

## UPDATE

MEDIA ZOOMS IN ON  
MORMONS, PROP 8

EIGHT MONTHS AFTER IT WAS REVEALED THAT Mormons contributed an estimated \$20 million to help pass California's Proposition 8, three well-known publications, *Time* magazine, *The Washington Post*, and *The Nation*, published stories scrutinizing the LDS Church's political strategies and spotlighting the continuing opposition the Church faces as the debate over same-sex marriage continues across the country. *The New Yorker* took a jab as well.

## MISUNDERSTOOD MORMONS?

INCORPORATING QUOTATIONS FROM Apostle M. Russell Ballard, LDS political scientist David Campbell, and SUNSTONE editor Stephen Carter, *Time* magazine published in its June 22 issue a story titled, "The Church and Gay Marriage: Are Mormons Misunderstood?" The story focuses on Jay Pimentel, a bishop and lawyer from Alameda, California, who became the object of a neighborhood "blacklisting" because of the \$1,500 he and his wife donated in support of Proposition 8.

"Dear Neighbor," the anonymous letter began, "our neighbors, Colleen and Jay Pimentel"—the letter then gave the couple's address—"contributed \$1,500.00 to the Yes on Proposition 8 campaign. NEIGHBORS SHOULD BE AWARE OF THEIR NEIGHBORS' CHOICES." The note accused the Pimentels of "obsessing about same-sex marriage" and suggested a number of local causes that recipients should support—"unlike the Pimentels."

David Van Biema, author of the *Time* story, notes that the growth of the LDS Church, now the fourth largest denomination in the United States, is coming at a cost. "Even as Mormons have become more prominent, they have struggled to overcome lingering prejudices and misrepresentations about the sources of their beliefs," Van Biema writes. "Polls suggest that up to half of Americans would be uncomfortable with a Mormon president. And though the Prop 8 victory was a high-water mark for Mormon political advocacy, it also sparked a vicious backlash from gay-rights activists, some of whom accused Mormons of bigotry and blind religious obedience."

Van Biema notes that "there are two radical Mormon theological deviations from conventional Christianity, both of which have at least some bearing on the gay-marriage battle": the doctrine of eternal progression and belief in a living prophet. "Prophets have even more authority than Popes do in Catholicism," claims Van Biema. He added that even if the push for Proposition 8 had a rational

basis, "belief in [President Thomas S.] Monson's supernatural connection also played a big role."

Van Biema notes that the LDS Church has not declared publically what role it would play in upcoming campaigns for and against same-sex marriage in Iowa and New England. David Campbell, a political scientist at the University of Notre Dame, told Van Biema: "If it appeared that the church sat out next time because it was criticized this time, there might be a credibility question." But Campbell wondered, given the current push towards same-sex marriage, "Does the church want the public to identify it primarily as a political body opposing an issue that comes back again and again?"

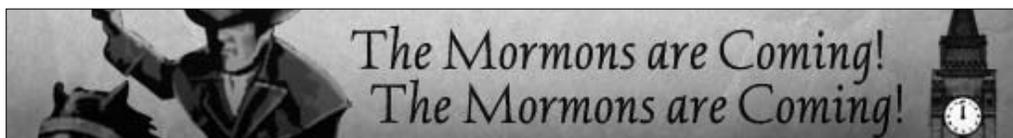
## "THE MORMONS ARE COMING!"

IN A STORY titled "The Mormons Are Coming!" *Washington Post* writer Karl Vick looks at the role Mormons and gay activists may play in the future as the campaign for same-sex marriage moves to the eastern states.

"With the battle moving east," Vick writes, "some advocates are shouting that fact in the streets, calculating that on an issue that eventually comes down to comfort levels, more people harbor apprehensions about Mormons than about homosexuality." A case in point is the ad titled "The Mormons Are Coming! The Mormons Are Coming!" which the group Californians Against Hate ran on the websites of newspapers along the East Coast.

"The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church) has been leading the national crusade against same-sex marriage since President Gordon B. Hinckley issued such a proclamation in 1988," Californians Against Hate proclaims on the group's website, MORMONGATE.COM. "The Church showed just how effective it could be beginning in Hawaii in the mid-nineties all the way through to California's Proposition 8 in 2008. They were involved to some degree with all 30 state elections outlawing same-sex marriage."

In his analysis, Vick concludes that the tactics used by Californians Against Hate are based on demographics: while nearly 80% of Americans know someone who is gay, only 48% know a Mormon. "I'm not intending it to harm the religion," protested Fred Karger, founder of Californians Against Hate, in an interview with Vick. "I think they do wonderful things. Nicest people. My single goal is to get them out of the same-sex marriage business



An ad run on the websites of some newspapers on the East Coast.

and back to helping hurricane victims.”

“Mormon officials have tried to stay out of the controversy that followed the California vote, when the church’s prominent role in the marriage fight became clear,” Vick reported. “A spokeswoman in Salt Lake City declined to say whether the church is involved in debates going on in states such as New Jersey and New York, except to say that leaders remain intent on preserving the ‘divine institution’ of marriage between man and woman.”

Suspicions that the Church is working secretly to fight same-sex marriage are encouraged, Vick proposes, by the way the Church fought same-sex marriage in Hawaii during the 1990s. Californians Against Hate has leaked ten memos from the Hawaii campaign which appear to have been written by the late Loren C. Dunn, who was then a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. “We have organized things so the Church contribution was used in an area of coalition activity that does not have to be reported,” Dunn allegedly wrote. The Church has not disputed the memos.

Gary C. Lawrence, who helped organize the California campaign against same-sex marriage and recently wrote a book about the Mormon image, lamented to Vick that “we’re upside down on our image. People have misperceptions of us because of ignorance, because of the history of polygamy, and because we organize quickly, which scares some people. The collection of negatives they are willing to apply to us suggests that they view us as a growing threat.”

#### GAYS FIND INSPIRATION IN . . . UTAH?

WHILE THE *TIME* and *Washington Post* stories focus on the situation in California and on the East Coast, an article published in *The Nation* pointed to the ironies experienced by gays and lesbians living in Utah—an ardent red state with a Mormon governor who recently came out in favor of civil unions for same-sex couples.

Author Lisa Duggan, a professor of cultural studies at New York University, and a lesbian, describes her time living in Salt Lake City last fall, writing that she was “repeatedly blown away by the progressive politics and outright queerness of the capital city, which is about 40 percent Mormon.”

Duggan’s article focused on the Common Ground Initiative, a campaign launched by gay organizations in Utah to push for health care, workplace protections, and nondiscrimination in housing. The campaign was a response to LDS leaders’ statements that the Church does not oppose civil rights for gay and lesbian people—only same-sex marriage.

The Common Ground Initiative advocates rights not only for same-sex couples, but for any two people living under the same roof. That strategy, according to Duggan, put conservative opponents on the defensive because it broadened the scope of concern to include the needs of people living in non-conjugal households regardless of their sexual orientation.

“My months in the Beehive State have taught me that a

#### COLBERT WEIGHS IN



Screenshot from an ad parody produced by The Colbert Report.

AS REPORTERS AND BLOGGERS FIX THEIR eyes on Mormon involvement in the movement to halt same-sex marriage, Comedy Central’s mock-news commentary *The Colbert Report* targets the LDS Church in a spoof of the “There’s a Storm Gathering” ad produced by the National Organization for Marriage (NOM). In the original ad, somber individuals standing against a backdrop of dark storm clouds warn viewers that legalizing same-sex marriage would take away personal freedoms (such as the freedom of parents to control what their children learn about homosexuality) and would pressure professionals such as doctors and pastors to violate their conscience.

To introduce the spoof on his Comedy Central show, Stephen Colbert replayed the original ad with the comment, “I love that ad. It’s like watching *The 700 Club* and *The Weather Channel* at the same time.” Colbert then ran his spoof in which, among other comedic jabs, a purportedly heterosexual husband becomes infatuated with another man as the rain from the “gathering storm” begins to fall, clinging to the man’s muscular body. At the end of the spoof, a voiceover announces, “Paid for by generous donations from an anonymous group that may or may not be The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

Colbert’s spoof spawned a number of copycat parodies which are now making the rounds on YouTube and similar video-sharing sites. But Colbert’s joking insinuation that the LDS Church may have been behind the NOM ad may turn out to have hit the truth. Chino Blanco, a blogger who has been tracking the relationship between the LDS Church and the National Organization for Marriage, has claimed at CHINOBLANCO.COM that at least seven of the actors featured in either the NOM ad or the audition reels (which Blanco claims to have obtained) are Mormons from the Gilbert, Arizona, area.

call for basic fairness and full civil equality, made in terms that include queers but are not limited to them, can rally progressive action in even the most arid conditions,” Duggan reflects. “Such outside-the-box strategy, focusing on concrete material benefits that cut across constituencies, can help sidestep the polarizing ferocity of gay-marriage politics, which engulfed California last year.”

Duggan concludes that advocates of equal civil rights for all “might do something truly weird and definitely queer: look to Utah for inspiration.”

#### ON THE ROAD TO MASSACHUSETTS

MEANWHILE, THE 22 June 2009 issue of *The New Yorker* got in a jab of its own, publishing a brief piece of humor by Paul Rudnick that sends a fictional Mormon family to Massachusetts, which legalized gay marriage in 2004.

The family finds that the state has become completely gay: erecting a statue to Rachel Maddow, engraving Barney Frank’s profile on the quarter, requiring a fifty percent “gay discount” (which, driven by Mormon frugality, the family takes advantage of by referring to the dad as Sharon), and refusing to deliver mail to mailboxes without rainbows painted on them.

The family tries to take refuge in an LDS chapel, but the sacrament meeting opens with songs from *Billy Elliot*, a musical about a boy aspiring to the ballet.

(However, it is entirely possible that the Mormon family accidentally stumbled into the chapel of another faith, as the hymns were led by a “minister” and a collection plate was passed.)

#### RETURNED MISSIONARIES WANT COMPASSION FOR IMMIGRANTS

A GROUP OF RETURNED MISSIONARIES HAS launched Missionaries for Compassion Towards Immigrants, an advocacy group aiming at “demonstrat[ing] our opposition to excessively punitive laws, not commensurate with the gravity of the offenses,” affecting Utah’s undocumented population.

The group was formed shortly before the Utah legislature passed Utah State Senate Bill 81. Under the new law, county sheriffs are required to “make a reasonable effort” to determine the legal status of anyone jailed for a felony or for DUI. The bill makes hiding or transporting an undocumented immigrant more than 100 miles a class A misdemeanor and prevents companies contracting or subcontracting with a government employer from hiring undocumented workers.

Missionaries for Compassion Towards Immigrants oppose SB 81. The bill “show[s] nothing but a lack of compassion and likely will discourage people from receiving the Gospel who [are] already here, may have come for economic reasons, but as we know, so often truly come for spiritual reasons,” the group wrote on their website at

MISSIONARIESFORCOMPASSION.WORDPRESS.COM. “They didn’t know what we know about Article of Faith 12 when they came over, but they are looking for saving ordinances, and if they are working to deal with their documentation status, we know that’s enough to faithfully pass a baptismal interview. Let us not be hypocrites.”

Ron Mortensen, a returned missionary himself and a supporter of SB 81, says the group’s stance is hypocritical. “You can be baptized if you’re an illegal alien using stolen documents and someone else’s identity and committing perjury on a I-19 form, but they couldn’t be baptized for drinking a cup of tea,” Mortensen told the *Salt Lake Tribune*. “If [Missionaries for Compassion] are so concerned about these individuals, are they willing to give them their names, Social Security number and dates of birth so they can limit the damage [undocumented immigrants] are doing to other people in order to get jobs?”

While LDS leaders did not announce an official position on the bill, the Church actively proselytizes among immigrants across the U.S. regardless of their legal status. In a 2008 event at Westminster College, Elder Marlin Jensen of the First Quorum of the Seventy asked Utah lawmakers to “slow down, step back, and assess the implications and human costs involved” in legislation regarding undocumented immigrants (See SUNSTONE, April 2008: 76-77).

#### PARENTS ASKED TO DROP MISSIONARIES CURBSIDE

AFTER THREE MISSIONARIES-IN-TRAINING AT THE Provo MTC were diagnosed with the H1N1 (swine flu) virus, Church officials announced a change in the missionary drop-off policy. Rather than escort the new missionary inside for a farewell devotional, parents and family members are now asked to say their goodbyes outside.

“We’ll do something to mitigate that,” promised Elder Richard G. Hinckley, executive director of the missionary department. “We hope to produce a nice little DVD that we can send out with the call package showing the MTC and what we do there . . . without the cumbersome logistics of having them actually come into the building.”

The former policy brought an additional 1,100 people into the facility each week.

#### FOUNDATION FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY LAUNCHES LDS CHAPTER

THE FOUNDATION FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY announced in April the formation of a Mormon chapter. Dedicated to “decreasing disrespect and ill will between people who adhere to different religious or ideological beliefs and practices,” the Foundation was started in 2001 by Charles Randall Paul and is guided by a multi-religious board of advisors. Former SUNSTONE editor Dan Wotherspoon is the Foundation’s director of operations.

The official launching of the Mormon chapter took place on 20 June at a retreat held at the cabin of the England family in Provo Canyon. The retreat was attended by more than twenty LDS authors and scholars, including Brian Birch, Sharon Adams, Claudia and Richard Bushman, James Faulconer, Roger Keller, Terryl and Fiona Givens, Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye, Daniel C. Peterson, Jana K. Riess, J. Bonner Ritchie, and Sterling Van Wagenen. Among the topics discussed at the retreat were proposals for fellowships

designed to offer opportunities for Mormons to become “religiously bi-lingual.”

The Foundation intends to include chapters from a wide spectrum of religious traditions, as well as from non-religious ideological groups such as those who embrace secular humanist perspectives. The evangelical Christian chapter may be ready to be launched at the end of the summer.

More information about the Foundation can be found at [FIDWEB.ORG](http://FIDWEB.ORG).

## People

**Deceased.** Salt Lake City bookseller Sam Weller, 88, of causes incident to old age. Born in Germany, Weller immigrated to the U.S. after World War I, worked for years in his father’s Zion’s Book Store in Salt Lake City and in 1946, began to run the store on his own. Renowned for its vast collection of new and used Mormon books, Sam Weller’s Zion Bookstore has been located at 254 S. Main for almost five decades, but plans are underway to move the iconic store to a location where it might better compete with chain bookstores.



**Shaken.** But safe, Apostle Russell M. Nelson, 84, after being assaulted by armed robbers at the mission home in Maputo, Mozambique, last May. Also attacked were his wife Wendy Watson Nelson, William and Shanna Parmley of the Africa Southeast Area Presidency, and hosts Blair and Cindy Packard. The group suffered cuts and bruises, and Cindy Packard suffered a broken arm during the attack.

**Deceased.** *Fascinating Womanhood* author Helen B. Andelin, 89, who rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s for urging women to embrace traditional gender roles as mothers and wives. Andelin, who unapologetically asked wives to have a “girlish trust” in their husbands and to express themselves through “childlike sauciness” when mistreated, coined the expression “domestic goddess,” which comic Roseanne Barr, a Salt Lake native, later incorporated into her standup routine.



**Hosted.** At the BYU Jerusalem Center, five administrative staff members to Pope Benedict XVI, during a papal visit to the Holy Land. According to the center’s assistant director, S. Kent Brown, the LDS church has a good relationship with Apostolic Nuncio Antonio Franco, whose official residence is next door to the center.

**Arrested.** Returning missionary Jose Calzadillas, 24, a foreign-born U.S. resident, for attempting to board a plane with

improper documentation after serving a mission in Ohio. The story brought media attention to the work of the LDS Church among undocumented immigrants. “We’re not agents of the immigration service and we don’t pretend to be,” LDS apostle Jeffrey R. Holland recently told the *Salt Lake Tribune*, “and we also won’t break the law.” The LDS Church supported a 2005 federal law that gives churches legal immunity for having undocumented immigrants do volunteer service, including serving missions.

**Laid off.** RONALD E. ROMIG, 60, from his position as archivist for the Community of Christ, a victim of budgetary cuts. At the church’s headquarters in Independence, Missouri, Romig curated a collection which includes priceless items such as the original manuscript of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. A Sunstone friend and symposium participant, Romig has helped scores of researchers from all branches of the Latter Day Saint movement and has helped build bridges between LDS and RLDS scholars. “It’s been a great privilege working in this position,” Romig told the AP. “I’ve developed great respect for the different ecclesiastical expressions of Mormonism. I find that each perspective brings something important.”



**Indicted.** LDS businessman, radio show host, and blogger Rick Koerber, after being accused of running a \$50 million Ponzi scheme. Koerber, who has often stated that “God is a capitalist” and declared that “capitalism is the foundation of celestial law,” is believed to have duped scores of his Utah County neighbors into taking out second mortgages on their homes and investing the proceeds with him in a scheme that has led many to lose their life savings.



**Appointed.** Chhay Leang Suy, a high councilor in the Church’s Phnom Penh Cambodia South District, to be an adviser to the President of the National Assembly of Cambodia. Suy, who converted in 1995 and served a mission in the U.S. from 1997 to 1999, will be responsible for advising on city infrastructure, public health services and educational improvement.