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Misunderstanding Mormonism in *The Mormonizing of America*

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MISUNDERSTANDING MORMONISM IN *THE MORMONIZING OF AMERICA*

Craig L. Foster

The Mormonizing of America by Stephen Mansfield has been touted as a solid, impartial look at Mormon history and doctrine. Unfortunately, on closer examination, the book is seriously lacking both in substance and impartiality. This article discusses the book's numerous problems.

Review of Stephen Mansfield. *The Mormonizing of America: How the Mormon Religion Became a Dominant Force in Politics, Entertainment, and Pop Culture*. Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2012. 264 pp. \$22.99.

Stephen Mansfield's *The Mormonizing of America* was published in 2012 at the height of the so-called "Mormon Moment," which coincided with Mitt Romney's presidential campaign. The book was generally well received by reviewers in publications like *US News and World Report* and *The Washington Post*. A number of reviews on Internet blogs were especially laudatory. On the "America Done Right" blog, for example, the reviewer stated how, after reading the book, he had "come away with a better understanding of the history of the Mormon religion and a healthy respect for their beliefs thanks to an honest author." The reviewer ended by advising,

“If you are interested in learning about the Mormon religion then this is the book for you.”¹

Among some of the Christian blogs and publications, the reviews were particularly positive. One review explained, “Although Mansfield is writing from a Christian perspective, he is very respectful towards LDS beliefs, writing from an impartial stance and leaving the evidence to speak for itself.”² Another Christian blogspot enthusiastically proclaimed, “*The Mormonizing of America* is a book I’d recommend as a primer on Mormon history and, more so, as a means of understanding why Mormonism has gained such popularity in recent days.”³

Even among some people studying Mormon history and doctrine there was praise. One historian wrote regarding critiques of *The Mormonizing of America*, “The book has received high marks for its objectivity and balance. Selecting quotes out of context from the author of the book to argue for anti-Mormon bias is inexcusable.”⁴

In spite of the numerous accolades and applause for *The Mormonizing of America*, not all readers nor reviewers were impressed. Doug Gibson of the Ogden Standard-Examiner

1 “Book Review: *The Mormonizing of America* by Stephen Mansfield,” *America Done Right: Ideas for a Better United States of America* (n.d.), <http://americadoneright.wordpress.com/2012/08/20/book-review-the-mormonizing-of-america-by-stephen-mansfield/>, accessed 9 January 2013.

2 “Review: *The Mormonizing of America* by Stephen Mansfield,” *Iola’s Christian Reads* (28 July 2012), <http://christianreads.blogspot.com/2012/07/review-mormonizing-of-america-by.html>, accessed 9 January 2013.

3 Tim Challies, “The Mormonizing of America,” *Challies: Informing the Reforming* (1 August 2012), <http://www.challies.com/book-reviews/the-mormonizing-of-america>, accessed 9 January 2013. Challies’s opinion is not without bias. In his review he describes Joseph Smith as “a polygamous, philandering, ego-centric, irrational confidence trickster.” He continues, “Brigham Young was no better, another polygamous sociopath who presided over a reign of terror in Utah.”

4 Copy of a page of comments sent to the author on 4 January 2013 and presently in the author’s possession. The name of the historian has been withheld as a common courtesy.

described the book as “a soft-sell piece of ‘Bible-bookstore’ anti-Mormonism, in which the author tries to tone down his righteous indignation using a ‘I-have-a-lot-of-Mormon-friends-I-admire’ maneuver.” Gibson ended his review by predicting the book “is too simple a work to find much of an audience beyond bookstores of the types that have sections devoted to anti-Mormonism books.”⁵

Gibson’s prediction was partly true. While it certainly was carried in Christian bookstores across the country, it became more popular than expected and certainly more popular than deserved. This review takes an in-depth look at Stephen Mansfield’s *The Mormonizing of America* and discusses what Mansfield got right and what he got wrong.

Stephen Lee Mansfield, a Georgia native, was born in 1958. The son of a United States military officer, Mansfield lived at military posts around the United States but spent most of his early years in Germany. After a conversion experience, Mansfield attended a Christian college where he earned a bachelor’s degree in history and philosophy. He spent twenty years as a pastor of a Texas church. While in Texas he also completed two master’s degrees, hosted a radio show, and became a popular speaker. In 1991 he moved to Tennessee, where he pastored a 4,000 member church.⁶

In 1995, Mansfield released his first book, *Never Give In: The Extraordinary Character of Winston Churchill*. This was followed by biographies of Booker T. Washington and George Whitefield, as well as other publications. *The Faith of George W. Bush* (2003) was highly acclaimed as was Mansfield’s *The Faith of the American Soldier* (2005). He later wrote *The Faith of*

5 Doug Gibson, “Book on ‘Mormonizing’ of America is Bible-bookstore anti-Mormonism fodder,” Standard-Examiner Blogs (21 May 2012), <http://blogs.standard.net/the-political-surf/2012/05/21/book-on-mormonizing-of-america-is-bible-bookstore-anti-mormonism-fodder>, accessed 16 June 2013.

6 “Mansfield Memo – Long Bio,” The Mansfield Group, www.MansfieldGroup.com, accessed 16 June 2013.

Barack Obama (2009), which received mostly positive reviews. He also wrote *Pope Benedict XVI: His Life and Mission* (2005) and *The Search for God and Guinness* (2009).⁷

In 2002 Mansfield's first wife filed for divorce. That was the same year he resigned as pastor of Nashville's Belmont Church and quit the ministry. In 2007 he remarried, and he and his wife continue to reside in Tennessee to the present. Mansfield continues to undertake numerous writing projects as well as speaking and teaching engagements, including conducting a seminar on Mormonism.⁸

That Stephen Mansfield would teach a course on Mormonism is ironic given his apparent lack of understanding when it comes to Mormon doctrine and history. It is difficult for almost any historian and scholar to write on a subject that is basically foreign to them. Christians writing about Islam or Judaism, or Catholics writing about Southern Baptists, for example, must understand and discuss doctrines, practices, and worldview different from their own without adding judgment or terminology that would taint their work. While Mansfield claimed to have done that for *The Mormonizing of America*, he was not successful.

Examples of this basic lack of understanding range from the silly to the substantial, manifested when almost immediately into the book Mansfield recounts how some Brigham Young University students had joked about the amount of candy consumed on campus by explaining that M&Ms are Mormons' drug of choice. He then writes, "And there we stood, a member of the Mormon priesthood and a decidedly non-Mormon

7 "Mansfield Memo - Long Bio," The Mansfield Group, www.MansfieldGroup.com, accessed 16 June 2013.

8 Bob Smietana, "Stephen Mansfield finds career in God, politics," *The Tennessean* (6 January 2013), <http://www.tennessean.com/article/2013106/NEWS06/301060095>, accessed 8 January 2013 and "Stephen's Seminar on Mormonism," The Mansfield Group, <http://mansfieldgroup.com/2012/07/01/new-seminar-on-mormonism>, accessed 9 January 2013.

guest, laughing about what would have been too painful to discuss not too many years ago.”⁹ It is difficult to figure out what had been so painful, Mormons talking to non-Mormons or Mormons eating M&Ms. Either scenario being portrayed as painful is strange, to say the least.

Mansfield doesn’t even get the name of the present LDS church president correct, referring to him as President Robert S. Monson.¹⁰ He also announces that “some Saints carry mental images of Smith or Young or Monson (current LDS president) or even Glenn Beck or one of the Marriotts that inspire them as a framed photo of Vince Lombardi might someone else.”¹¹ Such a declaration is obviously impossible to either prove or disprove. The reality is that if most Mormons were asked what mental image they carried with them to seek inspiration, they would probably say they think of the Savior. Many would not have a mental picture—rather they would think of a favorite hymn or scripture that strengthens and inspires them. Fewer would suggest a mental image of Joseph Smith or Thomas S. Monson, the current LDS president. It would be a very few, if any, Latter-day Saints who would mention either Beck or the Marriotts, especially since most members of the church do not know nor care what any of these men actually look like and would certainly not hold them up as spiritual exemplars to follow devotedly.

⁹Stephen Mansfield, *The Mormonizing of America: How the Mormon Religion Became a Dominant Force in Politics, Entertainment, and Pop Culture* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2012), xvi.

¹⁰ Mansfield, 81. Throughout *The Mormonizing of America*, little vignettes are included with made-up names that are, according to Mansfield, changed. In other words, whole undocumented conversations take place in which the reader is left to depend upon the author’s word these conversations really took place and he somehow was able to get whole conversations verbatim. The fact he couldn’t even get Thomas S. Monson’s name correct calls into the question the veracity of all of the so-called conversations.

¹¹ Mansfield, 213.

The book contains an embarrassing number of factual errors.¹² Some are just plain silly. For instance, there are nonsensical mistakes like calling the belief in continuing revelation “progressive revelation”¹³ and describing David O. McKay as the “First President” rather than the president and prophet in the First Presidency.¹⁴ Mansfield states that the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants “had 138 recorded revelations in its pages.”¹⁵ Not only were there not 138 revelations in the 1835 edition, the 138th section of the LDS Doctrine and Covenants was a vision that was not received until 1918 and not added to the Doctrine and Covenants until 1981. Later he explains that “women are now allowed to go on missions”¹⁶ as if that was a recent policy change. How difficult would it have been to perform just a little research and find out that the first Mormon sister missionaries were Inez Smith and Lucy Jane “Jennie” Brimhall, who were set apart in 1898 to serve a mission to England?¹⁷

However, there are more serious doctrinal and historical problems. Among the doctrinal problems are when Mansfield states that men “assume [the] priesthood at the age of fourteen” and then several pages later he has an unnamed person say that a young man becomes “a priest at twelve years old.”¹⁸ In reality, a young man, if worthy, is ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood, as a deacon at age twelve. Most young men become priests at the age of sixteen.

12 For example, there were basic errors like incorrectly explaining on page 159 how temple garments are worn and how to properly dispose of old temple garments.

13 Mansfield, 161 and 180.

14 Mansfield, 27.

15 Mansfield, 178

16 Mansfield, 160.

17 Diane L. Mangum, “The First Sister Missionaries,” *Ensign* (July 1980), <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1980/07/the-first-sister-missionaries>, accessed 16 June 2013.

18 Mansfield, 159 and 164.

On another topic, he makes a faux pas by stating, “During this ‘premortality,’ families were already formed and destinies determined.”¹⁹ Determining destinies is not Mormon doctrine. That is predestination as taught by Calvinists and others in mainstream Christianity. Mormons outspokenly reject “the belief in predestination—that God predetermines the salvation or the damnation of every individual. The gospel teaches that genuine human freedom and genuine responsibility—individual agency in both thought and action—are crucial in both the development and the outcome of a person’s life.”²⁰ Latter-day Saints do believe in what they call foreordination. Foreordination is the belief in “the premortal selection of individuals to come forth in mortality at specified times, under certain conditions, and to fulfill predesignated responsibilities.”²¹ But such foreordained roles depend upon whether or not the person makes the right choices and remains worthy.

Mansfield also errs when he describes Jesus Christ as the creator of the plan for spirits to come to Earth and live in mortality as a way of learning and testing.²² Latter-day Saints actually believe Jesus Christ championed God the Father’s plan that Lucifer had rejected. Mansfield also misquotes the famous Lorenzo Snow couplet regarding the progression of man. *The Mormonizing of America* gives the couplet as follows: “As man is, God was; as God is, man may become.”²³

19 Mansfield, 158. He then explains, “The ignoble spirits of preexistence are non-Mormons on earth” (which is incorrect).

20 Richard D. Draper, “Predestination,” in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., et al., *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), <http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Predestination>, accessed 25 June 2013.

21 Brent L. Top, “Foreordination,” in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., et al., *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), <http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Foreordination>, accessed 25 June 2013.

22 Mansfield, 158.

23 Mansfield, 159.

Mansfield describes Mormon history and its potential problems as “the soft underbelly of the Church.”²⁴ Whether or not that is actually the case, Mansfield appears to not have been able to even find the animal let alone discover the so-called “underbelly,” given the historical mistakes he makes. For example, he explains that Joseph Smith was tarred and feathered in 1842 rather than 1832²⁵ and that Joseph gave the full Masonic call when he was killed at the jail at Carthage rather than a partial call of “Oh Lord my God ...” as quoted by numerous sources.²⁶ At least three times Mansfield refers to Oliver Cowdery as Oliver Crowder.²⁷ He even gets the name wrong of Joseph Fielding Smith, tenth president of the LDS church, by calling him Joseph Field Smith.²⁸

Not only is Stephen Mansfield wrong about aspects of Mormon history, he is also wrong about some Mormon historians and even wrong about non-Mormon history. He makes a simple, avoidable historical error of referring to Christopher Columbus as an admiral when Columbus arrived in the Americas in 1492.²⁹ While Columbus had been promised an admiralship, it was based on the success of his initial voyage. Therefore, Christopher Columbus was not an admiral when he discovered the Americas.

In one of the incorrect and misleading moments in the book, Mansfield refers to Richard Lyman Bushman as “one of [our] own sainted historians.”³⁰ What exactly is meant by that is unknown other than it insinuates there must be other

24 Mansfield, 254.

25 Mansfield, 211.

26 Mansfield, 110. According to “The Third, or Master Mason’s Degree,” sacred-texts.com, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/mas/morgan/morg12.htm>, accessed 27 June 2013, the full Masonic call for help is “Oh Lord my God, is there no help for the widow’s son?”

27 Mansfield, 69–70.

28 Mansfield, 254.

29 Mansfield, 143.

30 Mansfield, 99.

“sainted historians” but their names are not given. While this reviewer has a great amount of respect for Richard Bushman and his work, the sad reality is that most of the members of the Church have neither heard of nor read his works. To suggest Bushman is held up on some kind of pedestal by the majority of the Church membership is not only incorrect, it is deceitful.

But the Bushman canonization for sainthood pales in comparison to how Mansfield handles Fawn Brodie. He inaccurately describes Fawn Brodie as a professor at the time of her excommunication. Fawn Brodie did not even begin teaching at a university level until 1967, when she was hired as a part-time lecturer at the University of California, Los Angeles.³¹ She did not become a full professor until 1971. That was a full twenty-five years after Fawn Brodie was excommunicated by the LDS church. Even more troubling than his misidentification of Brodie’s credentials is Mansfield’s mangled description of her biographies of Thomas Jefferson and Richard M. Nixon as being “celebrated.”³²

Contrary to being celebrated, Brodie’s biography of Thomas Jefferson was, by far, her most controversial and most criticized. Despite the book’s popularity among the general reading public, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* received harsh criticism among Jeffersonian and early Republic historians for what they claimed to be “speculations about Jefferson’s private life” and

31 Newell G. Bringhurst, *Fawn McKay Brodie: A Biographer’s Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 181. Bringhurst explains that Brodie was initially hired only as a part-time lecturer rather than the entry-rank of instructor or assistant professor because “she did not possess a doctoral degree in history. In fact, she had not earned any degree in history. Both her bachelor’s and her master’s were in English.” In fact, according to Bringhurst (on p. 205), Brodie did not become a full professor of history until December 1971, and only after initial opposition by fellow faculty members who were concerned about her lack of history degrees as well as all of her work being in biography rather than traditional historical research.

32 Mansfield, 125.

groping for “extremely subtle evidence.”³³ The Richard Nixon biography was even more problematic and has been described by Brodie biographer, Newell G. Bringhurst, as Brodie’s least successful book.³⁴

Why Mansfield would make such glaring mistakes is at first puzzling until the above references are read in context. Before calling Richard Bushman a “sainted historian” Mansfield uses another made-up conversation that is supposedly based on a real discussion to demonstrate that “Joseph Smith’s entire religion was rooted in hatred of his father.”³⁵ After obtaining sainthood, Bushman is then quoted, “If there was any childhood dynamic at work in Joseph Jr.’s life, it was the desire to redeem his flawed, loving father.”³⁶

In discussing why the gold plates had to be a fabrication on the part of Joseph Smith, Mansfield introduces Fawn Brodie, who “thought that Smith invented the whole tale,” as an “eminent historian,” “gifted scholar,” and “celebrated for her biographies.” Then, to make sure to bring home her qualifications for believing Smith was a fraud, he identifies her as “Professor Brodie” at the time of her excommunication,³⁷ stating that “she considered the act [of excommunication] a gift

33 Bringhurst, 185 and 216–19; and telephone interview of Craig L. Foster with Newell G. Bringhurst, 16 June 2013. During the phone interview, Newell Bringhurst commented that the criticism for *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* was extensive with a number of prominent historians lining up against her, particularly over the suggestion that Jefferson had an affair with his slave, Sally Hemmings. It should be noted that Brodie was proven partially correct when Hemmings descendants did test positive for Jefferson DNA. Unfortunately, that does not prove Thomas Jefferson was the father, only that a male Jefferson was the father.

34 Bringhurst, 261–64. This in spite of positive reviews by some Nixonian scholars. Brodie’s biography was published nine months after her death in January 1981.

35 Mansfield, 97.

36 Mansfield, 99.

37 Mansfield, 127.

of liberation.”³⁸ In fact, later in the book, he again mentions Brodie in a supposed dialogue between two non-Mormons. In the course of the conversation that Mansfield, like some kind of fly on the wall, is able to copy verbatim, the man says that *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate Biography* is his favorite book, that he also has read *No Man Knows My History* and that Joseph Smith is “a total liar.” His wife then says about Fawn Brodie, “What I’m saying is that here she is, this huge historian from UCLA, and she writes all of these big biographies. And the one on Smith gets her booted from the Mormon Church, right?”³⁹

Such purposeful and accidental twisting of historical facts shows up in other parts of the book. During his discussion about Anne Wilde, a Fundamentalist Mormon, he quotes Wilde saying that her parents never knew that she was a Fundamentalist because “it would have been too much for them.” He further quotes her saying that all of the wives of her husband, Ogden Kraut, are dead and that she is “actually quite lonely.”⁴⁰ Anne Wilde sent a letter to Stephen Mansfield taking him to task for his mistakes. She wrote, “I realize that authors take liberties in their writings, but there are certain statements you made about me that are absolutely incorrect and will reflect badly upon me when friends, family members, and acquaintances read it.”⁴¹ Wilde suggested a number of changes to the section discussing her and her experience with plural marriage. At one point, she emphatically stated, “I was NOT and am NOT lonely.” She also wrote, “**Most Important:** Please make the distinction that I am no longer a member of the LDS

38 Mansfield, 127.

39 Mansfield, 164.

40 Mansfield, 4.

41 Anne Wilde to Stephen [Mansfield], 7 July 2012; copy in author’s possession.

church; I'm an independent Fundamentalist Mormon who lived plural marriage separate from the mainstream church."⁴²

Mansfield claims Joseph Smith received a revelation "that told a fourteen-year-old girl she should marry him."⁴³ This no doubt is a reference to Smith's plural marriage to Helen Mar Kimball. Smith actually did not claim any revelation demanding Helen Mar Kimball marry him. Instead, her father, Heber C. Kimball, offered his daughter as a wife to Smith.⁴⁴ Mansfield also claims that Joseph's wife Emma Smith "threw several women out of her house and cursed them for overfamiliarity with her husband. She didn't know the women were her husband's other wives."⁴⁵ This, of course, is absolutely incorrect, as Emma Smith witnessed the marriages of Joseph Smith to Emily and Eliza Partridge.⁴⁶

To portray Joseph Smith's plural marriages this way, however, falls more in line with how Stephen Mansfield views Joseph Smith. From plural marriages to accusations of occult practices,⁴⁷ Mansfield focuses on what he feels would be the most negative. He announces that Joseph Smith "made part of

42 Anne Wilde to Stephen [Mansfield], 7 July 2012; copy in author's possession. [Emphasis in original.] Regarding her requested corrections and changes, she wrote, "They may not seem important to you, but they are VERY important to me." For his part, Mansfield responded with an e-mail dated 8 July 2012 in which he stated, "I will be happy to make those changes. I certainly did not mean to distort anything about your story." Copy of e-mail in author's possession.

43 Mansfield, 48.

44 Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), 24 and 28. It appears Mansfield attempted to emphasize the young age of Helen Mar Kimball, being age fourteen. For more information on the common age of marriage during Joseph Smith's lifetime, see Craig L. Foster, David Keller, and Gregory L. Smith, "The Age of Joseph Smith's Plural Wives in Social and Demographic Context," in Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster, eds., *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2010), 152–83.

45 Mansfield, 48–49.

46 Hales, 2:48–49.

47 Mansfield, 47.

his living through occult practices.⁴⁸ Later, while discussing the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, Mansfield makes reference to “the doctrines of the hat and seer stone.”⁴⁹ He continues to make references to the Smiths and the occult. For example, he comments that even after Smith’s divine visions Smith continued to make “a living in the occult.” Instead of quoting directly from the readily accessible D. Michael Quinn’s *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* about how the Smith family owned “magical charms, divining rods, amulets, a ceremonial dagger inscribed with astrological symbols of Scorpio and seals of Mars, and parchments marked with occult signs,”⁵⁰ he quotes Quinn by way of *Occult America: White House Séances, Ouija Circles, Masons, and the Secret Mystic History of Our Nation*. Could it be that the title of the other book sounds even more potentially sinister than Quinn’s book and, therefore, casts an even darker blot on Joseph Smith’s character? It would not be surprising if that were Mansfield’s goal, as his contempt for Joseph Smith is very obvious.

Regarding Smith’s revelations and prophetic claims, Mansfield writes that “Joseph Smith concocted revelations whenever he needed them.”⁵¹ He continues, “Smith’s revelations seem to be self-serving, a product of his need and will.”⁵² At another point he describes Smith as a “misguided mystic” who “lost all restraint.”⁵³ Smith’s revelations and religion, according to Mansfield, “started to get petty” and then “got strange.” From there, “it left being strange and became destructive.”⁵⁴

48 Mansfield, 120.

49 Mansfield, 134.

50 Mansfield, 109. Mansfield did not quote directly from Quinn’s *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. Instead, he cited Quinn as quoted in Mitch Horowitz, *Occult America: White House Séances, Ouija Circles, Masons, and the Secret Mystic History of Our Nation* (New York: Bantam Books, 2009), 23

51 Mansfield, 131.

52 Mansfield, 132.

53 Mansfield, 176.

54 Mansfield, 192, 193.

Admittedly, it is impossible for a historian to be completely neutral. As the British essayist and theorist Sir Isaiah Berlin, wrote, “The case against the notion of historical objectivity is like the case against international law, or international morality; that it does not exist.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless, those writing history are encouraged to recognize and admit their biases, and then do their best to hold those biases in check in order to produce a good history. Unfortunately, Mansfield appears not only to have resisted any restraint in his negative portrayal of Joseph Smith and aspects of Mormonism but he seems to have fled from scholarly objectivity like Joseph of the Old Testament fled from Potiphar’s wife.

Although once in awhile the book actually has some interesting insight, most of it seems to be a series of attacks under a thin guise of supposed scholarship. For example, while it is not expected a non-Mormon like Stephen Mansfield would believe in the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, is it too much to at least expect a modicum of respect for what approximately fifteen million people view as sacred scripture?

Mansfield makes it clear he believes the Book of Mormon to be nothing more than a cheap nineteenth-century knockoff of the Bible. After complaining that “more than 27,000 words in Smith’s writing came straight from the Bible” and the phrase “and it came to pass” was used “more than 2,000 times,” he writes, it made “the book sound like the King James Bible’s little brother.”⁵⁶ He continues, “This should come as no surprise. The Book of Mormon’s plundering of the Bible is flagrant. Poor Isaiah took particular abuse.”⁵⁷

Further on Mansfield writes, “The most searing indictment of the Book of Mormon is the way the story it tells seems to

55 “Quotes about History,” History News Network (26 December 2005), <http://hnn.us/articles/1328.html>, accessed 28 June 2013.

56 Mansfield, 142.

57 Mansfield, 142

grow organically from the soil of the United States in the early 1800s. Settlers from the East come west by ship to escape an evil system. They settle in a New World and must battle for survival against a darker-skinned enemy. One expects the *Mayflower* and Squanto to be mentioned by name.”⁵⁸ Unfortunately, in his enthusiasm to complain about the Book of Mormon, Mansfield seems not to have realized that the Book of Mormon never did say which direction the ship sailed. In fact, given where they were supposed to have sailed from, probably Lehi’s little band sailed east rather than west.

However, with the help of the supposed off-the-cuff but still verbatim recorded anonymous conversations peppered throughout the book Mansfield was able to more fully reveal his contempt for the Book of Mormon. In the course of a conversation two college roommates are supposed to have had about Mormons, one states that the Book of Mormon might have been “written by a demon.”⁵⁹ Later, one of the roommates says, “And there’s this voice. I mean if you get past all the ‘yeas’ and the ‘verily’s’ and the ‘and-it-came-to-passes,’ there’s this personality speaking that is bloated and haughty and—I don’t know, maybe ‘domineering’ is the word. It’s irritating. Freaky.”⁶⁰ Mansfield didn’t stop there regarding the Book of Mormon. “And it starts to get gross how arrogant it is. I mean there are pages and pages where you haven’t got a clue what’s going on for all the high and holy rambling but you’re still running up against the voice.”⁶¹

These undocumented conversations are used to attack not just the Book of Mormon. In another conversation one person exclaim, “Their religion is a joke. Between the underwear and the no drinking and Proposition 8 and now their priests that

58 Mansfield, 144.

59 Mansfield, 136.

60 Mansfield, 137 [emphasis in original].

61 Mansfield, 138.

are twelve. It's hard to take seriously.⁶² Another conversation the ever-vigilant Stephen Mansfield is able to capture is one that supposedly took place between two non-Mormon businessmen. In the course of the conversation, one says about a proposed wine and cigar bar, "We should never have tried to put this thing anywhere near LDS land... They just aren't going to let a wine and cigar bar anywhere near their holy ground. Even near their city!" The other one answers, "No. And they'll fight you most anywhere in the state."⁶³ In the course of the conversation, one of the men says, "It's a Mormon Taliban around here."⁶⁴ The conversation then includes a laundry list of real and perceived problems in Utah. These negative aspects of life in Utah include the high number of porn subscribers, the highest rate of arrest of people who "have sex in the woods," the climbing rate of sexually transmitted diseases, and the high use of Prozac, ending with the comment, "This state's a loony bin."⁶⁵

The references to Taliban and Utah's being a "loony bin" are part of an underlying theme of how strange Mormonism and Mormons are. At the very beginning, Stephen Mansfield portrays "secular America," viewing the so-called "Mormon Moment" as "yet another occasion for the passing parade of oddities that Mormons have long supplied."⁶⁶ Near the end of the book, he discusses the meaning of the word "cult." To Evangelical and Christian conservatives, the word almost

62 Mansfield, 164.

63 Mansfield, 13. Such statements are not only inflammatory, but also completely inaccurate. According to Visit Salt Lake, at http://www.visitsaltlake.com/restaurants/nightlife/?listsearch_submit=1&listingGetAll=0&subcatID=2209®ionID=109&listing_keyword=Keywords...&submit=#searchBr, downtown Salt Lake City alone had thirty-four bars and lounges.

64 Mansfield, 13.

65 Mansfield, 14.

66 Mansfield, 1.

always means “an organization built upon a perversion or significant revision of traditional Christian doctrine.”⁶⁷

In case the readers were questioning if Mormonism fit into that category, Mansfield does not want to leave them wondering long, as the very next sentence states, “This is exactly what Smith, Young, and company intended and it is, by their own confession, what the LDS is.”⁶⁸ This assertion is given without any documentation or explanation.

Further isolating Mormonism from the rest of Christianity and following in the footsteps of so many other writers, Mansfield compares Joseph Smith to Muhammad and Mormonism to Islam. He then explains that Islam is so successful partially through the power of the sword and partially through the simplicity of its system. In this matter of simplicity, “Islam is to religion what McDonald’s is to food: easily remembered, easily consumed, easily replicated.”⁶⁹ Like Muhammad, according to Mansfield, Joseph Smith popularized and simplified religion. “Though Mormonism appears complex to the outsider, it was actually an attempt to be something like the McDonald’s of American religion.”

After various attacks on the character of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other early Church leaders as well as mockery of Latter-day Saint history and doctrines, Mansfield seems to offer an olive leaf. He refers to “the Mormon people, the true heroes of the Mormon tale.”⁷⁰ He then explains:

This is what their experience produced, often despite their leaders and despite doctrinal oddities. They became a people. Even if their Prophet was a liar and their doctrines proved mere fantasies, on earth and

67 Mansfield, 238.

68 Mansfield, 238

69 Mansfield, 60.

70 Mansfield, 197.

in this life they became a people who, in striving to progress and achieve, became exceptional.⁷¹

While the backhanded compliment is lovely, it is, nevertheless, a backhanded compliment and exemplifies pretty much the whole message and tone of the book. Throughout the book, Mansfield repeatedly attacks the character of Joseph Smith, the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, and the foundations of Church. He naturally brings up real and perceived problems in Mormon history and doctrine. That, of course, would be expected in a book of this nature. That is what would be expected in a scholarly book.

Unfortunately, this book is far from a scholarly look at the LDS church and its members. There were numerous examples of poor research and analysis.⁷² Even worse is Mansfield's barely

71 Mansfield, 198.

72 A number of examples of silly, almost ridiculous mistakes have already been given in this review. These mistakes represented two things. The first was that Stephen Mansfield did a very poor job of research. The second point was that the editorial staff at Worthy Publishing did not do their job when it came to editing this book. On p. 29 of *Mormonizing of America*, Mansfield writes, "The LDS Church capitalized on it all. It sent volunteers, missionaries, and publicists scurrying to every venue. It hosted grand events for the world press. It made sure that every visitor received a brochure offering an LDS guided tour of the city." He uses "Mormon Church's Public Relations Effort amid Olympics Games Sparks Debates," *The Salt Lake Tribune* (19 March 2001), <http://business.highbeam.com/3563/article-1G1-71876499/mormon-church-public-relations-effort-amid-olympics> as his source. Why would he use an article that was almost a year before the actual Olympics? Would it not have been better to use post-Olympics analysis? Simply Googling Mormon Church and 2002 Olympics brings up a number of articles. Near the top was the article by Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Remembering the 'Mormon' Olympics that weren't," *The Salt Lake Tribune* (17 February 2012), <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/lifestyle/53520793-80/church-mormon-games-lds.html.csp>, accessed 3 July 2013, which states in part, "What most participants and observers found instead during those 17 memorable days was an absence of Mormon missionaries. . . . Plus, Mormon leaders sent out the edict that there would be no proselytizing, no pamphleteering, no handing out copies of the Book of Mormon away from, say, Temple Square. LDS volunteers were trained in how not to share their faith." Much earlier than Stack's article was Larry R. Gerlach's in-depth article titled "The 'Mormon Games:' Religion,

concealed disdain evident throughout the book. There are a number of non-Mormon scholars who obviously do not believe Joseph Smith's claims of visions, revelations, and translation of the Book of Mormon. Nevertheless, scholars like Jan Shippy, Lawrence Foster, and Sarah Barringer Gordon, to name a few, have been able to produce outstanding scholarly work that attempts to be both neutral and informative.

Their publications have not included language such as “those two handsome missionaries just back from the field. What miracles they've seen! Heavenly Father has proven himself once again.”⁷³ “The next day of destiny came on September 21, 1823.”⁷⁴ “Or, perhaps Cowdery could see nothing in the stones because Smith was a fraud manipulating even his own wife into believing he was hearing from God.”⁷⁵ “It is hard to escape the conclusion that Joseph Smith concocted revelations whenever he needed them.”⁷⁶ And, “their version of their history is like something out of Disney anyway.”⁷⁷

And finally one of the more egregious examples of a negative, biased tone is the following:

It is a pious sentiment but it will seem to most outsiders like an excuse: Mormons make dramatic statements about history but then claim God does not intend for the facts that support those statements to be proven. It is frustrating, intellectually unsatisfying, and perhaps even duplicitous, but it is consistent with what every Mormon repeatedly affirms—“I have received the

Media, Cultural Politics, and the Salt Lake Winter Olympics,” *Olympia* 11 (2002): 1–52, in which he describes the efforts of the LDS church to downplay the so-called Mo-lympics and have an understated presence at the games.

73 Mansfield, 80.

74 Mansfield, 104.

75 Mansfield, 123.

76 Mansfield, 131.

77 Mansfield, 164.

witness of the Spirit, and I bear testimony that the Book of Mormon is true.”⁷⁸

In conclusion, Stephen Mansfield’s *The Mormonizing of America* is a poor excuse of a scholarly work and cannot be recommended for anyone who appreciates decent scholarship.

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