized reviewer on the editorial board, he was candid and scrupulous in

his critiques of others' submissions and would not abide sectarian conjecture. His prodigious authorship of books and even his playwriting was astonishing in its velocity of production. I became convinced he could likely type faster than I could read. But I grew to know that we had become soulmates in our worldviews prior to his recent untimely death and I dearly miss our regular repartee. As such it is a humbling honor to have been asked to contribute a foreword to this book.

INTRODUCTION

THE TRUTH, THE WAY, THE LIFE: AN ELEMENTARY TREATISE ON THEOLOGY⁴

MR. B. H. ROBERTS,

Dear Sir: I ... find that you are a good reasoner and logician when you have sound premises to reason from; but unfortunately you are not always in possession of such premises, and therefore, while your reasoning faculties are good, many of your conclusions are simply faulty and false.

—*Wingfield Watson [1894] 1923*⁵

It was not until I had carefully reviewed by notes and checked them with my own sources of information, that I became aware of ... *the questionable methods employed in the handling of borrowed material.*

—*Woolsey Teller (1922, 7–8; original emphasis)*

The last posture a bureaucratic religion wishes to find itself in is vulnerability to disproof, where an experiment can be performed on which the religion stands or falls.

—*Carl Sagan (1974, 332)*

Oh buddy! What a mistake!

—*Clyde R. Forsberg, Jr., 39th Annual Meeting of the Social Sciences and History Association, Toronto, Ontario, 2014*

Clyde's younger brother Bohne loves to tell this story from his childhood: when he was about ten years old, Bohne donned a set of wings made of popsicle sticks and Elmer's Glue, climbed up to the roof of his suburban Ottawa, Ontario, house and jumped. He thought he would fly, catch a draft and glide effortlessly, gloriously onto the lawn below, perhaps even traverse the asphalted street to alight on the adjacent neighbor's lawn.

⁴ Part of this chapter is reprinted from Forsberg and Mackintosh (2021, 69–70) with kind permission of *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*.

⁵ Wingfield, Watson. 1923[1896?]. "An Open letter to B.H. Roberts, Salt Lake City, Utah". Accessed January 28, 2020.

<https://archive.org/details/openlettertobhro00watsrich>

Potential risks never surfaced: hit a power line; collide with the street, or a car, or both; sail through that neighbor's living room window, or worse. Bohne had painstakingly crafted those wings, the preteen's engineering a spark of genius. But bridges fall and ships sink and the hilarious thing about the incident is not that Bohne dropped like a concrete kite—which he did—or that, despite the sudden surprise of falling, he crashed and rolled like a parachutist. No, the truly funny thing, and why the story is worth the telling, is that *his popsicle-stick wings held*—just for a second, like Wile E. Coyote! Bohne recalls the euphoria of the instance—which felt longer. He believed for the briefest of moments he was flying—until he wasn't, his arms smacking together in agnostic prayer as he contemplated the rude ground rising.

The working title of this book (until the publication negotiations!) was “Feathers and Wax: B.H. Roberts and the Making of a Modern Racist. A Critical Moral Geography,” for this Daedelian reason: Roberts' *The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology (TWL)* mirrors Bohne's Icarus-like “flight” on wings of faith and folly—largely because Roberts himself alludes to *TWL* as an audacity of intellectual flight (Roberts 1996, 722). Constructed of what Roberts' imagined as the best science and cosmology, fastened together with his profound Mormon faith, and plumed with an abiding curiosity and learning, the wing-like book at first glance seems ingenious. We nonetheless contend the wings Roberts fashioned, to waft himself and his church to a more exalted place among the world religions, were also made of sticks and mucilage—or *the jerrybuilt, “race” science and creationism equivalent in Interwar America*. Design is everything when building materials are substandard, so we cannot help but “sort of” admire Roberts' craftsmanship. Do not, however, confuse our reluctant admiration for Roberts' design-cleverness—his attempt to pull Mormonism into the orbit of the twentieth-century's intellectual modernity—with *approbation for his ultimately racializing and socially unjust theologizing*. While we chortle at Wingfield Watson's reflections in the epigraph, *we utterly reject Roberts' reasoning*. Indeed, *B.H. Roberts, Moral Geography, and the Making of a Modern Racist (B.H. Roberts)* exhaustively deconstructs Roberts' thinking and especially his sources (which ultimately led to his disgrace among his Mormon peers, who sought more conservatism, not less). The problem, however, and why Roberts' manuscript-debacle makes such a good story is that, like Bohne Forsberg, B.H. Roberts thought his feathers-and-wax book would (metaphorically) fly. He believed the church would publish it as official “doctrine,” and that his “masterwork” of theology (Bitton 1996, 561) would proceed to inspire and ennoble his fellow saints, for generations to come—especially the high-

ranking church officials assigned to review the manuscript.⁶ Written only a few years before Roberts' death (27 September 1933) *TWL* was, alas, pinioned, filed in the LDS Church Historian's office until Roberts either made the required changes (no)—or the Church itself changed.

The latter came some 60 years later after the Mormonism to which Roberts dedicated his entire life had reoriented its purpose dramatically. In the aftermath of the *TWL* squall (cf. Sherlock 1980), Mormonism transformed into yet another anti-modernist fundamentalism, a “can-do” religion for dutiful followers of Mormon scripture and doctrine in a post-Manifest Destiny America—where quotidian obedience to Mormon obligations qualifies adherents for a “temple recommend” (participating in temple ceremonies is the goal of the everyday Mormon).⁷ This one fact—obedience supplanting intellect—throws a strange and ironic pall on the Brigham Young University archival project, in the 1990s, to resurrect Roberts' once-heretical *TWL*. The effort, led by John Welch, spends excessive time and creative energy reimagining Roberts as a New Age Mormon at the height of such thinking (the same-old theosophist and anthroposophist harmonizing of science and spirituality).

The BYU team's “apology” for an apology was not entirely wrongheaded. Roberts' early-twentieth-century theological science fiction needed this kind of exegesis *cum* deconstruction. However, it would not be achieved by a collective of Mormon faith-defenders, but rather after the manner we employ in *B.H. Roberts*: a source criticism that exposes Roberts as a racist, imperialist, and proto-fascist. For this reason alone, Roberts' beliefs must be exposed for the social injustice they promulgate. So, Karl Popper's (shaky) critique of science and his insistence on “falsifiability” bears mentioning. Roberts' own controversial “internal” report on the *Book of Mormon* (Roberts [1922] 1985; cf. Montez 2019)—in which he argues that *View of the Hebrews* (Smith 1823) by Vermont congregationalist minister, Ethan Smith (no relation), is the primary source for much of the *Book of Mormon*'s historical content—is precisely the sort of refutation Popper would applaud.⁸ That Roberts' *TWL* should fall under the hands of Mormonism

⁶ The committee consisted of George Albert Smith, Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., David O. McKay, Stephen L. Richards, and Melvin J. Ballard (Allen 1996, 695).

⁷ We mostly elide the details of the Roberts/Smith controversy, which has been well-covered (Sherlock 1978; 1980; Smith 1984; Keller 1982, 1985; Numbers 1992; Reid 1997). See Marty and Appleby's (1991, vii-x) discussion of the motivations of fundamentalisms (cf. Barr 1984; Marsden 2006).

⁸ Roberts was likely engaged in a modern enterprise: “opposition research,” but in reverse: privately exposing the weaknesses of the *Book of Mormon* for Mormon apologists to “spin” preemptively (cf. Ashurst-McGee 2003).

boosters eager to prove the hypothesis, faith in search of itself, says more about the editors than Roberts, although Roberts says plenty.⁹

We find it difficult to imagine Roberts could have remained Mormon for long, especially after *TWL* had untucked his heart's desire. A missionary to "the South," Church historian, and eminent philosopher of religion until the *TWL* calamity, Roberts may well have lost his faith (or "his testimony" in Mormon parlance), but this is irrelevant to our aims.¹⁰ Our interest in him ignores his personal Mormon faith. Instead we explore what he thought substantiated it. Then we demonstrate that what he knew and believed—gleaned from the "race" and creation science he consumed along with Mormonism's own teachings—*made him a modern racist*.

Still, it is important to ask: Did Roberts believe in the *Book of Mormon*? Yes. Did his belief in the book change over time? Yes. He read too much beyond Mormonism for it not to change. Did he believe in the historicity of the *Book of Mormon*? Probably not. Did he stop thinking of the volume as divine, when it appeared to all the world a work of fiction, of human imagination and inventiveness which spoke uniquely to the issues of its day—including the origins of North America's mysterious burial mounds (see Dahl 1961)? Ironically, Roberts' allegiance to the *Book of Mormon* and Mormonism only grew more fanatical. Hence his unremitting pursuit of anything and everything that would light Mormonism brighter or abet a still more aggressive defense.

We see this change through his critics' response to *TWL*'s ideas, Joseph Fielding Smith Jr.'s (Smith) in particular. Smith rejected *TWL* on theological grounds, which would not have been possible had Roberts mimicked his earlier Mormon-doctrine-making theologizing. *TWL*'s modernism and progressivism disgruntled Smith—vexing him still in his own *TWL: Man, His Origin and Destiny* (1954), discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.¹¹ Roberts' new approach traced lines of inquiry his fellow Mormons might use to combat the twentieth century's upwelling modernity, faultily employing the methods of modernism itself—science, philosophy, and theology. Roberts, of course, wrote and pushed his book as the world yet careened from WWI and its unrelenting criticism (cf. McKay and Swift 2016) and the incipient social and political economic discord of the 1929

⁹ We treat all sources in *B.H. Roberts* as literature and refer to them in the present.

¹⁰ For example, why Roberts (1996, 29) used Descartes' dictum, "I think, therefore I am," to suggest how humans apprehend themselves as conscious entities, with nary a hint of the affirmations of the Holy Ghost, should surprise any Mormon.

¹¹ "Man" as a synonym for "human" appears in most of the primary sources analyzed in *B.H. Roberts*. To prevent reader-exhaustion, we have opted not to insert "sic" after each iteration.