

UPDATE

MORMONS: FRIENDLY
BUT FRIENDLESS

THE MORMON BLOGOSPHERE IS BUZZING WITH THE release of *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. Co-written by political scientists Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, the book chronicles recent shifts occurring in the U.S. religious landscape and includes some revealing statistics about Mormons.

“The bottom line for Mormons, the authors say, [is that] ‘Mormons like everyone else, while almost everyone else dislikes Mormons,’” LDS author Jana Riess explains on her blog *Flunking Sainthood*. “The only fellow religious group to give Mormons a ‘net positive’ rating was the Jews.”

Riess underscores three key findings from the study for Mormons: “(1) evangelicals don’t like us, (2) secular Americans don’t like us, and (3) we really, really like ourselves. “Mormons ranked highest in ‘in-group attachment,’” Riess explains, “a finding the researchers felt was surprising, especially since three of the other groups that made the top five—Jews, Catholics, and Black Protestants—have their bonds cemented by a shared ethnicity. About 85% of Mormons say they feel a great warmth toward their own tribe.”

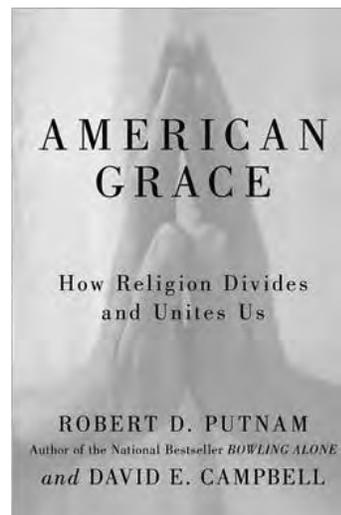
In an interview posted at the online forum *Times and Seasons*, co-author of the study David E. Campbell, who is LDS, suggests that the reason Mormons are viewed so negatively is that they have “‘cocooned’ themselves into religiously homogeneous social networks.”

“By being so insular, Mormons do not often build bridges to people of other religions, and thus do not benefit from the good feelings that accompany such personal relationships,” Campbell says. “If there is a message for Mormons in *American Grace*, it is that Latter-day Saints ought to stop being so insular and instead develop inclusive social networks.”

Riess opines that the reason Mormons are universally disliked is “partly about theology; evangelicals are still upset about some Mormon teachings. But it’s also likely about conservative politics and same-sex marriage, two issues where the religiously unaffiliated come down on the opposite side of most Latter-day Saints.”

WHY DON’T LDS WOMEN
WANT THE PRIESTHOOD?

AMERICAN GRACE REVEALS another surprising finding: While a solid 48% of LDS men favor female clergy, only 10% of LDS women feel the same way. Writing at *Flunking Sainthood*, Grant Hardy, an LDS professor of history and religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, proposes several explanations for the significant gender split, including the idea that “women see an exclu-



Authors Robert Putnam and David Campbell found that most Americans don't really like Mormons but that Mormons really like themselves

sively male priesthood as part of the inheritance of the Restoration” and that “many believe that motherhood is the equivalent of the priesthood.”

Asked about the same finding, David Campbell told *Times and Seasons* that “Mormon women are more likely to be religious traditionalists than men.” He added, “I also suspect that those women who truly object to a male-only priesthood have left the LDS Church and would not report their religious identification as Mormon.”

“Deborah,” an educator who blogs at *The-Exponent.com*, proposes another reason: It is more dangerous and heretical for a Mormon woman to support female ordination than such support would be for a Mormon man. “The feeling among many of my ‘faithful Mormon feminist’ friends is that once you publicly state that you think women should hold the priesthood, you’ve lost some leverage for working from within; you’ve aroused suspicion. It’s a dividing line.”

BOTTLENECK TO BRAZIL

HUNDREDS OF MISSIONARIES BOUND FOR BRAZIL have been temporarily reassigned to missions in the U.S. after Brazilian authorities mandated a new system of background checks for American citizens, retaliation for a similar procedure the U.S. uses to grant visas to Brazilians. The new system has created a bottleneck of visa applications to the Brazilian Consulate in Los Angeles, which handles applications from Utah.

Brazil has a total of 27 missions and some 5,000 missionaries—10 percent of the Church’s total missionary force. To try to make up for the deficit in its Brazilian missionary force, the LDS Church recently reduced the minimum required age for native Brazilians from 19 to 18.

In Switzerland, the LDS Church and other U.S.-based re-

ligious groups could soon face a major setback. Because of changes in Swiss immigration and labor laws, missionaries are now considered “gainfully employed” and therefore subject to Swiss employment laws, which favor European workers over those of other nations. The number of American missionaries allowed to operate in the country will therefore be restricted.

A transitional agreement provided visas for 80 LDS American missionaries in 2010 and for 50 in 2011. The LDS Church issued a statement saying Mormons have “a long history in Switzerland dating back to 1850. We hope a solution can be found that allows missionaries, regardless of their country of origin to serve the Swiss people.”

MORMONS MULL MEDIA MATTERS

SCHOLARS AND BLOGGERS GATHERED NOVEMBER 11–12 at BYU for the Mormon Media Studies Symposium, exploring issues relating to mass media and Mormonism.

The two-day event was organized by Sherry Baker, a BYU professor of communications who noted how much media attention Mormons have recently received—from presidential hopeful Mitt Romney to political commentator Glenn Beck, to the 2007 PBS documentary *The Mormons*.

“It was time for scholars that are looking at this from a scholarly perspective to have a forum to get together and discuss their work and interest,” Baker said.

Professor Terryl Givens, whose 1997 *The Viper on the Hearth* explores how nineteenth-century popular fiction constructed an image of the Mormons as a violent and peculiar people, noted that from the days of Joseph Smith, the LDS Church has been more invested in appearing mainstream Christian than in proclaiming its theological distinctiveness.

Givens also argued that Mormons have allowed detractors to frame the issues and happily assumed the role of victims. “Mormons were perfectly happy to play by the rules that had been inaugurated by their detractors and opponents,” Givens said. “They have played defense.”

Kathryn Lynard Soper, founding editor of *Segullah*, a blog and magazine for LDS women, discussed how cyberspace exposes bloggers to a diversity of perspectives, conflicts, and confrontation.

“The challenges of blogging with charity, or at least with basic human decency, are what make it a valuable tool for spiritual refinement,” Soper said. “For me, one reward of blogging is an expanded mind from butting heads with people I’d like to write off as just plain stupid, but who (I begrudgingly admit) actually have a point. Another is an expanded heart from realizing the legitimacy of differing points of view and the basic human respect deserved by all indi-

viduals, including that one woman who called me apostate (and that other woman I called apostate).”

The symposium included a screening of one of the rarest of Mormon films: *Corianton, A Story of Unholy Love* (1931), adapted from a stage play inspired by B.H. Roberts’s *Corianton: An Aztec Romance* (1889). Produced lavishly in the style of 1920s biblical epics, with music by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, the film had been presumed lost until 2005, when a copy had been donated to BYU.

PROVO TABERNACLE BURNS

THE HISTORIC PROVO TABERNACLE BURNED DOWN 17 December 2010, the result of what has been deemed an unintentional fire. At that time, the building was being prepared for the taping of Lex de Azevedo’s dramatic musical composition *Gloria*.

Completed in 1898 at a cost of \$100,000, the Provo Tabernacle was the venue of two “underground” general conferences (1886 and 1887, during the federal government’s anti-polygamy campaign), a speech by U.S. President William Howard Taft (1909), and the site of countless religious, social, and cultural events.

Designed to meet the congregational needs of a stake, tabernacles flourished in the nineteenth century in Utah, but in the twentieth century, the aging edifices became symbols of a bygone era. The LDS Church was forced to make difficult decisions—sale, demolition, renovation, or restoration. The 1971 demolition of the Coalville Tabernacle produced a public outcry and brought attention to the fading legacy of these historic buildings. The tabernacle in Vernal, Utah, though having been closed to the public for more than a decade, was restored as a temple in 1997.

As of press time, the Church had not yet decided if it would restore the Provo Tabernacle.



A 17 December 2010 fire guts the historic Provo Tabernacle.

People

Resigning. JON HUNTSMAN, Jr., 50, after serving one year as U.S. ambassador to China. The son of billionaire businessman and philanthropist JON HUNTSMAN and grandson of LDS Apostle DAVID B. HAIGHT, Huntsman is reportedly exploring a 2012 Republican presidential bid.



Excised. FRED HUNTING, who played the part of the apostle John in the 1991 temple film. Bloggers report that Hunting's image has been carefully edited out of the film and replaced with that of a different actor. A Fred Hunting signed the Reconciliation Petition Request at ldsapology.org asking that Church leaders re-examine the "ways in which official statements, rhetoric, policy and practice have been injurious to gays and lesbians," but it has not been confirmed that this is the same Fred Hunting.



Died. Historian BRIGHAM D. MADSEN, 96, of natural causes. Madsen, who in 1954 resigned his position at BYU over academic freedom issues, had a long career at the University of Utah as a teacher, researcher, and administrator. An expert in the history of Utah and the American West, Madsen produced an edition of B.H. Roberts's controversial *Studies of the Book of Mormon* (1985) and an autobiography, *Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Western Historian* (1998).



Convicted. Self-proclaimed prophet BRIAN DAVID MITCHELL, 57, for the 2002 kidnapping and rape of ELIZABETH SMART. After deliberating for five hours, the jury rejected the defense's claim that Mitchell had been insane when he had abducted the 14-year-old girl from her Salt Lake City home and took her as a "plural wife." Smart, now 23, temporarily returned from her LDS mission in Paris, France, to testify. In 2009, Mitchell's wife WANDA BARZEE was sentenced to 15 years for her role in the kidnapping.



Released. The FBI file of former LDS President and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture EZRA TAFT BENSON (1899–1994), including confidential letters that President Benson sent to then-FBI director J. EDGAR HOOVER. In the letters, Benson, a firm believer in a worldwide

Communist conspiracy, defends the work of the John Birch Society, condemns DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER for being soft on Communism, and asks Hoover to conduct background checks on Benson's top aides in the Department of Agriculture. Last October the *New Yorker* magazine listed Benson as one of the Tea Party's "confounding fathers", noting that "Glenn Beck's view of American history stems from the paranoid politics of the fifties."



Too Hot. For Deseret Book, *The Scorch Trials*, the new young adult novel by best-selling author JAMES DASHNER. The book reportedly contains graphic scenes of violence and expressions such as "damn," "this sucks," and "shuck it." Deseret Book's managing director of marketing, GAIL HALLADAY, told the *Salt Lake Tribune* that the book "contains language that some of our customers would find offensive." Dashner has published three books with Deseret Book's imprint Shadow Mountain.



Debuting. TREY PARKER and MATT STONE's *The Book of Mormon*, a Broadway musical which *Vogue* magazine is calling "the filthiest, most offensive, and—surprise—sweetest thing you'll see on Broadway this year, and quite possibly the funniest musical ever." Written in collaboration with *Avenue Q* composer ROBERT LOPEZ, and peppered with foul language and adult themes, the musical centers on two 19-year-old Mormon missionaries who are sent to Uganda.



Televised: On 23 January 2011, a fictional Sunstone Symposium session on HBO's series *Big Love*. In it, Barb (the first wife of Bill Henrickson) played by JEANNE TRIPPLEHORN participates with her mother on a panel session addressing the effects of excommunication on a family.

Hairy. Former BYU football player and current Steelers defensive end BRETT "DIESEL" KEISEL who grew an epic beard for luck in the 2011 Super Bowl. He suggested that if the Steelers won the game, BYU officials could "Maybe have a 'Diesel Day' or 'Diesel Week' where everybody [on BYU campus] can let their beard [grow] for a month or so." However, the Steelers lost.



MASSACRE SITE MAY BECOME NATIONAL LANDMARK

THE SITE OF THE MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE is on track to become a National Historic Landmark. Parks historian Lisa Wegman-French told the Associated Press that the National Parks Service Advisory Board supports giving the site landmark status though the U.S. Secretary of the Interior will make the final decision.

Located 30 miles north of St. George, Utah, Mountain Meadows is the site where, in 1857, a militia composed of Mormons and a few Native Americans killed 120 men, women, and all but 17 children bound for California. The slaughter has been called one of the darkest episodes in Mormon history, and competing interpretations of the massacre have dogged its memory for more than 150 years.

In recent years, representatives of three organizations generated from massacre survivors, along with the LDS Church, reached an agreement to support the national landmark designation. In 2007, the LDS Church, which owns much of the land at the site, authorized a statement expressing “regret” for the massacre.

“This [landmark designation] is something that we’ve wanted, some higher order of protection for our lost loved ones,” said Phil Bolinger, president of the Mountain Meadows Monument Foundation, which has worked for landmark designation for nearly a decade. “There’s not a lot you can do for people that were killed and buried 150-plus years ago, but you can honor and remember them in the highest possible way.”

“SISTER WIVES” LEAVES UTAH

MERI, JANELLE, CHRISTINE, AND ROBYN ARE PLURAL wives of Kody Brown—and the stars of *Sister Wives*, a reality TV show shot in Lehi, Utah, and carried since September 2010 on the TLC cable network. After months of public scrutiny in their Utah community, the family, consisting of 5 adults and 16 children, is moving to Nevada.



From left, sister-wives Meri, Christine, Janelle and Robyn, stars of the TLC reality series “Sister Wives.” The family is leaving Lehi, Utah for Nevada.

Though attorney Jonathan Turley says Kody Brown has moved his family “to pursue new opportunities,” Utah newspapers noted that the Lehi police launched an investigation into the family as soon as TLC announced the new show.

“There were no pending charges against them in Utah,” Turley stated. “I see no legal reason why their family cannot live and continue to thrive in Nevada as they have in Utah.”

However, since the show’s premiere, the family has faced difficulties such as Meri Brown’s being fired from her job in the mental health industry.

“I know the family so well, and they’re such fantastic people,” said Anne Wilde, cofounder of Principle Voices, a plural marriage advocacy group. “They’re not flaunting it at all. They’re trying to educate people that this is a viable lifestyle.”

TLC says that the move will not affect the series. The first 10 episodes of the second season have already been shot.

“We will continue to shoot no matter where they live,” announced Laurie Goldberg, TLC’s senior vice president of communications. “We’re interested in the family. That won’t change.”

Pontius’ Puddle

