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## EDITORIAL

*David M. Morris*

*Editor*

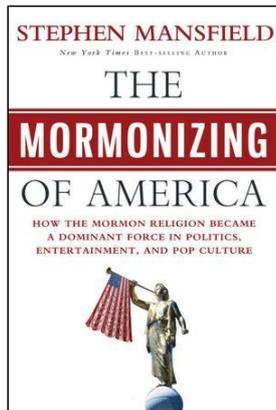
Since 2007, we have published one volume a year filled with scholarly articles, as well as book reviews. We will of course continue to do this, however, we will begin to publish book reviews directly, to the website and make a selection for each volume. This is to respond to the now numerous books and publications that are coming out.

In this issue, we are excited to publish a lengthy consideration of Mormon identity by Wilfried Decoo, as well as Armand Mauss' article 'From Galatia to Ghana'. Following which, we are able to publish, 'Sacred Secrecy and the Latter-day Saints' by Douglas J. Davies as well as articles by Alan Goff and Kirk Caudle. A number of book reviews also appear, all of which are available on <http://www.ijmsonline.org>. A special appreciation is extended to the contributors for their kindness in making available their submissions.

We, as always, extend our appreciation to those who took time to blind peer-review articles and review books fairly and as formatively as possible. As an editorial board we hope you will enjoy the contents of this issue.

If you wish to make a comment or suggestions on its improvement, please feel free to email us at [editorial@ijmsonline.org](mailto:editorial@ijmsonline.org)

**BOOK REVIEW: THE MORMONIZING OF AMERICA: HOW THE MORMON RELIGION BECAME A DOMINANT FORCE IN POLITICS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND POP CULTURE – DAVID M. MORRIS**



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

**Author:** Stephen Mansfield

**Publisher:** Worthy Publishing

**Year:** 2012

**Pages:** 288

**Binding:** Hardback

**ISBN-13:** 978-1617950785

**List Price:** \$22.95

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 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.