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Stephen Mansfield, the acclaimed *New York Times* best-selling author, has highlighted the growing popularity of Mormonism—a belief system with cultic roots—and the implications of its critical rise. Mormons are moving into the spotlight in pop culture, politics, sports, and entertainment via presidential candidates like Romney and Huntsman, media personality Glenn Beck, mega-bestselling *Twilight* author Stephanie Meyer, and *The Book of Mormon*, the hottest show on Broadway. Mormonism was once a renegade cult at war with the U.S. Army in the 1800s, but it has now emerged as not only the fastest-growing religion, but as a high-impact mainstream cultural influence.

The Mormonizing of America: How the Mormon Religion Became a Dominant Force in Politics, Entertainment, and Pop Culture Details

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From Reader Review The Mormonizing of America: How the Mormon Religion Became a Dominant Force in Politics, Entertainment, and Pop Culture for online ebook

Kathleen says

This book started out in an interesting way. The author painted a picture of Mormon people becoming prominent in our society and he attempts to define the "why" of that situation. Then the bulk of the book deals with the history of the church which of course starts with a deceiver Joseph Smith manipulating followers with false prophecies and fraudulent activities. The resulting thesis is that the Mormon people are better than their history, better than their leaders, and better than their teachings. But how does that happen???? Thus this book can be thrown in the pile of those who write about the church and just don't get it. I don't think anyone can write from outside the church and understands what makes Mormons tick. The phrase "By their fruits shall ye know them" keeps circulating in my mind. What are the fruits of Joseph Smith if it isn't the Mormon people? He certainly missed in this book. I wouldn't waste my time reading it.

Cynthia says

It quickly became apparent that "Pastor" Stephen Mansfield had an agenda in the writing of this supposed scholarly analysis of "How the Mormon religion became a dominant force in politics, entertainment, and pop culture." The tone of this book throughout is decidedly designed to make the LDS Church look, at best, quixotic in its doctrines, at worst, downright devilish and abhorrent. I will address a few of the book's specific examples.

Page 44: "Initially in Mormon history, blacks are declared cursed, ugly, demonic..." There is no endnote as to where we can find this alleged description of black people. Pastor Mansfield informs us that in 1978, black men were suddenly allowed the Priesthood. I quote from a 1988 talk by Gordon B. Hinckley, former President of the Church: "The question of extending the blessings of the priesthood to blacks had been on the minds of many of the Brethren over a period of years. It had repeatedly been brought up by Presidents of the Church. It had become a matter of particular concern to President Spencer W. Kimball." President Kimball prayed with his two counselors and the Apostles concerning this matter..."The Spirit of God was there. And by the power of the Holy Ghost there came to that prophet an assurance that the thing for which he prayed was right, that the time had come, and that now the wondrous blessings of the priesthood should be extended to worthy men everywhere regardless of lineage. Every man in that circle, by the power of the Holy Ghost, knew the same thing." So, on that June 1, 1978, the Priesthood was extended to men of all lineages. We can recall that while Christ walked in Palestine, He did not actively preach to non-Israelites.

Page 56: Pastor Mansfield writes: "Doctrine is not primary for him (church member); experience is." This premise is repeated a lot throughout the book, leading the reader to believe that we as church members have no idea what we believe in! Let me quote from the Church's Objectives of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (classes geared for high school students and college-age young adults): "Our purpose is to help youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven...We teach students the doctrines and principles of the gospel as found in the scriptures and the words of the prophets." The doctrines are all the teachings and truths that comprise our religion. In the Church, there is a lot of teaching of the doctrines. Every Sunday, I attend Gospel Doctrine class! Why would I belong to a church whose doctrines I have very little knowledge of? For Pastor Mansfield to claim we church members are ignorant of the doctrine is patently false. Matthew 7:16 states regarding the true followers of Christ: "Ye shall know them by their fruits." If we're being fed false and evil doctrine, then why

does the Church produce so much good fruit?

Page 63: Pastor Mansfield doesn't even get basic facts straight: Again, with regard to blacks and the Priesthood, he writes: "the change came forty-five years ago and everybody has admitted the Church was wrong..." Hmmm, from June 1978 to June 2012, I count 34 years. Can I trust someone who doesn't get a simple math problem correct? And the Church never stated it was "wrong." Again, no endnotes to point us to the source of this fabrication. In fact, there are too many inflammatory sentences throughout this book that were not sourced, evidence of shoddy scholarship.

Page 71: Under date of 1835, the author stated The Doctrine and Covenants was published with all 138 revelations. A quick look at the book shows many revelations were received after 1835, in some cases, well after. Again, shoddy scholarship.

I bookmarked many, many instances where the Pastor cast Joseph Smith and the Church's doctrines in the most negative way possible...all without ANY supporting documentation. It reads like a work of fiction, instead of a supposedly carefully researched book. I looked up several of the quotes the author listed in the source documents and found them to be taken out of context. (Sounds like modern day politicking.) He references the book, "Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling" but it appears he read very little of it. I would recommend that book as a thoroughly researched and documented volume of scholarly and impartial work. If people really want to know about the real "Mormon Church," this is not the book to read!

Troy Wallin says

Interesting perspectives mixed with some partial truths. Tripe.

Mary says

Eye-opening moments

This was my first book read about Mormons and my first book read by author, Stephen Mansfield. With the current political situation in America, I was intrigued when the publisher asked me to read and review, The Mormonizing of America.

Skeptical, I approached the book with doubts, thinking it would be filled with the authors biased opinions and his version of facts. Completing the book, I was pleasantly surprised that the opposite was true. I'm not claiming to believe everything I read as absolute fact; however, it became clear immediately that Mansfield wrote, The Mormonizing of America, to enlighten not to preach to his readers.

I'm embarrassed to admit the amount of previous knowledge I had acquired in my lifetime about the Mormon religion. I knew the basics and never desired to expand my education.

The Mormonizing of America, being filled with information and presented in a clear and concise writing style, enabled me to be receptive; hence I enjoyed the book considerably.

The history was fascinating. What scant knowledge I earlier possessed and anything I had questioned about the Mormons, the religion, the church, and the leaders, was answered beautifully by Mansfield. I didn't feel he was being condescending, yet quite the opposite as I continued reading. I noted passages throughout the book and enjoyed my eye-opening moments.

The Chronology from 600 BC to 1904 was an asset, also the Beliefs in Plain Language. The Appendix A, stating Joseph Smith's Articles of Faith, and Appendix B, noting the Surprising Quotes from Mormon Leaders were appreciated.

Given all the information, this was just the tip of the iceberg regarding the subject of the Mormon religion. The purpose of, The Mormonizing of America, was timely, being we currently have a Mormon who is running for the presidency. This is the perfect book for readers to get a feel for the Mormon life and beliefs of Mitt Romney.

I filled in so many blanks, from Joseph Smith and the Golden Plates, to why the Mormons are so successful today. It's amazing to go from being persecuted to running for the office of president of the U.S.

Mansfield explained that Mormons have outstripped their leaders and their extreme doctrines. As long as they fulfill the conditions of their faith, they will ascend in American society.

I recommend The Mormonizing of America, by Stephen Mansfield, for readers of all ages who are curious about the Mormon history and the life of Mormons.

Kerrie says

This was a very inoffensive and very even-handed look at the Mormon religion, particularly the history of its beginnings and the figure of Joseph Smith. Perhaps the only offense someone might take with it is that Joseph Smith comes across as a lying manipulative charlatan, but hey, facts is facts. Mansfield allows the words and actions to speak for themselves with a fence-sitting attitude that allows the reader to decide. In a way it was rather wishy-washy, but I also felt it gave the book more credibility. (The large font and 1.15 line spacing adds to the readability factor, but it felt like a kid's book - or the latest James Patterson novel - at times.)

The only thing I'll dock this book for is the real-life vignette of modern day Mormon interactions that begin each chapter. The dialogue and exposition was stilted and more than a little painful to read. But skip those and read the history. I only know the barest facts about early Mormonism so there was much in here that was new information (Brigham Young spoke in tongues?) An interesting and quick read.

Malin Friess says

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints began in ther 1830's after a Prophet named Joseph Smith declared that all Christianity had been corrupted and needed to be restored to the only true church. They became known as Mormons, settled in Utah, and took their message to the world.

Few would disagree that this "American Religion" has been remarkably successful. There are nearly 7 million Mormons in America (2% of the population or the size of the city of San Francisco). Newsweek magazine recently declared this influential religion to be having a "Mormon Moment" paying a nod to prominent Mormons such as: Stephen Covey, Mitt Romney, John Huntsman, HBO's Big Love, Glenn Beck, Stephenie Meyer (Twilight author), American Idol winner, Marriot Family, Harry Reid, The Winter Olympics, and dozens of members of the US congress. Mormonism has arrived. So how did this happen?

A few excerpts:

Mansfield sees the Mormon church as an engine..with a doctrine that life is a test to pass. Much like an obstacle course in order to qualify for eternity. Mormon literature talks about the virtue of achieving goals, organization (God organizes matter not creates it), improvement, eternal progress. It should be no surprise that many of Stephen Covey's principles come from the Book of Mormon.

Mormonism is devoted to family (sealed for all eternity), education (the common route is Eagle Scout, Mormon Mission, BYU, Law School, etc..), patriotism, (The Mormon Tabernacle Choir has sung at the inauguration of 5 Presidents), and lastly Capitalism (Mansfield calls Mormonism the Protestant ethic on Steroids.)

Unfolding Revelation (A living Prophet Trumps a Dead Prophet) is perhaps Mormonism's greatest strength and weakness according to Mansfield. It is allowed the church unbelievable flexibility that Joseph Smith can have a revelation that polygamy is required to reach the highest heaven (and also advantageous to the spread of Mormonism in the early Church). But then polygamy can be revoked with this practice becomes less politically acceptable. Initially the Mormon history books are declared Cursed and barred from the Temple, until 1978 it all conveniently goes away. Gays were once excommunicated but now a homosexual may enter the church if her or she remains celibate. More revelations may be coming and while the Church should certainly not be condemned for a checkered past (what Religion does not have moments they would like to cover up...Slavery, the Crusades) I expect the LDS church to come more in line with evangelical/protestant Christian Theology (Many were surprised that the defeat of Mormon Romney had little to do with religion and much more to do with 47% comments and a changing Latino Demographic. It seemed that ultimately Evangelicals/Protestants/Catholics overwhelmingly accepted Mitt Romney as a viable candidate as he was). I think even in the past 10 years you have seen the LDS church deemphasize Joseph Smith/Brigham Young and emphasize Jesus Christ.

Mansfield launches deeply into the difficult and controversial past of the Mormon Church;

"Mormonism must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith," so says one of the Mormon Presidents.

"For the faithful Joseph Smith is the true Prophet...noble and holy and good. To the outside world he is viewed as both a deceiver and himself deceived."

Joseph Smith taught all previous versions of Christianity were corrupt..this meant Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, and early Christians who rescued babies...were abominable." I believe this judgement by Mansfield is unfair..and you would not find many and none of my Mormon friends who would condemn the likes of Mother Teresa today.

Smith has always been guided by revelations. They told him to marry a 14 year old girl. They told him to buy some old mummies and Egyptian Papyrus. They told him to jam his face into a hat while he stared at stones inside it and translate five golden plates into the Book of Mormon.

"Joseph Smith was the Henry Ford of revelation..he wanted every home to have one...Smith lived at a time of great spiritual excitement, he was put off by the constant bickering in Christianity. Such that the faith of the Saints evolved by prophecy rather than by doctrine. Smith was opposed to creeds. As a result, today it is difficult to find a definitive systematic statement of what Mormons believe, produced by the Mormons themselves....there is little place for professional theologians among the saints. It is Joseph Smith was focused more on what a man does than what he believes...Deeds not Creeds. The outside world naturally identifies Mormons by their doctrinal oddities (Garments, Baptism for the Dead, Garden of Eden in Missouri)...Mormons think of themselves in terms of priesthood authority..and the sacred life they share

together." I'm not sure if my LDS friends would agree with this paragraph..but perhaps this statement gives me more understanding of this faith than 15 years living in Utah. I admire the LDS faith for what it does so well its deeds (community, family, missions, prayer, kindness, honesty, work ethic) but at times outsiders like me are bewildered by their unique doctrines (Baptism for the Dead, Garments, Temple Marriage Rituals).

What do we make of the Book of Mormon? The historical claims of the book will almost never receive scholarly affirmation outside of the faithful fold..says Mansfield. 27,000 words of the BoM come straight from the Bible (about 10%). "and it came to pass" is used 2000 times. One chapter of the BoM quotes 13 consecutive chapters of Isaiah. Are there mistakes..Jesus born in Jerusalem? Horses abound in the New World thousands of years before Columbus' time?

Is the BoM based on fact? Does it matter? Some say what is important is what does it mean to us now? But Gordon Hinkley says in 2007 of the BoM "It's either true or false. If it's false we're engaged in a great fraud. If it's true, it's the most important thing in the world." A BYU professor says, "A true BoM is a powerful witness; a fictional one hardly worth reading and pondering." Most outsiders would say the BoM has its challenges... There is no evidence that Smith's "Reformed Egyptian" existed. The idea that the American Indians were the "Lost Tribes" of Israel is common..but the DNA evidence shows no similarities between Indian tribes and Hebrews. New World Archaeological Excavations just don't reveal the establishments suggested in the BoM.

Why no mass exodus? BYU does have supporting organizations FARMS (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies). But Mansfield claims that while most Mormons might find their history unproven, frustrating, maybe intellectually unsatisfying they repeatedly affirm what is more important in their mind..to receive the witness of the Spirit, bearing testimony that the BoM is true. Who can argue with a Religious Conversion Experience. It is uniquely personal whether it be LDS, Buddhist, or what have you.

But despite this all..Mormons survived. They were persecuted and pushed out of New York and Missouri all the way to Utah. Their leaders were tarred and feathered. They organized, regrouped, and thrived. Then in 1907 Mormon Smoot took his seat in the Senate. And quietly the country went on its business. Mormons then banned polygamy. Ezra Taft Benson became Secretary of Agriculture. Mormon athletes won gold medals. Donny and Maie Osmond became beloved by the country. Glen Beck, Harry Reid, Mitt Romney..it continues.

Mormonism is a costly religion...Family meetings once per week, dozens of possible church roles, fasting once per month, financial tithing, and then a two year mission (of which nearly 1 million LDS youth have served). To this the LDS church I believe is admired by other faith's for their high level of commitment and devotion. Polls support this as 60% express a favorable view of Mormons (much different I imagine than if the poll were taken 20 years previous).

Where do we go from here. It seems LDS wish to be thought of as traditional Christians like Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals. Some are calling the Mormon faith the 4th Abrahamic Religion (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism being the other three). But divisions still exist. Many Holocaust survivors have great disdain for seeing their relatives (perhaps even Anne Frank) being baptized for the dead within a Mormon Temple. Furthermore, it seems Joseph Smith was not offering middle ground. He reworked and "translated" the Bible (even though he didn't know Greek or Hebrew). B. Young himself said, "every spirit that confesses Joseph Smith is a Prophet...and that the BoM is true, is of God..and every spirit that does not is of Anti-Christ." But has that statement been trumped by a more modern day prophet?

When Baptists says Mormonism is a Cult I believe they are rightly offended. When LDS says their Church is the only true restored Christian church I think Protestants are rightly offended. Can the gap be bridged? Billy Graham removed the word "Cult" from its description within his BGEA organization after meeting with _____

Romney. LDS and Evangelicals often band together politically in support of traditional marriage and pro life agenda.

Mansfield believes that the "Mormon Momen" will not end. He does urge the Church to be more transparent. Although all faiths have miracles and obstacles that can be difficult to defend..the historical proximity (the Mormon story happened in just the last 200 years as opposed to the Christian story that happened in the last 2000 years) becomes more difficult to defend.

Mansfield ends with this final thought... Joseph Smith perhaps in his ingenuity saw that constant revelation will allow this Religion to continue to adapt, remake itself, and be on a trajectory ever upward.

I'm sorry this review was way too long. I give this book 5 stars. Mansfield does seem to have an axe to grind with the LDS church (I wonder what faith Mansfield belongs?) It seems at times even the author is amazed despite it all..how successful this American Religion has become.

Brett Chapman says

This book offers a good introduction to the Mormon faith. From the historical view, as the author narrowed his focus toward today, and the many changes that had been put in place over the years, the essence of that faith becomes just a bit vague. He also explains the big differences between Mormonism and all other Christian denominations. Particularly important are four "engines" which drive Mormons and their belief system. The belief that this life is a test and part of an eternal plan of progression leads to self-improvement and achievement, long-term and eternal family binds and marriage, the focus on education and leadership, and patriotism are discussed.

Brooke Berry says

The introduction was cute and funny, almost like an LDS member poking fun at himself. I laughed and had to share with my friend a few of the funny quirks. One thing to note is that there are a few outdated ideas such as the prompting to have 13 children being common. It's way more common to have 2 or 3 these days although there are a few who have 5. The church doesn't really get involved and would definitely counsel (if asked) for a family to not have more than they can provide for.

I found this book to be a basic introduction to the beliefs of the church. The author claims to neither deny or defend and for the most part this was true, but it tended to have an overtone of the authors opinion of doubt. Especially towards the history of the church's founding as well as the life of Joseph Smith. I would say this book is about 80% true and the remaining 20% wasn't well researched and is the authors assumption based on his own observations. Girls ARE allowed to go on missions, in fact many of them do. As a researcher who has spent time in Salt Lake meeting with church officials, surely he would have seen hundreds of them, as well as elderly couples serving missions as well. This is just one incorrect observation that he mistakingly published as fact.

Overall, I would summarize the authors opinion that the church itself, MEH, but the resulting people are hard working, loyal, and successful, which is why we hear about so many of them in the public eye.

In Summary: Not really worth the read. Browse the first 10 pages in the book store and you get the best parts.

Georgia Herod says

Having lived in Utah for 24 years as a non-Mormon and having seen the movement of the LDS church into mainstream of religion and culture, I was eager to read Mansfield's book. A writer and speaker, Mansfield has written extensively on the role of religion in history, leadership, and modern culture. This book is divided in two parts separated by a chapter titled "Mormon Beliefs in Plain Language": a chronology of history of the religion; Mormonism moving into the culture. Joseph Smith's life and the history are presented factually. The presentation of beliefs is excellently done. The religion's movement to mainstream becomes understandable. Each chapter begins with a chatty dialogue or scenario to draw the reader into the topic at hand and for the reader to connect with a real life situation.

While I have known what the Mormon church teaches and practices, Mansfield offers astute insight about the reasons that stand behind those doctrines and practices. The LDS community has gained prominence because of several important features of Mormonism: "the ability to draw practical inspiration from the LDS journey [history, persecution, trek westward, etc.], the earthly effect of Mormon spirituality [little disconnect between secular and sacred--all of life is done with eternal consequences in mind], the power of celebrity, and the valuing of hardship [strong work ethic, sacrifice, frugality, etc.] (p. 222)." These features plus "the religious priority of achievement, family, education, work, the free market, heritage, networking, and the various other engines of the Mormon Machine" have contributed to the "Mormonizing of America."

Very readable. Doesn't get bogged down in controversy.

David says

As someone who doesn't know a great deal about the LDS church, I found this account of the history of the church and nature of its beliefs and practices informative. not sure i liked it enough to tweet "I recommend reading #themormonizingofAmerica" as helpfully recommended by the back page, even if I were on Twitter.

Drawbacks included:

1. To introduce discussion of some of the controversial aspects (boys of 12 can become priests, Blacks could not until the late '70's....) he uses a very stilted device of imagined conversations between incredulous outsider and Mormon friend.
2. Never establishes the basic point he sets out to explain (see subtitle). If you have to repeat over and over that the Osmonds, Glenn Beck, Mitt Romney, Stephen Covey, and the guy who runs JetBlue airlines are Mormon, is that actually remarkable for a Church of 7 million? Don't know.
3. Granted, it would be very hard to study definitively, but his explanations of Mormon success in terms of their theology (they see everything about this life as a test to prove your worthiness of being with "Heavenly Father", so they are highly achievement motivated) also seemed to be carried by assertion rather than any evidence.

Nonetheless, I did learn about a hero in the anti-tobacco movement. Apparently Joseph Smith's wife

complained about tobacco stains on their rug after meetings of elders, and the ever-flexible (sorry, subject to "progressive revelation") Mr. Smith followed up shortly thereafter with the news that Mormons should not smoke. Adding in alcohol and "hot drinks" (later interpreted as coffee or tea) seems to me a bit of an overgeneralization, but the tobacco part was ahead of its time.

David says

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In approaching this review I have endeavored to be open-minded, about the author's approach, and his knowledge of the matter at hand. Too often it is easy for a reviewer to dismiss a publication on account of whether it is considered 'outside' of a particular field or following a particular agenda. There is no doubt that Stephen Mansfield's style is easy to read and consume. This does not mean, however, he is convinced of Mormonism's argument which is easy to detect. I would also credit the author with his register and general tone providing a popular book for a larger audience. Personally, it matters little to me whether the writer is Mormon, Jew, Baptist etc. For me it is a legitimate endeavour to research and question without being part of the inner. So that Mansfield is not Mormon or even that this publication is Mormon orientated matters little to me the purpose is to assess, review and report.

That said, I was left with the overwhelming feeling that despite attempting to discuss the 'The Mormonizing of America', it seemed more like a thrashing of well worn and aged arguments. Mansfield in his attempt to make sense of the foundations of Mormonism, assesses that the LDS Church is a product of the Jacksonian era. Occasionally, a flattering comment arises, but appears to be more of a cursory rather than part of any advancing scholarly framework. This book, therefore, might be considered a rebuttal of Mormonism with a thinly veiled act of diplomacy, dusted with a little flattery.

The book itself, with its introduction, prologue, nine chapters, and two appendices, is oriented around what Mansfield argues as the four "engines" which drive Mormonism. In between individual chapters are interwoven small vignettes playing out Mormon and non-Mormon dialogues. However, I will discuss these later.

The first engine identified is that of belief, that this life is a test, and part of an eternal plan of progression leading to self-improvement and achievement. (32-34). Second, the emphasis on long-term family commitment creates a culture which reinforces Mormons' commitment to their church and each other. (34-36). Third, the focus on education and development of leadership skills produces abilities that lead to success in non-church settings. (36-38). Finally, fourth, the Mormon emphasis on patriotism and a free

market economy, combined with cautious views of government control, lead to active conservative political participation. (38-41). It is not unreasonable, in the author's assessment, therefore, that this ascent has made Mormons "free market apostles". (40)

In accepting such a four part model, in order to make sense of this dominant force in America, Mansfield does observe a further "spiritual appeal" of Mormonism. (41). He emphasizes that for Mormons, the concept of a caring Heavenly Father, rather than an abstract impersonal God, strengthens their resolve as well as the beliefs in their own personal spiritual experiences. He further argues that there is the notion of continuous heavenly revelation intended to guide the Church as well as its members.

Chapter One discusses how Mormons see themselves and their 'unshakable belief' in the priesthood, the restored authority to act in God's Church. (57) Debatable, but nevertheless I'll go with the flow. In fairness, the wider outlaying of the doctrinal assessment is somewhat fair, even though Mansfield does claim that doctrine is not primarily important (56), I think most Mormons would agree with that as being inaccurate. When Mansfield does get past considering Mormons a bit 'squishy' (64), he does suggest a page of valid questions that perhaps even Mormons should consider, and consider how they would respond, particularly regarding their relationship to other denominations, and considerations of what priesthood actually means. (65) He draws the first chapter to an end by assuring that due to the Church's critical mass it should be 'worth considering for this reason alone.' (66). Helpfully, a chronology follows and generally is accurate, a few entries do need clarifying, for example, August 1835 was not a period when polygamy was even accused, let alone denied. See for example Brian C. Hales three volume set *Joseph Smith Polygamy: History & Theology* who argues it was not until post-1840 that any allegations were made. An entry referring to the RLDS Church might also be questioned as to when it was formed (1860), or when it first began to informally meet (1852). I had hoped that at least the research was more than a brief observation.

Chapter Two through Six addresses the contextual background for the Church's early beginnings and the Smith family. This is pretty much a thumbnail sketch of Richard Bushman's *Rough Stone Rolling*, perhaps the definitive biography of Joseph Smith. I have no real disagreement with the general historical context. I do have issue as to the extent that the author considers Fawn Brodie as an eminent (125) and gifted historian. Mansfield does not mention the issues or criticism that she received for her psychoanalytic approaches, or even in-house editor's criticism of making facts fit the theory rather than theory to the facts. Unfortunately the author uses few other historians to the extent of Brodie, who remains the primary scholar. "The truth is that when all of the research is considered, there is precious little scientific or historical evidence that Book of Mormon claims are historically true." (177) The same might be said of many aspects of religious feeling and responses within and without Mormonism. So why don't Mormons leave the faith? He says most Mormons are not primarily interested in scholarship as they are taught to seek a feeling of confirmation, an "inner knowing" that trumps objective evidence.

I found several historical and theological errors that could have been easily avoided if this draft had been reviewed by a scholar of Mormonism, not necessarily a Mormon scholar. He is clear of his disdain for the Book of Mormon, even using the outdated excuse of the Spaulding manuscript as a possible source for the book. (149) The author quotes members of Spaulding's family recalling Book of Mormon names that first appeared in Spaulding's Manuscript Found. One would think that the author would check a copy of Spaulding's book, easily available at the Internet Archive. If he had, he would have easily found a word search of the document fails to uncover the names referenced. Additionally, if the author had made any effort at fairness, he would have shared some of the significant research that has been shown to disprove that theory. Furthermore in his seeking for evidence or accuracy the vignettes are curious.

Some of these vignettes do not seem authentic, particularly, the young men and boys being ordained as priests. At one point it is stated that boys at 13 were considered for the priesthood as a priest, in another place it is highlighted as 14 and 12 to be called a priest. (163). The actuality is that it is age 12, and that was to be ordained to a Deacon and at 14 to the office of Teacher, and finally at 16 to the office of Priest. This office of

priest would generally only last two years before a young man is ordained to a higher priesthood such as the office of Elder or High Priest. If these dialogues had come from the Mormon experience as supposed - then this would be readily known. The same sentiment rests for some of the others.

There are a number of further typos or errors including the contents and number of revelations in the Doctrine of Covenants (1835) (178), Smith's marriage date as January 18 1927, when it should be 1827 (111), moreover the report of mob violence cited as 1842 instead of 1832, (211).

Mormon Beliefs in Plain Language (157-161).

While it is welcome that an author provides an overview of an organisation's articles, there are a number of inaccuracies concerning this section. For example: 5: Pre-made families, destinies determined, and assignment in life as Mormon/non-Mormon are incorrect; 13: The age at which boys receive the priesthood is 12 not 14; 19: Stating that women can now go on missions is a misnomer, it is not a recent phenomenon but one of the nineteenth century, 1897, and believed to be Inez Knight who went to Great Britain; 20: 'Some Latter-day Saints' is misleading, it is actually fundamentalist groups and not LDS who continue the practice. There are distinct subtleties between the names Latter-day Saint, Latter-Day Saints and Latter Day Saint.

In conclusion, this book remains an easy read and is intended for the popular audience. It provides little that is new or anything other than the rehashing of older publications. It has so much potential but lacks in-depth research causing inaccuracies and flawed outcomes. There is very little to do with the title or the process or personalities of Mormonizing America. For me this review is not a defense of Mormonism but a focus on the books research and outcomes. I would hope that a second edition seriously considers more recent scholarly work, availability of resources, and the reading of the script by an academic dealing with Mormon studies.

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www.amazon.com/gp/product/1617950785?..

Ryan says

Without a doubt this is the worst book on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that I have ever read. In the beginning, I was willing to give the author the benefit of the doubt with everything he was getting completely wrong about the Church theologically, doctrinally, historically, culturally, etc. Given his claims about all the supposed "research" he had done for this book, I thought maybe he was just a really bad listener. But as the errors continued to pile up at alarming rate, I eventually had to come to the unhappy conclusion that he actually must be disingenuously deceptive about his actual understanding of LDS doctrine, faith, and practice, as well as his ability to be "unbiased." Craig Foster (Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture, 2013, 6:85-104) has written a pretty good review cataloguing a few of the numerous errors in this book. I highly recommend that review for anyone who thinks they're getting an accurate picture of Mormonism in this book. But it isn't just what Mansfield gets wrong that is the problem; it's about what he leaves out that is the most problematic. In contrast to this book, I am also currently reading the Ostling's "Mormon America." This may be true for most believers in a religion (as I am in Mormonism), but when I read the Ostling's book, the perspective I feel I am getting on the Church to which I belong is like going to the funeral of someone I knew and loved. The corpse sort of looks like the person I know-but not quite. The life, the "spirit" of the faith just isn't there. As I said, I suppose many believers would feel this way about the way "outsiders" try to describe or explain or depict their faith. And I am actually OK with that. However, when I read this book I feel like I am being asked to identify the corpse of a loved one who has been in a

terrible airplane crash, and hasn't just been burned and disfigured, but has actually been grossly dismembered in a grisly manner. I am so glad that I finally finished this book and can move on to something actually worth my time.

Steve says

Recently I was approached by Worthy Publishing with the opportunity to be one of a select group of bloggers to review this new release by best-selling author Stephen Mansfield. Having always had a fairly positive opinion of the Church of Later Day Saints, I was a little leery at first. I didn't want to read a book that simply chose to pick apart a faith, or that paid all of its attention on some of the more peculiar practices of it's members. Truth be told, I think if you look objectively at any religion, some of the rites and rituals are a little strange - my own faith included.

The subtitle of this new book is what convinced me to read it: How the Mormon Religion Became a Dominant Force in Politics, Entertainment, and Pop Culture. As the author repeatedly states, we are certainly living through a "Mormon Moment" and to learn what it is about this faith that seems to produce successful adults in numbers that belie their relatively small membership could be interesting. After finishing it, I have mixed feelings.

Mansfield begins with the right approach in mind. "[A] book about a people that takes every pain to refer to that people and their beliefs with derision need not have been written....Best to simply state what Mormons believe, having first established that it is not the view of the author. And now we have done so." He then provides a chapter's worth of anecdotes about Mormons in America today. While asserting they are true, there is no form of attribution given, and while I am sure some variant of the numerous conversations recorded here happened, they come off as a bit forced, both in content and style. The point however is clearly made: Mormons are an impressive people with some odd beliefs. This premise colors all that is to follow.

The anecdotal, tone-setting evidence doesn't cease at the end of the first chapter though. Mansfield uses this technique throughout the text, opening each chapter with a story to illustrate what the rest of the chapter will explain. At times this is helpful and informative, but too often it creates a bias before even delving into the given subject. The reader gets the sense that Mansfield truly does admire these people for what they have been able to accomplish, but it is as if he just can't help himself. He is clearly critical of the Church of Later Day Saints' theology and this comes through both in these vignettes of Mormon life, as well as in the detailed description of the unfolding of Mormon history.

In fact, the history of the Saints, including Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, the golden plates, the westward migration and everything in between, make up a large portion of the book. There is nothing really new or revelatory here as much of it has been covered already at length by other authors, and the author's disapproving voice is thinly veiled behind this narrative. I couldn't help but feel sympathy for the Mormons at this point. Judeo-Christian history is shrouded in the distant past, far from the kind of historical scrutiny that is being brought down around the Later Day Saints. I understand the scrutiny; when Mormons claim events have happened in the recent, documented, past there is no avoiding taking them to task when two versions of history do not agree. Still, it is, at the same time, unfortunate. The rest of the book turns to what, for me, was the more interesting story.

Regardless how strange, unprovable and odd their history may be, not many people can deny the fact that Mormons are among the most successful, charitable, family-oriented and civic minded people in America today. Why? Here Mansfield is at his best as he deftly makes the case that Mormonism is a truly American religion and that the facets that make one a good Mormon are the same facets that make one a successful and

upstanding American. He calls this the "Mormon Machine" and it revolves around the religious priority of achievement, family, education, work, the free market, heritage, networking and an unabashed sense of American exceptionalism. It is easy to see how any group that seriously valued these concepts would find success in modern America.

After finally delivering on the promise of explaining why "the Mormon Religion Became a Dominant Force in Politics, Entertainment, and Pop Culture" Mansfield then once again falls into the trap of editorializing by including an appendix full of "Surprising Quotes from Mormon Leaders." While there is nothing I can see that is factually inaccurate, the continual critiquing of the history and practice of this faith undermine what he states time and time again as his main thesis.

Overall, I enjoyed reading this book, but I do wish he remained truer to his promise to present an objective view of this "Mormon Moment" we are all witnessing.

Brittany Binowski says

Neutral? No. Fair? Yes.

His argument, as stated best on page 226:

"We come home to where we began: 'There is the case to be made that the Mormon people have often been better than their leaders and better than the doctrines their leaders have given them.' It is certainly true. The faithful will object because they have been taught obeying their leaders is essential to salvation. We can let them object. What we know from Mormon history, though, is that it is the Mormon people who have accomplished the greatness of Mormonism. They, in essence, have worked the Mormon Machine."

Where Mormonism is strong, he says it's strong (Mormon values, the culture of the people); where Mormonism is weak, he says it's weak (the accuracy of the doctrines, reliability of the leaders).

But, any good religious person knows that it's not the accuracy of the doctrines that ultimately wins them over; it's an internal knowing of belonging, acceptance and righteousness.

To believe in religion is to believe in a leap of faith. It's a good introduction into the theology (and how it relates to long-held American values), especially if you don't know much about it, but not the be-all-end-all.

J.S. Green says

Bashing Joseph Smith

With two Mormon candidates for US president in this election (now only one) the Mormon Church has received an unusual amount of news coverage, much of it negative. The Mormon or LDS Church is one of the fastest growing religions with over 14 million members worldwide (about half in the United States) and there are influential and successful Mormons in American politics, business, sports, entertainment, and many other areas which makes Stephen Mansfield very nervous. He wonders how a church that was so persecuted in its early days could have become such a potent symbol of American values and ideals. And, more importantly, he wonders what it might mean if a Mormon were elected president.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (which has been known historically as the Mormon Church) has long made a point of saying that its truthfulness hinges on the story of Joseph Smith. As a 14 year old boy Smith claimed to have a vision where he saw God and Jesus Christ, and that through him the gospel of Jesus Christ was "restored." This also involved the translation of The Book of Mormon, which Mormons claim as holy scripture in addition to the Bible. It follows that if Joseph Smith was a fraud, the church would be as well. But if Joseph Smith was a true prophet, then the church he established is true. As evidence they offer The Book of Mormon, and missionaries invite people all over the world to read it and pray about it.

This oft-repeated claim does not go unnoticed by the perceptive Mansfield, and he uses it as the backbone of his attack. While he can be complimentary toward current members, his "history" of Joseph Smith and The Book of Mormon is a rehash of every anti-Mormon accusation regardless of merit or source. He repeatedly uses words like "fraud" and "charlatan" when describing Smith, and dismisses The Book of Mormon as boring and unsupported by evidence. (He also conveniently glosses over the fact that Joseph Smith gave his life for his cause and died as a martyr.) Instead, he lamely asserts that the incredible success of the church is due simply to its sense of community, focus on family and education, and its organization.

I tried to give the author the benefit of the doubt and assume his intentions were noble, but sadly this is a very poorly-researched book that was rushed to print before the election is over and the issue fades away. Like other anti-Mormon literature, Mansfield uses second-hand quotes and takes quotes out of context to make Mormon leaders seem extra strange, and anything factual is presented in a way to support his own bias. He uses lots of short vignettes that are supposedly real conversations happening every day in "Mormon America" that mostly play on irrational fears or cast Mormons in extreme ways. He continually gets his facts about the priesthood wrong and insinuates that polygamy is still practiced by church members. He even quotes a fictional novel to suggest Mormons claim to have planted all the sunflowers in the American west. And as a long-time member of the church I've never heard some of the "common Mormon sayings" he quotes.

I might agree with Mansfield when he says too many Mormons aren't familiar *enough* with doctrines (pg 56-57), but this ignores the fact that surveys show Mormons are generally more familiar with their own doctrines than non-Mormons are with theirs. He also says the church discourages its members from studying doctrine and favors "experience over doctrines" and emphasizes a "mystical inner knowing" instead, which mostly demonstrates his own lack of familiarity with his subject. He says The Book of Mormon has been "ignored as serious literature," but he's ignoring that it was recently named among the most influential books in America.

His explanation of how Mormons "became a dominant force" is weak (again, he says it's because of an emphasis on community, family, education, etc., and urges other churches to adopt such attitudes) and he questions the continuing loyalty and patriotism of members (even though he praises such attributes). He suggests a higher level of scrutiny is necessary and that the integrity of such previously honest people isn't good enough, which is really just a shameless political jab.

I do not resent or begrudge Mansfield for not sharing my religious beliefs - that's his prerogative - but there is little that is fair or unbiased in his book. He admits "Smith has come in for quite a bashing in these pages..." (pg 210), and laughably makes pretense at scholarly writing (pg xxii) even though the notes and sources at the end of the book occupy only a few short pages. (While I was reading it someone saw the unusually large font the book is printed with and asked if I was reading a children's book.) To use Mansfield's words, this book "need not have been written." (I received this book from the publisher, and as an avid reader I deeply regret the time I have wasted on it.)