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978-1-107-02797-8 - Seeking the Promised Land: Mormons and American Politics

David E. Campbell, John C. Green and J. Quin Monson

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## Seeking the Promised Land

Mormons have long had an outsized presence in American culture and politics, but they remain largely unknown to most Americans. Recent years have seen the political prominence of Mormons taken to a new level, thanks to developments including the presidential candidacy of Republican Mitt Romney, the high-profile involvement of Mormons in the campaign for California's Proposition 8 (anti-gay marriage), and the ascendancy of Democrat Harry Reid to the position of Senate Majority Leader. This book provides the most thorough examination ever written of Mormons' place in the American political landscape – what Mormons are like politically and how non-Mormons respond to Mormon candidates. However, this is a book about more than Mormons. As a religious subculture in a pluralistic society, Mormons are a case study of how a religious group balances distinctiveness and assimilation – a question faced by all faiths.

David E. Campbell is Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame and the founding director of the Rooney Center for the Study of American Democracy. He is the coauthor (with Robert Putnam) of *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, which received both the 2011 Woodrow Wilson Award from the American Political Science Association and the Wilbur Award from the Religious Communicators Council for the best nonfiction book of 2010. He is also the author of *Why We Vote: How Schools and Communities Shape Our Civic Life*.

John C. Green is director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics and Distinguished Professor of Political Science at the University of Akron. He also serves as a senior research advisor at the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. He is the author of *The Faith Factor: How Religion Influences American Elections* and the coauthor of *The Diminishing Divide: Religion's Changing Role in American Politics*, *The Bully Pulpit: The Politics of Protestant Clergy*, and *Religion and the Culture Wars*.

J. Quin Monson is Associate Professor of Political Science, former director of the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy, and a Mollie and Karl Butler Young Scholar in Western Studies at the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University. Monson's research has appeared in journals such as *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Political Analysis*, *Political Behavior*, and the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. He is the coeditor of several monographs on congressional and presidential elections and contributes regularly to a blog called *Utah Data Points*.

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# Seeking the Promised Land

## *Mormons and American Politics*

DAVID E. CAMPBELL

*University of Notre Dame*

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*University of Akron*

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*For Kirsten, Katie, and Soren;*

*Kate, Anna, Alex, Sadie, and Josephine;*

*Lynn, Brendan, Darcy, Russell, and Caroline*

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## Preface

This is a book about Mormons and American politics, a religious community and a subject that frequently elicit strong reactions. Some readers will have a negative perception of Mormons, others will have a positive view, and some will be Mormons themselves. Still others will not have a prior opinion one way or the other and are reading this book out of curiosity (or perhaps because it was assigned in a class). Since our readers will come to this subject with different backgrounds, let us explain ours.

We recognize that it is unusual to highlight authors' personal, especially religious, backgrounds in a work of empirical social science. But owing to the fervent opinions Mormonism can engender, many readers will undoubtedly wonder about our connections to the faith. Readers who would rather not know our religious perspectives should stop reading this and skip to Chapter 1. Perhaps, upon finishing the book, they can try to guess our religions and then come back to find out whether they are right.

Our team consists of two Mormons and a non-Mormon. J. Quin Monson is LDS and teaches at Brigham Young University, the LDS Church's flagship university. He grew up in the Mormon heartland of Utah. Mormonism is to his hometown, Provo, what chocolate is to Hershey, Pennsylvania. Furthermore, his extended family has deep roots within Mormonism (although he is not related to LDS Church President Thomas B. Monson). David E. Campbell is also LDS and teaches at the University of Notre Dame. He hails from Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada – a community where Mormons are a relatively small share of the population. His extended family members are a mixture of Mormons and non-Mormons.

In other words, Monson was born, raised, and still lives in the midst of Mormonism's "Zion." Campbell, on the other hand, was raised and now lives in what Utah Mormons call the "mission field" (an environment where Mormons are a minority). The genesis of this book dates from when Campbell and Monson were both undergraduates at BYU, majoring in political science and on their way to graduate school. It was in the food court of BYU's student center that they

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hatched a plan to one day write a book on Mormons and politics. Even then they recognized that because of their varying life experiences, they bring different perspectives to their understanding of Mormon culture.

John C. Green provides still another perspective. He is a United Methodist who teaches at the University of Akron, a public university in Ohio. He has long been interested in American religious pluralism, including the fact that it is more often honored in preaching than observance. It is worth noting that the terms “Mormon” and “Methodist” were originally coined by critics, but then proudly adopted by the targets of the criticism.

While our biographies are likely relevant to some readers, we nonetheless hope that attention to our religious backgrounds does not overshadow our professional expertise. As a parallel, we point to the bounty of excellent scholarship on African Americans and politics – some of which is written by black scholars and some of which is not. To those who may worry that Mormon scholars cannot write objectively about Mormons, we paraphrase John F. Kennedy, who famously said that he was not the “Catholic candidate for president but the Democratic Party’s candidate, who happens also to be a Catholic” (1960). Likewise, Monson and Campbell are not Mormon political scientists but political scientists who happen also to be Mormons. To those who are concerned that a non-Mormon cannot understand the intricacies of Mormonism, we note that even though Green is not a member of the faith, he nonetheless has a deep familiarity with it. He has done many years of “field work” among Mormons, beginning with a childhood spent in Colorado around many Latter-day Saints. As a team, we rely on insider knowledge to detect nuances within Mormon culture while also drawing on an outsider perspective when translating “Mormonisms” to those unfamiliar with that culture.

In writing this book, we have had to decide how much of Mormonism to explain and how to explain it. This is not a book on all things Mormon, but rather an analysis of Mormons’ place in American politics. Accordingly, we have made our choices by keeping our focus on those aspects of the LDS faith and culture that are *politically* pertinent. Unlike much that is written about Mormonism, our objective is not to be devotional or polemical. We cover some potentially uncomfortable aspects of Mormonism – particularly polygamy and the restrictive racial policies of its past – because they have political relevance. But neither do we dwell on them at the expense of ignoring politically salient aspects of Mormonism that perhaps do not garner as much attention from other sources. At all times, we have stuck to the facts.

In sum, we hope to provide a theoretically grounded, empirically informed examination of Mormons’ place in American politics – with perspectives from both inside and outside the faith.

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## Acknowledgments

Many of the ideas in this book have been percolating for years, having taken shape in our conversations with each other, as well as with mentors, colleagues, and students. But refining our ideas, collecting the data, and producing the actual manuscript happened rather quickly, thanks to supportive institutions and the assistance of good friends. Financial support for the data collection was jointly supplied by the Francis and Kathleen Rooney Center for the Study of American Democracy at the University of Notre Dame, the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron, and the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy at Brigham Young University. The political science departments at Notre Dame and BYU also granted leave to David C. Campbell and J. Quin Monson that allowed them to focus on writing.

The series editor, Ken Wald, has been helpful and encouraging throughout the process, offering crucial advice and substantive input every step of the way. We gathered as an author team at Brigham Young University in November 2012 for a small conference with a group of friends and colleagues to review early chapter drafts, for data analysis, and to set a course for the remaining work. We are grateful to Brian Cannon and the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University for funding this conference. We likewise owe a debt of gratitude to Clyde Wilcox, Frances Lee, Chris Karpowitz, Paul Edwards, and Kelly Patterson for their conference participation and careful review at that early stage. They were encouraging while also steering us toward additional analysis and writing that have made the book thorough enough to interest specialists in religion and politics but also informative and accessible to a general audience. We are also grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions.

The original data collection for the book was all done through YouGov. Samantha Luks and Ashley Grosse were especially helpful with their expertise in conducting the Peculiar People Survey and the Mormon Perceptions Study. Available data about Mormons has exploded in recent years, largely because of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. We have especially benefited from

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the “Mormons in America” data and report and the large-scale Religious Landscape survey. At a time when government funding for political science research is drying up, Pew demonstrates the value in public-spirited data collection. The work of David Magleby and Kelly Patterson with the Utah Colleges Exit Poll has provided a tremendous data resource and also sparked an intellectual curiosity for questions about Mormons and politics among their former students (including both Campbell and Monson).

We were aided in our work by a number of student research assistants who faithfully toiled with us on the project. We thank them for their long hours and careful work on what could at times be tedious tasks. They include Zach Smith, Kali Smith, Brian Reed, Madison Daines, and Jordan Stauss at Brigham Young University. In particular, Zach provided tremendous assistance on a variety of data analysis tasks and Brian contributed heavily to the ecological inference analysis of Utah Mormons. Other research assistance was provided by the staff and students at the University of Akron, including Angie Wynar, Michael Kohler, Britney Raies, Ian Schwarber, and Marilyn Johnson, who contributed heavily to the case studies of Mormon presidential candidates, trends in Mormon officer holders, and mentions of Mormon candidates in the *New York Times*. We are especially grateful to Jonathan Schwartz for the brilliant idea to use the Pew Religious Landscape survey questions about former religious affiliation to compare current and former Mormons. Janet Lykes Bolois deserves praise for her copyediting expertise.

Feedback on early drafts of our work was also provided by the participants in a seminar at the University of Florida and the weekly research workshop of Notre Dame’s Rooney Center. As the manuscript progressed, we also received helpful input on sections of the book from Geoff Layman, Christina Wolbrecht, Robert Millet, Kirsten Campbell, and Lynn Green. Finally, a project like this always requires patience and support from those closest to us, particularly our spouses and children. Our families provide just the right balance of support and distraction to make doing a project like this possible and even pleasant.