PART I

MORMONS AS AN ETHNO-RELIGIOUS GROUP

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Meet the Mormons

In 1996, *Time* magazine named Stephen R. Covey one of the twenty-five most influential Americans. His best-known book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1990), has long been a staple of bookstores and best-seller lists, having sold more than 25 million copies. Covey built a self-help empire teaching executives how to employ his habits to make an effective business. When he passed away in 2012, his *New York Times* obituary noted that "more than two-thirds of Fortune 500 companies" had sought his advice (D. Martin 2012). Covey also consulted with political leaders, winning praise from Democrats like President Bill Clinton and Republicans like Newt Gingrich. His advice even extended beyond the boardroom to the family room with a follow-up book on creating highly effective families (Covey 1997). With his bipartisan appeal, folksy wisdom, and sunny disposition, Covey was part Norman Vincent Peale, part Dale Carnegie.

Covey was also a Mormon, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[1] Far from merely a peripheral aspect of his life and work, Covey's Mormonism served as the foundation for his famous seven habits. Fellow Mormon and Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen told the *Economist* that "the seven habits are essentially a secular distillation of Mormon teaching" (*Economist* 2012). Indeed, prior to writing *The Seven Habits*, Covey published a book for a Mormon audience, *The Spiritual Roots of Human Relations* (1970), which employed many of the same concepts.

Covey is only one example among many of how Mormons seemingly stand at the center of American culture – they are the "quintessential Americans," as columnist George Will put it back in 1979 (cited in R. L. Moore 1986, 43). In

[1] The full name is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For the sake of brevity and variety, we often refer to it here as either the Church (when the context makes our meaning clear) or the LDS Church. Members of the Church are referred to as Mormons, Latter-day Saints, LDS Church members, or, occasionally, Church members. As we use them, these terms are fully interchangeable synonyms.

1959, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir won a Grammy for its recording of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." In the 1970s, Donny and Marie Osmond were America's sweethearts, with hits on the pop charts and a top-rated television variety show. In 2002, Mormons received very positive press coverage during the Winter Olympics hosted by Salt Lake City, a city founded by Mormons and today the worldwide headquarters for the LDS Church.

Those Olympics were run by Mitt Romney. He was given the job of running the Olympics in the wake of a bribery scandal and financial difficulties that were threatening to tarnish the Games. As head of Bain Capital, Romney had specialized in the art of the turnaround. And turn around the Olympics he did, as they made a profit and were generally thought to be a success (Gold 2012). His business background no doubt made him an attractive choice to take the reins of a troubled Olympics. But given that the games were held in Utah, his religious background certainly mattered too. Like Covey, Romney is a Mormon, with deep family roots in the LDS Church.

Five years later, Mitt Romney was running for president. Given the importance of religion to many American voters, one might think that belonging to the "quintessentially American" church would be a political asset – and especially in the Republican primaries, where conservative values are a boon. Instead, Romney was confronted with suspicion regarding his religion, from both the left and the right. Editorialists argued that voters were "thoroughly justified" in opposing a Mormon presidential candidate on the grounds of his religion (Weisberg 2006; Linker 2006). Romney's leading opponent in the primaries, former Southern Baptist pastor Mike Huckabee, subtly raised suspicions about his religion (Chafets 2007). Out on the hustings, anti-Mormon sentiment was anything but subtle. For example, many South Carolina voters were sent an unsigned eight-page anti-Mormon diatribe in 2007 (Spencer 2007).

In this context, a Gallup poll found that 28 percent of Americans openly said they would not vote for a Mormon presidential candidate, a number essentially unchanged since 1967 – when Mitt Romney's father, Michigan governor George Romney, also ran for president. Interestingly, this was roughly the same percentage of Americans who said that they would not vote for a Catholic candidate in 1960, when John F. Kennedy was running for president (Jones 2007).

Given the controversy over his religion, it should not be surprising that in both 2008 and 2012, Romney generally steered clear of discussing it. In today's religion-soaked presidential campaigns – especially among Republicans – his religious reticence stood out. This is not to say, however, that he ignored the "Mormon question." In 2007, during his first run for the presidency, Romney sought to address concerns about his Mormonism in a speech delivered in College Station, Texas, evoking memories of a comparable speech delivered by Kennedy during the 1960 presidential campaign, also in Texas. In that speech, Romney walked a fine line. On the one hand, he spoke of his core belief in Jesus, leading to a remarkable statement for someone running for the secular office of the presidency: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of

mankind." On the other hand, he declined to discuss the "distinctive doctrines" of his church and instead invoked his belief in a common set of "moral values" found in nearly all religious traditions (Romney 2007).

In his 2012 campaign, Romney delivered no comparable speech about his faith, and mostly tried to keep the focus on his business background. To the extent that his religion was mentioned, it was generally either journalists reporting on the millions of dollars he has donated to the LDS Church (Montgomery, Yang, and Rucker 2012) or friends of Romney describing his time as a lay leader in his church ministering to members of his congregation (S. Holland 2012). Through his highlighting of these aspects of Mormonism, Americans unfamiliar with the faith were introduced to the tight bonds Mormons form with one another, and the often-extraordinary investment of time and money they make in their church.

This book is about the seeming paradox of Mormonism in American life, as revealed by the contrast between Stephen Covey and Mitt Romney. If Mormons are the quintessential Americans, Covey and Romney could be considered the quintessential Mormons – or, at least, they are exemplars of how Mormons are often presented and perceived. Both are toothsome family men who achieved considerable professional and financial success. Yet whatever similarities they share, the contrast in their public reception is telling. Covey wrote a book that has sold 25 million copies by distilling his Mormon beliefs into secular language, with no antagonism toward the peculiar features of his faith. Romney ran for president and, despite stressing his faith's commonalities with other American religions, faced antagonism over Mormonism's distinctiveness. Who better represents the place of Mormons in today's America: Covey or Romney? Are the Latter-day Saints a "quintessentially American" faith or a "peculiar people" set apart?

The paradox is that Mormons are both. Just as light has the properties of both a particle and a wave, so are Mormons best understood as being simultaneously in the mainstream and on the fringes of American society. Mormons have a strong sense of internal solidarity, powering a degree of voluntarism unmatched by any other religious group in America. They are an optimistic and patriotic people known for their upright living, family values, good health, and generous ways. However, the same faith that fosters these all-American virtues also includes unique beliefs and practices that create external tensions with other Americans. Many simply consider Mormons to be different and praiseworthy or odd but innocuous, while others see Mormons as clannish, exotic, or even heretical – a "peculiar people" in one way or another.

WHY THIS BOOK?

Why a whole book about Mormons and politics? One reason is the lack of attention Mormons have received from social scientists. In the contemporary United States, there are as many Mormons as Jews – roughly 2 percent of the

population – and contrary to the stable Jewish population, Mormonism is often described as being among the fastest-growing religions in America.[2] Yet there has been far less research on Mormonism than on Judaism, let alone work that has focused specifically on Mormons and politics.[3]

Size and growth rates alone would admittedly be weak rationales for a book about the politics of any group. There are as many owners of hamsters and guinea pigs in the United States as there are Mormons, and the number of Zumba dancers is growing much more rapidly than the membership rolls of the LDS Church.[4] But neither owners of small rodents nor dance exercise fads occupy the kind of cultural or political niche that Mormons do.

Mormonism's place in American culture is perhaps best illustrated by the hit Broadway play *The Book of Mormon: The Musical*, written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone of *South Park* fame. Imagine musical theater that spoofs, say, Presbyterianism. Somehow it would lack the same comedic punch. Nor is this the first time that Mormons have been featured in popular culture, as they have appeared in fiction – usually as villains – since the nineteenth century (Givens 1997).

Whatever their portrayal in fiction, in reality Mormons have long walked the halls of power. Many Mormons hold high political office, such as Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (Democrat) and the long-serving senior senator from Utah, Orrin Hatch (Republican). In Congress, Mormons have consistently been represented in numbers slightly greater than their share of the population. From the 106th (1999–2000) to the 113th (2013–14) Congresses, the proportion of Mormon members has hovered around 3 percent. A number of Mormons have also run for the presidency, a legacy that includes the quixotic campaign of Mormonism's founder, Joseph Smith, in 1844. The twentieth century saw the presidential campaigns of George Romney (1968), Mo Udall

[2] While there is no question that the LDS Church is growing, the precise rate of growth is a matter of controversy. According to membership statistics provided by the LDS Church, the Church grew by 30 percent between 1990 and 2008. Using the American Religious Identification Survey, sociologists Rick Phillips and Ryan T. Cragun put the LDS growth rate during that same period at 16 percent. Using other membership statistics reported by the LDS Church, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reports that the LDS growth rate from 2000 to 2010 was 18 percent. The discrepancies result from different methods of counting membership. While the LDS Church reports anyone baptized into the Church as a member, a survey like the ARIS counts only those people who self-identify as Mormon. See *Mormons in the United States 1990–2008* for more details (Phillips and Cragun 2011); also see Stack (2012b).

[3] There are, however, a few notable exceptions. They include *Latter-Day Political Views* (Fox 2006); *Mormons in American Politics: From Persecution to Power* (Perry and Cronin 2012); and *LDS in the USA: Mormonism and the Making of American Culture* (Trepanier and Newswander 2012). We acknowledge these authors for being in the vanguard of studying Mormonism's impact on American politics, and are grateful for their insights.

[4] According to Gallup, 2 percent of Americans own a hamster or guinea pig (http://www.gallup.com/poll/25969/americans-their-pets.aspx). For details on the explosive growth of Zumba, see Rusli (2012).

(1976), and Orrin Hatch (2000), while the twenty-first century brought both Jon Huntsman, Jr. (2012) and Mitt Romney (2008, 2012). Romney has come closest to winning the presidency, having received the 2012 Republican nomination but ultimately losing in a tight race to Barack Obama.

Even if Trey Parker and Matt Stone had not written their self-described "atheist's love note to Mormonism" (Jardin 2011) and Mitt Romney had never run for president, a detailed treatment of Mormons' place in contemporary American politics would be long overdue. Because Mormon voters are politically distinctive, they warrant an in-depth examination. In being distinctive, they can also inform a theoretical understanding of how religion and politics intersect. The politics of the Mormon rank and file are often shaped by their religion, sometimes in surprising ways. Although Mormons are overwhelmingly Republicans, Harry Reid reminds us of Mormons' partisan diversity. And notwithstanding that most Mormons are Republicans and self-described conservatives, on some issues their religious beliefs cause them to depart from the canon of conservative thought.

Mormons also challenge the prevailing trend within American religion whereby boundaries between religious communities have blurred and distinctions eroded (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Mormonism draws bright lines around its adherents with a set of distinctive beliefs and practices. Latter-day Saints are an example of what scholars call an "ethno-religious" political group, in which religion and ethnicity forge a strong sense of identity. Irish Catholics, Dutch Calvinists, and German Jews are good examples of ethno-religious groups in the past (Green 2007). Mormons represent a contemporary case of a group whose identity is shaped by their religion in ways that closely resemble an ethnic group, even if the group is not defined as ethnic per se.

Many scholars have argued that ethno-religious tensions have largely been supplanted by a new type of political grouping, in which religious traditionalists and progressives face off in dueling alliances that cut across religious communities. The divisions between conservative and liberal Catholics – and the alliances of these groups with their ideological counterparts among Protestants – are good examples. This development is known by many names: "religious restructuring" (Wuthnow 1990), "culture war politics" (J. D. Hunter 1991), "the new religion gap" (Green 2007), and the "coalition of the religious" (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

Mormons challenge this new paradigm in two respects. First, they hold to highly traditional values and yet fit uneasily with other religious traditionalists, especially evangelical Protestants. Second, Mormons offer a unique window into the persistence of ethno-religious groups in a pluralistic society. Mormons are not an archeological discovery, an ancient people isolated on the margins of modern society. Founded in the United States in the nineteenth century, the Latter-day Saints have become a global religion, well adapted to the modern world and yet offering a clear alternative to it. Mormons are a paradigmatic case of a vital religious group that has only slowly found acceptance in the American

social and political mainstream. In this sense, the experience of Mormons may be helpful in understanding the future of other ethno-religious groups in the American religious mosaic, such as Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists.

WHO ARE THE MORMONS?

A group cannot be studied until it is defined. For our purposes, "Mormon" or its synonym, "Latter-day Saint," refers to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In this approach, Mormonism is defined much like Catholicism, with both traditions demarcated by membership in one worldwide church. Like Catholicism, Mormonism has also produced a few schismatic groups that identify with the broader tradition, but such groups are dwarfed in size, if not public attention, by a single dominant institution (in the case of Mormons, the Salt Lake City–based LDS Church). And as with Catholicism, history is important to the definition of Mormonism.

As every Mormon child can tell you, Joseph Smith had what Mormons call his "First Vision" in 1820, at the age of fourteen. In this initial theophany, Mormons believe Smith came face-to-face with God and Jesus Christ. This inaugural revelatory experience was followed by a series of other visions and divine visitations. In the ensuing years, an angel revealed to Smith the location of plates, made of gold, containing the record of an ancient Hebraic civilization in the Americas whose progenitors traveled from the Holy Land to the New World in Old Testament times. Smith translated the plates with divine assistance and published the translation as the *Book of Mormon* (Mormon being the name of a prominent figure within the book). As God's prophet, Smith formed a church in 1830, initially called the Church of Christ.[5]

The young church grew, and its members came together and formed tight-knit communities. They were often pejoratively called "Mormonites" or "Mormons." The latter nickname was accepted by the faith's early adherents, and it has stuck ever since. Mormonism's early days brought a grim pattern – a gathering in a particular place, rising tension with the surrounding communities, and then an exodus to gather anew someplace else. In 1837, most Mormons moved from Ohio to Missouri, and then, facing an extermination order issued by Missouri's governor, moved again across the Mississippi River to Illinois in 1838. Smith named the new gathering place Nauvoo, where he

[5] We can only provide a précis of Mormon history here. For more thorough treatments, see:

The Mormon People: *The Making of An American Faith*, by Matthew Bowman (2012a, Random House)

The Mormon Experience: *A History of the Latter-day Saints*, by Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton (1992, University of Illinois Press)

Mormonism: *The Story of a New Religious Tradition*, by Jan Shipps (1985, University of Illinois Press)

simultaneously served as mayor, general of the city's military force, and prophet of the Church.

The Mormons prospered in their "kingdom on the Mississippi" (Flanders 1975), but by 1844 tensions had risen again. Rumors of polygamy among the upper strata of LDS leaders were circulating, having been put into print by a newspaper published by some of the Church's former officials. In his capacity as mayor of Nauvoo, Smith had the newspaper's press destroyed, which led to his imprisonment in the county seat of Carthage, Illinois. Joseph was joined in jail by his brother Hyrum and two other prominent Church leaders. On June 27, 1844, a mob stormed the jail with guns blazing. Joseph and Hyrum Smith were shot and killed. Smith's murder – known to Mormons as the Martyrdom – was a critical juncture for the young Church. In the immediate aftermath of his death, it was not clear if anyone would succeed the charismatic young prophet, and if Mormonism would fade as just another failed utopian experiment of the Second Great Awakening.

Far from fading away, Mormonism carried on under the leadership of Brigham Young. Most – but not all – Mormons accepted Young as Smith's successor. "Brother Brigham" became the Mormons' Moses (Arrington 1986). Their troubles did not end with Smith's murder, and Young made the decision to lead his people on a mass exodus to what they hoped would be their promised land. The Mormons left Nauvoo and immigrated to present-day Utah, which was then part of Mexico. They soon established settlements throughout the Mountain West.[6] For years, a steady stream of Mormon converts, many from Europe, made the arduous trek to "the place which God . . . prepared, far away in the West."[7]

Upon settling in their western enclave, in 1852 LDS leaders openly acknowledged the practice of polygamy, or "plural marriage," as the Mormons themselves called it. Polygamy was highly controversial and led to decades of conflict between the Mormons and the federal government, including a military expedition, pursuit of Church leaders by federal authorities, a series of federal laws designed to thwart polygamy by targeting the LDS Church and its assets, and, finally, an 1879 Supreme Court decision that polygamy was not a form of free exercise of religion protected by the U.S. Constitution. Polygamy long delayed Utah from becoming a state.

[6] Some Mormons did not recognize Young as their new leader and instead followed others who claimed to be Smith's successor. The largest of these groups eventually formed the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), initially led by Joseph Smith's son, Joseph Smith III. Among the RLDS was Emma Smith, Joseph Smith's first – that is, pre-polygamy – wife and Mormonism's "founding mother." Today, the RLDS Church has been renamed the Community of Christ. Headquartered in Missouri, with a membership of approximately 120,000, the Community of Christ bears diminishing resemblance to today's LDS Church. When we speak of Mormons, we do not mean members of the Community of Christ, or any other offshoot from the dissension following Smith's death.

[7] Lyrics from the Mormon hymn, "Come, Come Ye Saints."

A watershed in Mormon history came in 1890, when the fourth president of the LDS Church, Wilford Woodruff, announced that the Church would no longer sanction plural marriages. The "Manifesto," as it came to be called, did not bring polygamy to a screeching halt, but it did apply the brakes. In the immediate wake of the Manifesto, there was ambiguity regarding its full implications. For example, questions remained about the status of preexisting polygamous marriages and whether such marriages could be performed outside the territory of the United States. Notwithstanding these unresolved questions, the polygamy ban was enough for Utah to be granted statehood in 1896, and by the beginning of the twentieth century the polygamy era drew to a close. Any uncertainty about the status of polygamy was resolved in 1905, when two of the Church's twelve apostles were forced to resign from their ecclesiastical positions after defying the church president's edict and continuing to officiate at polygamous weddings (Flake 2004).

Just as the death of Joseph Smith caused one critical juncture, the end of polygamy brought another. Some "fundamentalist" sects never accepted the prohibition on polygamy and continue the practice today (Van Wagoner 1989). These fundamentalists are not members of the LDS Church, which treats polygamy as an offense that warrants excommunication. Indeed, as we detail further in Chapter 3, among members of the LDS Church, polygamy meets with greater moral disapproval than premarital sex – which is saying something, given Mormons' moral conservatism. While the number of polygamists is tiny, they elicit equal parts public fascination and revulsion such that they attract a lot of attention. In recent years, this has included the reality TV show "Sister Wives" and the dramatic series "Big Love." Recent years have also seen the high-profile prosecution of Warren Jeffs, leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, as his marriage to teenage wives led to a conviction for the sexual assault of minors (*Associated Press* 2011). These fundamentalist polygamists are not included in our definition of Mormons, because the Church does not accept them as members and they, in turn, do not recognize the authority of the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

WHAT DO MORMONS BELIEVE?

An examination of LDS beliefs brings the Mormon paradox to light – the juxtaposition of being both the "quintessential American church" and a "peculiar people." To anyone accustomed to Protestantism or Catholicism, attending an LDS sacrament meeting (worship service) would reveal a blend of both the familiar and unfamiliar. The meeting would include many common Christian themes. Mormons believe the Bible to be holy scripture and draw lessons from both the Old and New Testaments. Mormons freely speak of Christ as their Savior, celebrating the nativity at Christmas and the resurrection at Easter. They take communion and sing many hymns found in the songbooks of other churches. But such a visitor would hear much that is unfamiliar – a sampling