Emma Ruth Burns

Project Proposal

HIST 268: Telling Bryn Mawr Histories Praxis

Subject: Mormons at Bryn Mawr

For this semester’s Praxis course I am proposing a research project which would investigate the experience of Bryn Mawr students who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (“Mormon”, or “LDS”). The project aims to look at the support of the Bryn Mawr community and institution, and how that support was supplemented or supplanted by the support of the church institutions. The church institutions that I anticipate encountering would be the Philadelphia Young Single Adult Ward (formerly Branch) or local “family wards”, an LDS Student Association (“LDSSA”), LDS Institute classes, or the support of the local Mormon community outside of these officially Church-sponsored and -organized groups (e.g. local family friends who are LDS). I am investigating in particular the experiences of Bryn Mawr students, although these experiences might overlap with the experiences of students in the Bi- or Tri-Co (e.g. a Tri-Co Institute class). My focus is the experience of students at Bryn Mawr, both those who are currently active members of the Church and those who are not. In fact, I hope that in the case of those who are no longer LDS they may be able to communicate whether their experiences at Bryn Mawr contributed to this decision.

In order to look at these experiences, I will reach out through whatever means possible to LDS alumnae. This may include through social media, LinkedIn, in-person networking, email, or through the alumnae network. When possible, I may conduct in-person or digital interviews or gather written record of their experiences.

In order to have a fuller understanding of the place of Mormonism at Bryn Mawr, I will also be doing broader research into the history of religion at the college. While this will not be the focus of my research, I hope that it will contribute context to the more focused goal.

Thus far, I have gathered a series of names from the last two decades of students who were active in the LDSSA scene at Bryn Mawr. I hope to gather information from the College News and Alumnae Bulletin, and potentially the Alumnae Association. The problems which I will encounter with this project are necessarily those related to contact – whose names can I find? Who can I find a way to get into contact with? Who will respond to my emails?

The goal for the semester is tightly intertwined with my motivations for conducting this research. The intended audience of this project is not the administration, although they are a spectre and their involvement is necessarily a factor in the project; the intended audience of this project is future LDS students, in order to provide a sense of continuity and legacy in the context of a school where this legacy is not always tangible. I will produce not a paper but a scrapbook of sorts, whether digital or physical I haven’t decided. I hope it will include photographs, testimonies, experiences, interviews (or transcriptions), and more than anything analysis of the students’ place at the school in the form of captions and a series of short essays on topics of interest.

This project aligns with the stated goals of the course, although I do not see it containing an activist component. The goal of this project, at least for this semester, is not to change the way Mormons are viewed on-campus, nor is it meant as a critique of Bryn Mawr’s religious culture or lack thereof: it is meant as primarily an internally-facing project.