



Charles Ellis Johnson and the Erotic Mormon Image

Mary Campbell

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On September 25, 1890, the Mormon prophet Wilford Woodruff publicly instructed his followers to abandon polygamy. In doing so, he initiated a process that would fundamentally alter the Latter-day Saints and their faith. Trading the most integral elements of their belief system for national acceptance, the Mormons recreated themselves as model Americans.

Mary Campbell tells the story of this remarkable religious transformation in *Charles Ellis Johnson and the Erotic Mormon Image*. One of the church's favorite photographers, Johnson (1857–1926) spent the 1890s and early 1900s taking pictures of Mormonism's most revered figures and sacred sites. At the same time, he did a brisk business in mail-order erotica, creating and selling stereoviews that he referred to as his "spicy pictures of girls." Situating these images within the religious, artistic, and legal culture of turn-of-the-century America, Campbell reveals the unexpected ways in which they worked to bring the Saints into the nation's mainstream after the scandal of polygamy.

Engaging, interdisciplinary, and deeply researched, *Charles Ellis Johnson and the Erotic Mormon Image* demonstrates the profound role pictures played in the creation of both the modern Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the modern American nation.

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