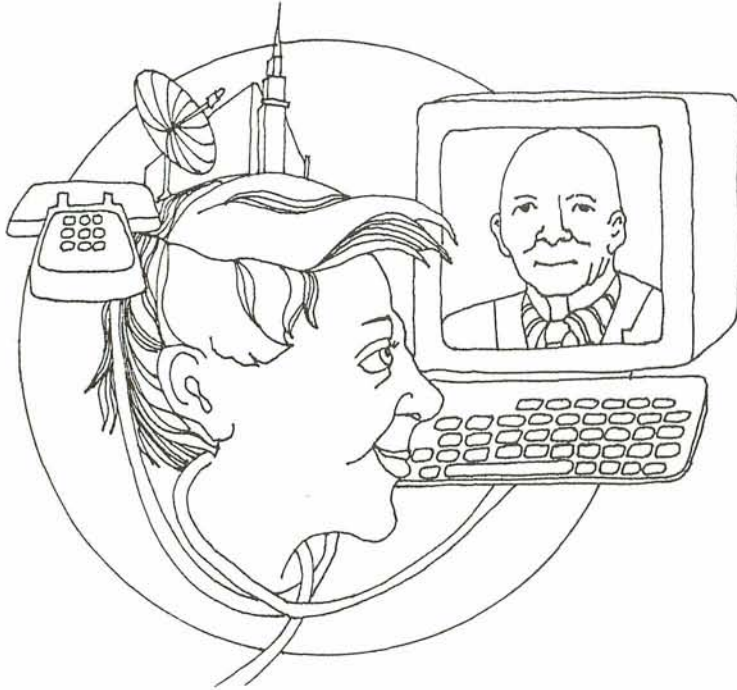


INTERVIEW

DO IT A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENTLY

A Conversation with Joel Kotkin



MARTHA S. BRADLEY

Mormons are becoming a non-racial, world-wide, economic tribe, and they must maintain their identity as they assimilate diverse cultures.

JOEL KOTKIN is the author of the recently released book *Tribes: How Race, Religion and Identity Determine Success in the New Global Economy*. He also co-authored *The Third Century and California, Inc.* and is a senior fellow with the Center for the New West in Denver and an international fellow at Pepperdine University School of Business and Management. This interview was conducted by Elbert Peck.

WHAT IS A GLOBAL TRIBE?

For decades many have said that the two inevitable characteristics of the twentieth century are the nation state and the growth of secularization—that people would identify with their nation over their ethnicity or religion and that the world was moving toward greater homogeneity; that cultural factors were becoming less important than technological factors. That's technological

and economic determinism. Marxism and free-market are contrasting systems of economic determinism, and neither acknowledges nor concentrates on the cultural aspects of why people do what they do—their need for otherworldly or trans-historical identity.

With the end of the Cold War there has been a profound and long-term world-wide shift back toward the search for cultural identity. Ironically, at the same time we have the internationalism of economies and cultures through technology and trade. The world is globalizing rapidly—U.S. gross domestic product is now three times as much tied to international trade as it was in 1960. This affords an opportunity to look at history, and particularly economics, through what I call global tribes—international ethnic groups that operate in the international economy by maintaining their ethnic cultural identity. They meet three conditions.

First, they are dispersed around the world and have international connections and an international perspective.

Second, global tribes have a tradition of self-help and what Martin Buber called a "vocation of uniqueness," a sense of being different. In a world where family and value structures are under assault, those who maintain those structures are in good shape. The Arab historian Ibn Khaldun said only tribes held together by a group feeling can survive in a desert. I see the modern world as a desert where individuals can be easily isolated and weakened, but groups that function on the basis of self-help are in good shape.

Third, global tribes have to be cosmopolitan and interested in gathering information. In my book, I quote the Mormon maxim "the glory of God is intelligence" (D&C 93:36) as an example of this interest. All the tribes that I talk about have a strong tendency toward education, toward learning, toward developing a strong consciousness of wanting to get technology from other people and use it.

I discuss five major tribes that are positioned to operate in the changing economic world: the Jews, who are the historical archetype; the British, who are largest and historically most important in terms of a global network; the Japanese, who have a unique network that I call "diaspora by design," maintaining their global empire through the rotation of corporate Jesuits; the Chinese, who are the most important emerging global tribe and who probably will be the dominant tribe in the twentieth-first century; and the Asian-Indians, who may be the ones to challenge the Chinese.

There are also what I call new global tribes, new affiliations that are developing out of this same ethnic milieu—Armenians, Palestinians, and Lebanese. Then there are the Mormons, who are the first of an emerging and new kind of global tribe.

ARE MORMONS REALLY A TRIBE OR JUST AN INTERNATIONAL CHURCH?

Look at the three characteristics. First, although based in the United States, they are increasingly a global, trans-national group who are predominately non-American. They are genuinely dispersed around the world in established colonies, not just a bunch of white guys from Provo who are there for two years. Second, there is the enormous culture of self-help among Mormons—they "take care of their own." Third, there has been a strong Mormon drive to technology and information, and with the growing sophistica-

tion of Brigham Young University there are now a large number of Mormons in the university systems and the professions who are involved in information manipulation—lawyers, investment bankers, accountants. Taken together, these characteristics make Mormons network more like a tribe than just belonging to a denomination; they are well positioned in the global marketplace.

SOME SAY MORMONISM IS A NEW RELIGIOUS TRADITION—IT IS TO CHRISTIANITY WHAT CHRISTIANITY IS TO JUDAISM.

That's what it's going to have to become to achieve its goals of global expansion. The greatest growth of the Church is in other Christian places; clearly Mormonism is going to have to grow fundamentally off a basic Christian base. A lot depends on how its ethnic identity adapts. It strikes me that Mormonism is buffeted by two forces that are equally dangerous. One is its desire for respectability and conformity that will inevitably end up in Mormons becoming some flavor of generic Protestant Christians. Then there is the force of fundamentalism that's sweeping through society, driving the Church to the religious right. If I were worried about Mormonism, I'd be worried about an attempt to go back to being a fundamentalist white Christian Protestant brand of Mormonism that would make it less attractive to others. Both forces have their dangers. If Mormons become like mainstream Protestants, then what's their *raison d'être*? If they become too fundamentalist, they're also going to cut themselves off. In economic terms, Mormons have to have product differentiation to maintain their identity. Mormons have a danger of not differentiating themselves. Maybe they're afraid of being different because of their history of persecution. But they're not just another brand of Protestantism; if so, then why be a Mormon?

Mormonism has enormous advantages: it is expanding at the time when English is becoming the global language, when there is new global technology, and it has strong lay presence. There is a great opportunity for Mormons in the Confucian countries, because the Confucian values and the values of Mormonism are extremely similar. Both are family oriented; there's an interlock between the Chinese worship of ancestors and Mormon genealogical work. But, again, there has to be market differentiation of Mormonism from other Western Christian faiths—it has a very different kind of historical tradition. If it tries to be another fundamentalist sect or

another washed-out W.A.S.P. sect, it can't compete. How's it going to compete for respectability against the Episcopalians?

With the emergence of Latin America you see the growth of Protestantism and Mormonism. One of the points in my book is that as Latin America industrializes, the Calvinist values that infuse Mormonism are becoming extraordinarily useful. One of the things against the Catholic Church is that it has not exactly been the friend of economic development and uplift of population. Mormonism is well-suited for upward-mobile, developing countries. Even in Los Angeles, there is an emerging Latino middle class that feels the Catholic Church has become an excuse-maker for those who don't want to work hard.

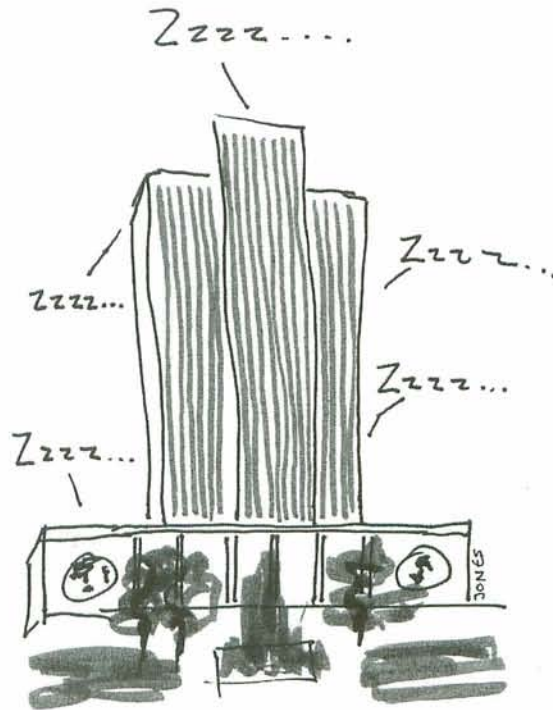
HOW WILL MORMONS OPERATE IN THE FINANCIAL ARENA AS AN ETHNIC GROUP?

What is interesting economically is that Mormons, unlike most of the tribes, have concentrated their members heavily in the bureaucracies, both government and large corporations. They have penetrated mainstream institutions more than created their own economic institutions, at least outside of Utah. That's a very different pattern than with the Jews, Chinese, Asian-Indians, or Japanese, all who tend to create their own

economic institutions. This Mormon pattern has advantages: it obviously helps with proselytizing and attracting the mainstream. It also has a danger of turning them into something like everyone else.

In contrast, the Jewish or Chinese financial and business worlds sustain their cultural world of diversity. The reason the Jewish community can produce more books, for instance, than virtually the entire Christian community is that there is so much philanthropy directed toward Jewish scholarship. And you don't have to answer to anybody for your interest. If Armand Hammer decides he wants to donate a million dollars to holocaust studies, who is going to say no? Such self-supporting actions sustain their unique identity.

A problem with Mormonism is managerialism, which is a Protestant disease. Its danger is that the world economy is changing and moving to smaller units and more flexible kinds of operations. I suspect that Mormons would reflect that change; if they don't, they're going to be in trouble. One of the things that have hurt the African-American community is an over reliance on government and corporate bureaucracies. If you go to a Pacific Bell or AT&T meeting of employees, you'll see a greater percentage of African-Americans than what you see in the entrepreneurial community. Those positions are not nearly as important in the long term



One effect of the growth of the Church in Latin America—the siesta.

as the hi-tech meetings in Orange County or in Silicon Valley, California, where up to 50 percent of the employees are Asian-Indian or Chinese. I'll put my bets on the Indians and the Chinese. That's where the new wealth is going to be created.

Mormons have important assets in the global economy, especially its communal values. Economists once believed that when we got to a certain point in capitalist development that science and technology would take over and that Calvinist values would no longer work and that Judaism, although ideal for capitalism, was too communalistic to function in the modern world. Completely wrong. In reality, communal values are exactly what's needed to be effective in capitalism. Capitalism without values is destructive, as Marx accurately pointed out. You cannot have this capitalistic culture if group self-help—communalism—is not part of that culture.

Indeed, one of the reasons my tribe, the Jews, have been able to survive as capitalists in a capitalistic society is their communalism—who's more communal and tribalistic than the Jews? When Russian Jews come to the United States, the Jewish Federation sets them up in houses, job training, English language training, and very often jobs. I've been asked by three different Jewish organizations in Los Angeles to help come up with strategies for the Jewish community to deal with the realities in L.A. It's a very conscious thing, Jewish communalism. It's different from the typical mainstream Christian charity thing, which is, "We're guilty, we're guilty, we're guilty." The Jews think, "How must we fit into this situation so that we can survive, and what is the mutual self-interest?"

One of the things many reviewers missed is that all the tribes in my book had strong communalistic, familialistic tendencies. They weren't pure capitalists in the sense of financial manipulators who are only profit maximizers; there's something else that sustains them. This includes understanding how the tribe needs to reach out to others outside the tribe in order to preserve the cosmopolitan environment. For tribes to survive as minorities they need to make sure that the cosmopolis survives. Because, for example, if all the Jews in Los Angeles moved to the Intermountain West, Judaism would be doomed in the West. We need Los Angeles. Without L.A. we die because we'd end up being just another group of Anglos, and what could be worse than that?

The history of Judaism is that very early on we became an urban people. Our destiny is in large cosmopolitan cities because of the

diversity, community self-help, and economic networks they allow. If large cosmopolitan cities in America become dysfunctional, then we're in trouble.

Even for Mormons, the danger is that if you destroy a city like Los Angeles you destroy the huge number of people who are potential converts. I think that Mormons, like Jews, are able to survive that chaos because of their own insular communities. The people who are leaving L.A. are the rootless part of the Anglo community who have the least benefit of being in L.A.

JAPANESE TRIBAL NETWORKING MEANS THAT, WHEN POSSIBLE, JAPANESE BUSINESSMEN PATRONIZE ONLY JAPANESE-OWNED COMPANIES. IS SUCH EXCLUSIVENESS PART OF THE FUTURE MORMON GLOBAL NETWORK?

That's how the Japanese do it. Other tribes function in different ways. In contrast, the Jews, the Chinese, and the Asian-Indians usually settle in the country to which they immigrate. And therefore the degree of integration, particularly by the second generation in the adopted country, is much stronger than with the Japanese. In other words, a Jewish businessperson is not going to predominantly work with other Jews; but his charitable contributions will predominantly go to Jewish groups. He will still think and to some extent vote as a Jew.

ISN'T THERE A DANGER OF LOSING YOUR ETHNIC IDENTITY FROM NOT PRESERVING THE BOUNDARIES OF ASSOCIATION?

Yes. But someone once described the Jews as a constantly disappearing people. Jews are always afraid we're going to be wiped out, with good reason, but we always end up surviving. Every group has to fight between the dangers of being too insular and exclusive and of losing their identity completely through assimilation, particularly in an attractive country like the United States. Currently, a Jewish revival is going on here because the mainstream institutions are dysfunctional. The American culture is in such a state of decay, not so much the economy as the culture, that many Jews are increasingly attracted back to their traditions. There are by far more Kosher restaurants in Los Angeles now than when I first moved there. Most Jewish parents I know are sending their children to Hebrew schools, even though they did not go to Hebrew schools themselves. They're looking for alternative institutions to

sustain their identity.

Mormons are interesting because they are going into the unexplored territory of tribes that aren't based on race. Up until the 1950s Mormons were basically a race, a spinoff of Calvinism, which came from Northern Europe. Since then, they're breaking the ground for a new, non-racial, kind of global economic tribe. For example, environmentalists may become an eco or green tribe, people who are united by their common ecological sense. In many ways, ecologists in California, Denmark, and Japan have a lot more in common with each other than with people in their own country—they read the same books, do the same things, fund the same charities, have the same holidays. Gays are also becoming a global tribe of their own with their own resorts, literature, music, causes, etc. But Mormons are leading the way.

WON'T OUR RAPID ASSIMILATION OF NEW PEOPLES MAKE US LOSE OUR ETHNIC IDENTITY?

I think the ethnic and racial diversity of the LDS church should make it more unique, not less, because the other Protestant groups are not diversifying nearly enough. Very few of the Protestant religions in the United States have 50 percent of its members outside the United States. Your globalism and your diversity should be a strength, not a weakness. The challenge for you is to risk it a little bit, do it a little bit differently, don't be afraid to be something different. Only by being different are you going to survive. ☞



TENDERNESS IN A DARK AGE

They tore our mouths apart.
They took our teeth

And kissed off our sexes.
It was a pleasure

Or so they said.
We knew there were others,

A pile of ears over here,
A jar of tongues over there

Hidden in a dark room
For centuries.

There was much blood and weeping,
A little singing.

—TIMOTHY LIU