beginning in late 1799, when he was setting out as a chaplain and missionary from England to India, until 1812, the year of his death in Torkat, Turkey. These complete letters have been meticulously collected, researched, and annotated. They are grouped into five chronologically ordered sections based on Martyn's geographic location as he navigated his missionary vocation. The editor gives each letter's source and current location along with any of its unique characteristics; he supplies information about all the persons mentioned in it; and explanatory notes about places, events, persons, and foreign words allow the reader to understand its purpose and contents. Ample cross-referencing makes it easy to pick up the numerous threads in Martyn's life and thought as these weave themselves through the various letters. A helpful list of recipients of the letters, with all the letters addressed to each one of them, is placed at the beginning of the book.

The much shorter, fifty-eight-page introduction provides the historical background that makes possible an intelligible and intelligent reading of the letters themselves. The introduction contains a fine biographical sketch of Martyn's life along with a fair assessment of his personality, character, thought, and work. It also offers insight into the various social, religious, and intellectual milieux in which Martyn dwelt during his brief life. In addition, the introduction provides some sense of the ways in which Martyn has been viewed and received among historians and ordinary church folk. All in all, the volume is an excellent historical compendium and would be of much usefulness to researchers in the fields of mission and British colonial history.

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Kingdom of Nauvoo: The Rise and Fall of a Religious Empire on the American Frontier. By **Benjamin E. Park**. New York: Liveright, 2020. 324 pp. $28.95 cloth.

Whereas most studies of early Mormonism understandably focus on its emergence as a new religion, Benjamin Park's engaging book *Kingdom of Nauvoo* interprets the history of the Latter-day Saints in the early 1840s primarily as a response to the failure of American democracy to deliver on its promises of the inclusion and protection of minority rights. Deeply researched and written engrossingly for both an academic and broader public audience, *Kingdom of Nauvoo* aims to reveal "not only the radicalism of the early Mormons, but also the tenuousness of the American experiment" (6).

Park's book is a portrait of political and religious alienation. We encounter the Latter-day Saints beginning in 1839 as a people traumatized by their immediately prior persecutions in Missouri. In establishing their new city on the banks of the Mississippi River in western Illinois, the Mormons sought earnestly to create a society that would provide the order, security, and assurance they craved. However, their estrangement only deepened when the federal government, consistent with the limited federalism of the period, repeatedly demonstrated its inability or unwillingness to provide relief for the very real wrongs the Saints had endured.

Not content to be simply another denomination, the Saints under Joseph Smith established a semi-autonomous religious city-state. At first, this was done with the full cooperation of Illinois politicians, both out of sympathy for the Mormons' plight and in order to court Mormon votes. The Saints took full advantage of their newfound influence as a swing constituency, which worked well at first. By August 1843, however, Smith's efforts to play all sides worked only to anger virtually everyone, leaving the Saints politically isolated even as tensions escalated with their neighbors.

Having written extensively on early American nationalism, Park is at his best, and is often quite brilliant, in explicating the Mormons' maneuverings in the context of county, state, and national politics. For instance, this was the first book I have read that fully made sense of how habeas corpus laws worked and how Nauvoo leaders used them to their advantage. Furthermore, Park clearly demonstrates how Joseph Smith's views of expansive federal power, especially residing in the executive branch, were rare for his time but presciently anticipated later American political developments, from the Reconstruction-era Republican Party to mid-twentieth-century liberalism. Smith's statement that "the States rights doctrine" is "what feeds mobs" could have been uttered over a century later by virtually any civil rights activist (184).

Another signal strength of the book is the way that Park frequently puts women front and center. Park persuasively argues that women in Nauvoo were not simply "victims or powerless participants, but also drove change and forced the hands of the men, institutions, and governments around them" (6). *Kingdom of Nauvoo* skillfully traces the rise and fall of women's authority in early Mormonism. Things looked promising in 1842 and 1843 with the creation of the Relief Society and Quorum of the Anointed. But this brief moment of promise slipped away as Smith and other male church leaders came to feel threatened by the women's relentless campaign, led by Smith's first wife Emma herself, to root out secret immorality and polygamy in the city.

Indeed, one of the primary roles for women in this narrative is as either participants in or critics of Smith's controversial practice of "plural marriage." At multiple junctures, Park goes to pains to explain why women—of various ages, social standing, and marital status—might possibly have been attracted to this peculiar system. The answers varied. For some, it was "another step in a path toward personal sanctification and transcendence" (115). For most, however, it seems that their ritual "sealing" to Smith and other senior church leaders offered "security and permanence" (64). These were not intimate, companionate marriages so much as the forging of ritual kinship networks that promised to transcend the grave. Whatever theological benefits may have accrued, however, Park reminds us that Smith's "vision of the afterlife reaffirmed a patriarchal structure on earth, and expanded it forward indefinitely" (153). Other scholarship on Mormon polygamy, especially in its more formalized dimensions as later practiced in Utah, highlights the counterintuitive ways that the practice worked to empower at least some Mormon women. But Park reveals Nauvoo plural marriage for the social, religious, and emotional thicket that it was; there is no feminist gloss to be found here.

The book's greatest contribution—its successful focus on how Nauvoo revealed "the boundaries of religious liberty" and "the limits of American democracy" (278)—is also the source of its one key limitation. *Kingdom of Nauvoo* is not the first book to turn to if your primary interest is early Latter-day Saint theology—even though Nauvoo was where Smith conducted many of his most inventive doctrinal explorations. For instance, Smith's most theologically revolutionary sermon, the King Follett discourse, is barely mentioned, whereas the Saints' brief dalliances with potentially settling in Texas and Oregon are allotted several (admittedly fascinating) pages. In addition, I was

unconvinced by the author's sociopolitical reading of the Book of Abraham, one of Smith's Nauvoo-era revelatory productions that has been far more formative for Mormonism's cosmology than its sociology or political theory. This was one time I wished the author had slowed down and provided a closer reading of the text in order more fully to persuade me of his novel interpretation.

But why and how Mormonism proved vitally attractive to tens of thousands of early converts is not Park's central question here. This is a book about Mormon Nauvoo and American democracy, not Joseph Smith and early Mormon theology. The issues Park is wrestling with, and that the Saints and their neighbors were grappling with, are not of merely Mormon concern. They are central to the life of any pluralistic society and continue to animate contemporary debates. How will minority rights be guaranteed? How do we balance individual liberties and group rights? What are the limits on religious freedom? And how does a democracy manage competing interests when disparate communities disagree on core values? Mormonism and American democracy have each proven remarkably resilient, but *Kingdom of Nauvoo* reveals that both institutions' eventual—and mutual—success was anything but inevitable.

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In the Matter of Nat Turner: A Speculative History. By **Christopher Tomlins**. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. 376 pp. $29.95 hardcover.

Recently I followed a twitter-back-and-forth between some historians and religious studies scholars asking the question, "Do historians ask themselves what history is?" The historians said, yes, of course (I am, after all, teaching a course on historiography right now); the religious studies scholars responded, no, you are not reading the theorists that challenge the process of creating historical narratives because you think they are "too hard." The historians replied, yes, we are, they are just not the theorists that you have anointed as the chosen ones to read. And so on and on, back and forth. Just then I picked up this work to review—written by a law professor but incorporating the best of historical research and theoretical studies (not to mention literary and legal analysis, and much else). And it was on an ideal subject, largely because you cannot just tell the history "as it actually was" but must invest your own meaning into the story: Nat Turner, leader of a group of enslaved men in Southampton County, Virginia, in August 1831, who joined Turner in murdering around fifty-five whites in the county before being captured and tried, some then executed. In Turner's case, the capture took about two months, but the legacy lives on to this day.

Before his predictably rapid execution, a lawyer named Thomas Gray took Turner's testimony. Or embellished, or just flat made up his testimony. Or both. No one really knows for sure. Turner's motive was to explain his motives; Gray's was to produce a sensationalist tale that would sell a hell of a lot of copies (as indeed it did) and get him out of debt. Beside that possibly specious document and a scattering of legal records and a few newspaper stories and entries in private diaries and letters, that is