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**Abstract** Review of *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of a Violent Faith* (2003), by Jon Krakauer.

## DOING VIOLENCE TO JOURNALISTIC INTEGRITY

Craig L. Foster

The noted author Paul Fussell once commented, “If I didn’t have writing, I’d be running down the street hurling grenades in people’s faces.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the same could be said about Jon Krakauer. Both he and his works are complex, introspective, and, without doubt, “in your face” and controversial. Krakauer is fascinated by people who are on the edge physically and emotionally, those who push the limits to the extreme. His writing reflects this fascination as he tries to define for his reading audience what it is like to go to extremes. Krakauer has succeeded where many others have failed because he is, without argument, a gifted writer. His text flows seamlessly, creating a literary picture that touches a reader to the very core.

Krakauer has used his writing talents to look at the fringes of the Latter-day Saint community in his book *Under the Banner of Heaven*, in which he examines the double murders committed in 1984

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I would like to thank Newell G. Bringhurst, Steven L. Mayfield, and Louis C. Midgley for their help and advice.

1. Quotation is from Rand Lindsly’s Quotations; also in Maria Leach, comp., *The Ultimate Insult* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1997), 173.

Review of Jon Krakauer. *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of a Violent Faith*. New York: Doubleday, 2003. xxvi + 372 pp., with index and bibliography. \$26.00.

by the ex-Mormon brothers Ron and Dan Lafferty and explores the fundamentalist communities of Colorado City–Hildale on the Utah–Arizona border and Bountiful in British Columbia.<sup>2</sup> His accounts of murder and seduction are mixed with events and teachings in Latter-day Saint history in an attempt to portray these fringe elements as murderous and libidinous offspring of a religion steeped in its own history of violence and quirkiness.

As a means to understanding Jon Krakauer’s approach to this topic, an understanding of his background is necessary. A former carpenter and fisherman turned freelance writer, Krakauer’s accumulation of literary accomplishments was slow but steady. His workhorse approach to writing initially gained him a respectable reputation among readers and publishers of outdoor magazines. However, he could not make a living writing about mountain climbing and other outdoor-related activities. Krakauer soon branched out and began to write on other subjects. For example, since he had been a carpenter, he decided to write an article about architecture, feeling he could bluff his way to being published in *Architectural Digest*.<sup>3</sup> He also wrote about a commercial fishery for *Smithsonian* and published other articles in *Rolling Stone*, *Playboy*, *Time*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and *National Geographic*.<sup>4</sup> He gave these magazines “whatever they wanted” because, as he related, “I wanted to pay the rent, I didn’t have any grandiose ambitions of being an artiste; I wanted to pay the . . . bills, so I worked really hard.”<sup>5</sup>

Krakauer’s hard-scrabble career beginnings seem to belie his upper-middle-class childhood and youth. He was born in 1954 in Brookline, Massachusetts, where his father, Lewis, was finishing his medical

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2. Although Krakauer’s book discusses the Lafferty murders, as well as the fundamentalist communities of Colorado City–Hildale and Bountiful, this book review focuses rather on Krakauer’s discussion of the history and doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

3. “An Interview with Jon Krakauer,” as published at [www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0697/krakauer/interview.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0697/krakauer/interview.html) (accessed 25 August 2003).

4. “‘Under the Banner of Heaven’ Author Visits Oregon State,” *Corvallis Gazette-Times*, 25 July 2003.

5. “An Interview with Jon Krakauer.”

studies.<sup>6</sup> Lewis Krakauer was born in Brooklyn in 1927 to first-generation Russian-Polish Jewish emigrants.<sup>7</sup> His parents were Jay T. and Ruth A. Krakauer. The senior Krakauer had emigrated from Czestochowa, Poland, in 1904. He arrived on the *Aurania*, which sailed from Liverpool, England, and arrived at Ellis Island in that same year. At the time of his arrival, he was listed as a Russian Hebrew and gave Jakob Krakauer as his name.<sup>8</sup>

Jakob Krakauer, whose family name means “a person from Krakow, Poland,” later anglicized his name to Jay Krakauer.<sup>9</sup> He worked as a civil engineer with the New York City subway system.<sup>10</sup> Lewis became a medical doctor and moved with his wife, Carol, and family to Corvallis, Oregon, where he practiced medicine.<sup>11</sup>

Although Jon Krakauer’s relationship with his father was often strained and volatile, he picked up several things from him. First, he gained a love for mountain climbing. Second, he gained a great love of the outdoors.<sup>12</sup> And third, he inherited a gift for writing from his

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6. “About Jon Krakauer,” found at “Jon Krakauer Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of a Violent Faith,” as published at [www.randomhouse.com/features/krakauer/author.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/features/krakauer/author.html) (accessed 21 July 2003). While Krakauer grew up in Corvallis, he later lived for a time in Seattle and presently lives in Boulder, Colorado, with his wife of twenty-three years, Linda Moore.

7. United States Population Schedule, 1930 Census, Brooklyn Borough, King’s County, New York, E.D. 24-1508, sheet 29A, lines 5-7, available at [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) (accessed 22 March 2004).

8. Passenger Record for Jakob Krakauer, available at [www.ellislandrecords.org](http://www.ellislandrecords.org) (accessed 27 August 2003). When Krakauer emigrated, most of Poland was under the control of the Russian Empire.

9. Heinrich W. Guggenheimer and Eva H. Guggenheimer, *Jewish Family Names and Their Origins: An Etymological Dictionary* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992), 427; and Mail Jewish Mailing List 34/15 (22 January 2001).

10. 1930 census.

11. Lewis Krakauer died 24 September 2001. Corvallis (Benton County, Oregon) City Directory (Los Angeles: Polk, 1958-); “Lewis J. Krakauer,” *Corvallis Gazette-Times*, 25 September 2001 as found at [www.gazettetimes.com/articles/2001/09/26](http://www.gazettetimes.com/articles/2001/09/26) (accessed 15 September 2003); and [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com)—Social Security Death Index, “Lewis J. Krakauer” (accessed 27 August 2003). Between 1958 and 1990, Lewis J. Krakauer and his family resided in Corvallis where he continued with his medical practice until his retirement.

12. Biography section of Jon Krakauer’s official Web site—[www.cwu.edu/~geograph/krakauer.htm](http://www.cwu.edu/~geograph/krakauer.htm) (accessed 27 August 2003).

father, who edited *The Year Book of Sports Medicine* on several occasions.<sup>13</sup> It was because of mountain climbing that he wrote his first article. In 1974 he went to Alaska for the first time and climbed in the Brooks Range. He wrote about his experiences in the *American Alpine Journal*. Three years later he described his experiences climbing the Devil's Thumb for *Mountain*.<sup>14</sup> And, as a final legacy from his parents, Krakauer learned to view the divine through agnostic, if not atheistic, eyes.<sup>15</sup>

Krakauer's writing career has included stints as a contributing editor for *Outside* and *Men's Journal*, as well as authorship of several books. During his early career, Krakauer was viewed as a "nature writer." However, he has more recently been described by one reviewer as more of "an adventure writer" on a par with Jack London.<sup>16</sup> Krakauer's first well-received book was *Into the Wild*,<sup>17</sup> which recounted the fateful journey of Christopher McCandless. In an attempt to understand himself and find inner peace, McCandless gave up his successful upper-middle-class life and journeyed to Alaska's wilderness, where he ultimately died from hunger and exposure. Krakauer placed McCandless's experience within the context of other "spiritual daredevils and sons of dominating, successful fathers."<sup>18</sup> His discussion of McCandless's painful relationship included revelations of his own unhappy relationship with his father. Krakauer, who readily admits to relating to the subject of his work, gave a sympathetic portrayal of McCandless. Indeed, one reviewer wrote, "Mr. Krakauer has

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13. James L. Anderson, Frank George, Lewis J. Krakauer, Roy J. Shephard, and Joseph S. Torg, eds., *The Year Book of Sports Medicine, 1981* (Chicago: Year Book Medical, 1981); Krakauer, ed., *The Year Book of Sports Medicine, 1984* (Chicago: Year Book Medical, 1984); and Krakauer, ed., *The Year Book of Sports Medicine, 1987* (Chicago: Year Book Medical, 1987).

14. "An Interview with Jon Krakauer."

15. "Dateline NBC," found at [www.msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com) (accessed 15 July 2003).

16. "Spilt Ink Presents Jon Krakauer," as found at [www.spiltink.com](http://www.spiltink.com) (accessed 4 February 2004).

17. Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild* (New York: Villard, 1996).

18. "Jon Krakauer," Gale Literary Databases, found at [www.galenet.com/servlet/GLD](http://www.galenet.com/servlet/GLD), n. 18 (accessed 25 August 2003).

taken the tale of a kook who went into the woods, and made of it a heart-rending drama of human yearning.”<sup>19</sup>

Jon Krakauer’s best-known book is *Into Thin Air*<sup>20</sup>—his cathartic look at the 1996 climbing disaster on Mount Everest. As a part of the climbing team, Krakauer offered personal insight into what was, without doubt, a horrific experience of hunger, fatigue, poor decisions, a terrible snowstorm, and freezing temperatures. Eight climbers, including four of his team members, died, while others suffered debilitating injuries from frostbite and exposure. Krakauer blamed “his own actions, or failure to act” as a factor in the deaths of two of his team members. He had been paid by *Outside* magazine to climb Mount Everest and then write his experiences; he did, in fact, write a riveting article. He then went on to write his best-selling *Into Thin Air* in a three-month “sprint of writing and emotional purging.”<sup>21</sup>

The book “was a sensation, riding best-seller lists for two years, translated into 24 languages, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Critics Circle award. There are now more than 3.6 million copies in print.”<sup>22</sup> *Into Thin Air* was, without doubt, a literary tour de force. It was Krakauer at his finest, as he looked at what drives men to go to the edge of life itself and take incredible chances. So traumatizing an experience was the Everest debacle for Krakauer that he “established the Everest ’96 Memorial Fund at the Boulder Community Foundation, endowing it with royalties from his book.”<sup>23</sup>

However, the book has not been without its critics. The climbing world has been rocked by a heated debate over the accuracy and even veracity of Krakauer’s account. Describing this controversy, one writer clarifies:

What is surprising is how bitter, how defensive and how wounded Jon Krakauer sounds these days. Much of this bitterness stems

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19. Ibid.

20. Jon Krakauer, *Into Thin Air* (New York: Villard, 1998).

21. “Plumbing the Depths of Faith,” at [www.theage.com.au/articles](http://www.theage.com.au/articles) (accessed 16 August 2003).

22. Timothy Egan, “What’s Left after Everest?” *New York Times*, 13 July 2003.

23. “Author Visits Oregon State.”

from this fact: Since “Into Thin Air” was published nearly two years ago, the book has been under almost constant sniper fire from a small and close-knit group of climbers, a few of whom were on Everest in 1996, who dispute some of his book’s facts and interpretations. In their view, Krakauer didn’t merely get things wrong—he got things intentionally, maliciously wrong.<sup>24</sup>

Accusations of shoddy research and even plagiarism found their way into the debate. Some people in the mountain-climbing community have suggested that Krakauer borrowed heavily, without proper attribution, from Jim Curran’s *K2: The Story of the Savage Mountain*.<sup>25</sup> In 1998 journalist Steve Weinberg looked at the controversy about *Into Thin Air*, including accusations of bias and shoddy research.<sup>26</sup> While the article only touched on his book and the controversy, Krakauer was, nonetheless, extremely offended. He responded, “I take my reputation as a reporter more seriously than I take my reputation as a writer. . . . I didn’t rely on fact-checkers to catch my errors.” He had been determined to “get it right the first time.”<sup>27</sup>

Krakauer also takes seriously his effort to understand the psyche and motivation of people on the edge, those who go to the extreme. Perhaps this is why his works contain not only riveting action and thoughtful analyses of human nature, but also reveal what makes Krakauer himself tick. He has acknowledged this. “People think of me as this outdoor writer. But I’m really a seeker, a doubter. I’m interested in those people who take things too far, because I see something of myself in them.”<sup>28</sup>

Krakauer’s search involves an uneasy relationship with religion. He was raised in an agnostic household.<sup>29</sup> In fact, in an interview

24. Ibid.

25. Telephone interview with North Las Vegas City attorney and mountain-climbing enthusiast Kenneth Long, 30 August 2003.

26. Steve Weinberg, “Why Books Err So Often,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, July–August 1998.

27. “Coming Down,” Salon Wanderlust (August 1998), found at [archive.salon.com/wlust/feature/1998/08/cov\\_03feature.html](http://archive.salon.com/wlust/feature/1998/08/cov_03feature.html) (accessed 8 June 2004).

28. “Plumbing the Depths of Faith.”

29. Ibid.

with Tom Brokaw, Krakauer explained that his family members were, “for all intents and purposes, atheists.”<sup>30</sup> In regard to religion, he has demonstrated a certain skepticism as well as cynicism. While he admitted to “trying to figure out religion,” he also readily confessed that he does not believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, while he claims to ache for a belief in God,<sup>32</sup> he also acknowledges that he does not “know what God is, or what God had in mind when the universe was set in motion,” or “if God even exists” (p. 338).<sup>33</sup> Even so, he admits to “praying in times of great fear, or despair, or astonishment at a display of unexpected beauty” (p. 338).

However, Krakauer’s doubts run deeper than the simple questioning of the reality of Deity. Indeed, his doubts also exhibit a very real animosity to faith. When asked in a 1996 interview what made him angry, he answered: “self-righteous religious fanatics.”<sup>34</sup> He has also confessed to being “troubled by this sheeplike acceptance that faith is always good.”<sup>35</sup> When asked in an interview if Dan Lafferty was crazy, Krakauer answered:

I don’t think Dan’s crazy at all. He’s no crazier than John Ashcroft. The difference between Dan Lafferty and John Ashcroft is *not* very great. I mean, John Ashcroft hasn’t killed anybody. And that’s a very important distinction. John Ashcroft isn’t a Mormon, but he’s a fundamentalist. Their belief systems are remarkably similar. That really scares me. That you have people

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30. “Dateline NBC” (15 July 2003).

31. Notes taken by Steven L. Mayfield at a talk and book signing by Jon Krakauer at Trolley Corners Theater, Salt Lake City, Utah, on 18 July 2003 (copy in possession of author).

32. *Ibid.*

33. In Chris Nashawaty, “Jon Krakauer Gets Religion,” *Entertainment Weekly*, 18 July 2003, 47, Krakauer explains: “I grew up in a family of atheists, so the closest thing I’ve ever had to religion is climbing.”

34. Paul Roberts, “Profile: Jon Krakauer,” *Outside* online, found at [web.outsideonline.com/disc/guest/krakauer/profile.html](http://web.outsideonline.com/disc/guest/krakauer/profile.html) (accessed 27 August 2003).

35. “Plumbing the Depths of Faith.”

in high positions of government making decisions that affect the survival of the world who are consulting their God.<sup>36</sup>

In *Under the Banner of Heaven*, Krakauer elaborates on this theme, “There is a dark side to religious devotion that is too often ignored or denied. As a means of motivating people to be cruel or inhumane—as a means of inciting evil, to borrow the vocabulary of the devout—there may be no more potent force than religion” (p. xxi).

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the author’s open disdain for religion, he inexplicably chose for his latest work a look at what he considers the violent history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *Under the Banner of Heaven* is, according to Krakauer’s publicists, the result of questions arising during his childhood, at which time he knew a number of Latter-day Saints. “Although he envied the unfluctuating certainty of the faith professed so enthusiastically by these Mormon friends and acquaintances, he was often baffled by it, and has sought to comprehend the formidable power of such belief ever since.”<sup>37</sup>

While a study of Mormonism’s supposed violent past became the final product of Krakauer’s endeavors, his original goals were different. Eric Johnson of the Mormonism Research Ministry, an evangelical Christian ministry that has been challenging the Church of Jesus Christ since the ministry’s founding in 1979, explained that Krakauer “originally wanted to write a book titled *History and Belief* that would focus ‘on the uneasy, highly charged relationship between the LDS Church and its past.’”<sup>38</sup> According to D. Michael Quinn, Krakauer first approached him and other Mormon intellectuals about writing a book concerning the problems intellectuals face in a church known for its conservative and authoritarian approach to its history and doctrine.<sup>39</sup> The premise of Krakauer’s original project, and certainly that of the final product, reflect his continued uncomfortable relationship with faith and religion in the face of what he views to be rational thinking.

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36. Nashawaty, “Krakauer Gets Religion,” 47, emphasis in original.

37. “About Jon Krakauer.”

38. Eric Johnson, “Under the Banner of Heaven,” as found on the Mormonism Research Ministry Web page [www.MRM.org](http://www.MRM.org) (accessed 1 April 2004).

39. Typed statement in possession of author.

Both Krakauer and his book have gained significant publicity in recent months, and reviews have come down on both sides. Indeed, the book gained some media attention two weeks prior to its release with “Church Response to Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven*,” by Richard E. Turley, managing director of the Family and Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.<sup>40</sup> This hard-hitting response, according to Krakauer, was considered a “god-send” by the marketers at Doubleday—they believed it helped propel the book onto the best-seller lists.<sup>41</sup>

Adding to this preemptive strike was Michael Otterson of the Public Affairs Department. During a press conference, he made comments that were reprinted in the *Salt Lake Tribune*. His remarks make it very clear what he and other representatives of the church thought of Krakauer and his book. “This book is not history, and Krakauer is no historian. He is a storyteller who cuts corners to make the story sound good.” He then goes on to explain:

The exceptions are the rule by his standards. One could be forgiven for concluding that every Latter-day Saint, including your friendly Mormon neighbor, has a tendency to violence. And so Krakauer unwittingly puts himself in the same camp as those who believe every German is a Nazi, every Japanese a fanatic, and every Arab a terrorist.<sup>42</sup>

Accusations of bias notwithstanding, Krakauer does have his defenders—for example, Holly Mullen of the *Salt Lake Tribune*, who accused the Church of Jesus Christ of sending its “public relations machine . . . into damage-control overdrive.”<sup>43</sup> Even so, some of the comments made by reviewers make one wonder if the ardent support of *Under the Banner of*

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40. “Church Response to Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven*,” available at [www.lds.org/newsroom/mistakes](http://www.lds.org/newsroom/mistakes) (accessed 9 July 2003).

41. Mayfield notes.

42. Mike Otterson, “Church: Best-Selling Author Is No Historian,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 13 July 2003.

43. Holly Mullen, “Mullen: ‘Banner’ Account of Early Mormondom Stirs the Beehive,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 3 August 2003.

*Heaven* stems from more than just an admiration of Krakauer's remarkable writing skills and fascinating storytelling style. For example, Martin Naparsteck of the *Salt Lake Tribune* illogically claims that "because truth trumps accuracy and courage is more important than pleasing readers, *Under the Banner* should be read by anyone hoping to understand if there is a causal connection between Mormon history and the violence associated with oddball polygamist cults."<sup>44</sup> The reviewer for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* says it was "difficult to find fault with Krakauer's findings that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints tries to clean up its history,"<sup>45</sup> while the reviewer in BooksMags.com advises readers that if they "prefer to wallow in ignorant bliss, leave [the book] on the shelf."<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps one of the most favorable and revealing reviews was written by Clay Evans of Scripps Howard News Service and appeared in the *KnoxNews*. He begins: "That The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons, would object to this book is hardly a surprise." He then mentions the "sometimes violent past and selective history of the mainstream church," giving as examples Joseph Smith, plural marriage, and the Mountain Meadows massacre. Evans concludes the review by affirming, "So of course the Mormon church is upset. But this book, with extensive notes and footnotes, won't be shouted down by people representing a faith that, as a matter of policy, strives mightily to control and sanitize its past."<sup>47</sup>

A *San Francisco Chronicle* review declares that Krakauer "masterfully weaves Mormon history and modern polygamy into a seamless story about the strangest subculture of the American Southwest."<sup>48</sup>

44. Martin Naparsteck, "Truth Trumps Accuracy in 'Under Banner of Heaven,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 July 2003.

45. Ed Gray, "Writer Stirs a Controversy among the Mormons," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 27 July 2003.

46. "Challenging the Creationist Approach to Mormon History," [www.booksmags.com](http://www.booksmags.com) (accessed 29 August 2003).

47. Clay Evans, "'Banner' Examines Sect's Violent History: Krakauer's Carefully Researched Book Studies Mormon Fundamentalists," *KnoxNews*, 24 August 2003. Perhaps Evans does not realize that extensive documentation does not necessarily mean careful documentation. He also shows a serious bias against the Church of Jesus Christ.

48. Don Lattin, "Blood Faith and Fanaticism: Krakauer Weaves '84 Murders into Enthralling History of Mormon Breakaway Polygamists," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 July 2003.

A *St. Petersburg Times* review describes the book as “a piece of solid reporting,”<sup>49</sup> and *USA Today* affirms that “Krakauer also explores the often blood-soaked roots of the Mormon faith.”<sup>50</sup> *Barnes & Noble Presents* declares Krakauer’s work as “provocative but also convincing,”<sup>51</sup> while BooksMags.com proclaims Krakauer’s efforts a “superb job of chronicling several schisms in the Mormon church.”<sup>52</sup>

According to one *Salt Lake Tribune* review, “Krakauer never pretends to be historian or master of theology. He is a journalist, powerfully gifted in writing non-fiction.”<sup>53</sup> Obviously, for this fellow journalist, gifted writing supercedes thorough research and accuracy. “The fact is, Krakauer probably knows more about early, unvarnished church history than most practicing Mormons today. His premise for connecting zealotry with unspeakable violence is as sound as any.”<sup>54</sup>

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49. Ellen Emry Heltzel, “Obsession, Murder and Mormonism,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 13 July 2003.

50. Deirdre Donahue, “Murder by Zealot Mormon Sect Sparks Deeper Look,” *USA Today*, 13 July 2003.

51. Paul Evans, “God’s Soldiers,” *Barnes & Noble Presents*, July–August 2003, 72.

52. “Challenging the Creationist Approach to Mormon History.” Other positive book reviews include Lauren F. Winner, “Of Marriage and Murder: Two New Books Shed Light on the Hidden—and Sometimes Violent—World of Mormon Fundamentalism,” *Newsday*, 13 July 2003; Lev Grossman, “Thou Shalt Kill,” *Time*, 21 July 2003; Malcolm Jones, “Murder in the Name of God: Best-Selling Journalist Jon Krakauer Finds Religion—in a 1984 Double Homicide,” *Newsweek*, 21 July 2003; Tom Walker, “Mormons, Author Battle over Accuracy,” *Denver Post*, 13 July 2003; “Banner Ruffles Some Feathers,” *Book Magazine*, July–August 2003; Cathy Lynn Grossman, “In the Name of GOD,” *USA Today*, 17 July 2003; “Newsalert,” The Berean Call at [www.thebereancall.org/newsletters/aug03/other.htm](http://www.thebereancall.org/newsletters/aug03/other.htm) (accessed 9 September 2003); “Banner of Blood,” *The Inklinger: The King’s English Bookshop* 11 (Summer 2003): 1, 7; Timothy Egan, “Krakauer Draws Fire from Mormon Church,” *Toronto Star*, 19 July 2003; and, Jane Lampman, “When Certainty Reigns, Reason Goes into Thin Air,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 July 2003.

53. Mullen, “‘Banner’ Account of Early Mormondom.”

54. Ibid. One of the best reviews was the press release prepared by Richard E. Turley Jr., which is available on [www.lds.org/newsroom/mistakes/](http://www.lds.org/newsroom/mistakes/). However, Mullen’s review berates Turley for questioning Krakauer’s “admitted lack of faith in God.” While Mullen sees no problems with Krakauer’s methodology and analysis, Robert Wright’s “Thou Shalt Kill,” *New York Times*, 3 August 2003, gave a mixed review, complimenting the fascinating chapters but questioning some of the analysis.

Notwithstanding the positive reviews, a number of mixed and negative reviews point out fundamental flaws in Krakauer's book. One reviewer charges Krakauer with being a "one-sided journalist,"<sup>55</sup> and another with viewing such religious actions as wearing sacred garments as "freakishness rather than fervor."<sup>56</sup> The *Wall Street Journal* describes the book as "quite misleading,"<sup>57</sup> while the *International Herald Tribune* complains that the book "provides more voyeuristic astonishment than curiosity or understanding."<sup>58</sup> A *Deseret News* review describes Krakauer as lacking "the personal understanding of religious devotion necessary to deal with such a complex topic."<sup>59</sup> And *Christianity Today* warns its readers to "keep in mind the origin of Krakauer's project, [which started] with an agenda."<sup>60</sup> Even more to the point are the comments found in the Japanese-published English-language newspaper *Daily Yomiuri*, which notifies its readers that the book is not "an unbiased history." The review concludes with this insightful comment:

Ultimately, we are left feeling that *Under the Banner of Heaven* would have been a better book had Krakauer had a more authoritative grasp of his material. He is not a historian, and his principal strengths are his vigorous writing and a fascination with those on society's fringes. Here, as an avowed agnostic, Krakauer is in unfamiliar territory, and in treating the Lafferty murders as a particularly Mormon crime, he places himself in danger of papering over the fact that any murder committed in the name of God is extremist, rather than religious in nature.<sup>61</sup>

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55. Lee Benson, in his review titled "Krakauer's Writing Is One-Sided," *Deseret Morning News*, 21 July 2003, goes even further by questioning not only the analysis but accusing Krakauer of being "unfair" in his approach.

56. Janet Maslin, "Book Review: *Under the Banner of Heaven*," *International Herald Tribune*, 25 July 2003.

57. Naomi Schaefer, "Review," *Wall Street Journal*, 11 July 2003.

58. Maslin, "Book Review."

59. Dennis Lythgoe, "Author Blunders over LDS History," *Deseret Morning News*, 6 July 2003.

60. "Hearing Voices," *Christianity Today*, September–October 2003.

61. Annabel Wright, "Krakauer's Book on 'Mormon Murder' Case Falls Short of Its Goals," *Daily Yomiuri*, 16 September 2003, found at [www.yomiuri.co.jp](http://www.yomiuri.co.jp). Two British publications also had interesting reviews which, while appreciating Krakauer's writing and storytelling skills, expressed concern about some of his conclusions: "Hells Bells:

Krakauer uses charged language when describing certain events and practices in the Mormon past. This language is probably used to reinforce negative stereotypes. This practice reflects a proven bias on Krakauer's part against religion in general and conservative religion in particular. Krakauer's book has serious problems that must be addressed. These include historical and factual errors, which are either the result of a knowing deception or an ignorance of Mormon history, doctrine, and church government. Either way, they should send up red flags to any reader with an understanding of the Church of Jesus Christ. Krakauer also cannot hide his lack of familiarity with general American history. This is obvious with the main theme of his book—that the origins or foundations of Mormonism have bred a significant amount of violence.

While Krakauer focuses on the “story of violent faith,” he does so without putting the church within the historical and social context of the nineteenth century. No doubt some Saints engaged in violent behavior. However, was this violent behavior a result of Latter-day Saint teachings or were the teachings that touched on aspects of violence a result of the social milieu in which the Saints lived?

David H. Fischer has shown that aspects of violence in early America were the result of what he called the “backcountry” culture.<sup>62</sup> This culture was strongly influenced by descendants of the Scots and Irish as well as by other groups from the traditional Celtic fringe of Great Britain and the north border country of England. The backcountry consisted mainly of the southern highlands of Appalachia, the old Southwest, and the Ozark Plateau, as well as places to which their descendants migrated. In these regions “a climate of violence” developed, “which remained part of the culture of that region to our own time.”<sup>63</sup> Personal violence or *lex talionis* (the rule of retaliation) was expected and encouraged by people of Scots-Irish heritage in the

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Mormons Who Murder,” *Economist*, 3 July 2003, and Jacqui Goddard, “Mormon Fury as Author Likens ‘Fundamentalist’ Wing to the Taleban,” *Scotsman*, 28 July 2003.

62. David H. Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10, 765, 769–70.

63. *Ibid.*, 769.

backcountry. The concept of accepted violence and retaliation was taught within the community and among the families.<sup>64</sup>

Characteristics of this culture of violence included perceptions of men as “warrior castes”; the concept of honor as “a pride of manhood in masculine courage, physical strength and warrior virtue”; and defense of honor by “lashing out instantly against . . . challengers with savage violence.” “To behave dishonorably was to commit an ‘unmanly act,’” “order was a system of retributive violence,” and vigilantism was an accepted part of backcountry culture.<sup>65</sup> This tradition of violence extended to Missouri, where it rubbed up against, and most certainly influenced, the early Latter-day Saints. Violent confrontations in the form of vigilantism, dueling, and other forms of extralegal justice were not only accepted but romanticized. Indeed, “Ozark vengeance” continued into the 1950s in parts of Missouri.<sup>66</sup> Without doubt, “These backcountry order ways created an exceptionally violent world.”<sup>67</sup>

In his review, Turley mentions several of the book’s problems regarding its handling of church history and doctrine. For example, Krakauer states that “a disgruntled client had filed a legal claim accusing Joseph of being a fraud” (p. 57). However, Josiah Stowell, Joseph Smith’s employer, not only did not file the complaint, but testified in Joseph’s behalf at his trial. Joseph Smith was found innocent.<sup>68</sup>

Krakauer demonstrates a further lack of knowledge when he discusses the letter Brigham Young sent to southern Utah Mormons telling them not to attack members of the Baker-Fancher party and, instead, to see to their safety until they were out of Utah Territory. Unfortunately, the letter arrived too late to stop the now infamous Mountain Meadows massacre. Young’s attempts to thwart this tragedy are belittled by Krakauer, who insinuates duplicity on the part of church

64. Ibid., 663, 765, 769–70.

65. Ibid., 690, 764, 767.

66. Dick Steward, *Duels and the Roots of Violence in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 1, 205.

67. Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 770.

68. The trial is discussed in Gordon A. Madsen, “Joseph Smith’s 1826 Trial: The Legal Setting,” *BYU Studies* 30/2 (1990): 105, as quoted in Turley, “Review,” 3.

leaders by claiming that “the actual text of Brigham Young’s letter remains in some doubt, because the original has disappeared (along with almost every other official document pertaining to the Mountain Meadows massacre). The excerpt quoted above is from a purported draft of the letter that didn’t surface until 1884, when an LDS functionary came upon it in the pages of a ‘Church Letter Book’” (p. 221n).

However, as Turley explains, the text of Brigham Young’s letter does not remain “in some doubt.” As with most of Brigham Young’s correspondence, this letter was copied immediately after being written by using a letterpress book that contained onionskin pages to create a mirror image of the document. “A perfect mirror image of Young’s famous letter is right where it should be in Brigham’s 1857 letterpress copybook. It is a contemporaneous copy and was available to and used by the prosecution in the trial that led to John D. Lee’s conviction and subsequent execution in the 1870s.”<sup>69</sup>

Turley and others have demonstrated that Krakauer seems to lack historical training. Evidently Krakauer took at face value statements and accusations made in jaundiced secondary literature. Rather than searching for and analyzing the primary sources, Krakauer merely regurgitates old assertions. He announces, for example, the existence of “compelling circumstantial evidence [which] suggests that [Samuel H. Smith] succumbed from poison administered by Hosea Stout” (p. 194). Quinn, in *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, affirms:

William [brother of Joseph and Samuel H. Smith] eventually concluded that Apostle Willard Richards asked [Hosea] Stout to murder Samuel H. Smith. The motive was to prevent Samuel from becoming church president before the full Quorum of Twelve arrived. William’s suspicions about Stout are believable since Brigham Young allowed William Clayton to go with the pioneer company to Utah three years later only because Stout threatened to murder Clayton as soon as the apostles left. Clayton regarded Hosea Stout as capable of

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69. Turley, “Review,” 7–8.

homicide and recorded no attempt by Young to dispute that assessment concerning the former Danite.<sup>70</sup>

Quinn bases this statement on the June 1892 letter of William Smith to a Brother Kelley. The letter was written almost forty-eight years after Samuel Smith's death and William Smith's bitter estrangement from Brigham Young and the other apostles. In addition, while Mary B. Smith Norman, Samuel Smith's daughter, claimed in 1908 that her father had been poisoned, there appear to be no contemporary sources indicating death by poisoning. Furthermore, while no one who has read Stout's diary would contest accusations of violence, even leading to death, there is no evidence whatsoever that Stout murdered Smith. Quinn acknowledges this lack. Even so, he still places credence in a rather tenuous assortment of evidence. Krakauer, on his part, appears to have read Quinn's book and either ignored the extensive endnotes on this matter or chose not to mention the serious lack of facts supporting Quinn's assertion.<sup>71</sup>

The following statement is among the potpourri of historical and doctrinal errors found in *Under the Banner of Heaven*: "Mormons esteem three books of scripture above all others" (p. 6n), when in reality four books constitute the Latter-day Saint canon. Krakauer is also incorrect in his assertions that Native Americans are, according to the Book of Mormon, descended from the lost tribes of Israel (p. 69). And regarding the Mountain Meadows massacre, he announces that William Aden was killed on 10 September 1857 (p. 221). That would have been the night before the actual massacre. Aden was killed at least two and probably three days before the 11 September massacre.

Perhaps one of the more glaring instances of Krakauer's limited knowledge of Latter-day Saint history and doctrine appears in his dis-

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70. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 153.

71. *Ibid.*, 384–85 nn. 50–54. As examples of Stout's violent nature, Quinn references Stout's published diaries, Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout 1844–1861*, 2 vols. (1964; reprint, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, Utah State Historical Society, 1982). However, there still is no evidence, contemporary or after the fact, to suggest the murder of Samuel Smith at the hands of Hosea Stout.

cussion of Elizabeth Smart's kidnapping. In March 2003, Elizabeth Smart was found alive and well in Sandy, Utah. Her kidnapping the previous June had made news not only in Utah but across the country and, indeed, around the world. Smart's kidnappers were arrested, and she was returned to her family. It would not be an exaggeration to say that people all over the world were able to celebrate a happy ending to a story that could have been a horrible tragedy. However, very soon after her rescue, rumors began to filter out to the media that Elizabeth Smart's captors were religious fanatics with a connection to the Church of Jesus Christ and that she had been kidnapped in order to become a polygamous wife.<sup>72</sup>

Although many of the media attempted to distinguish between the mainstream church and its various offshoots, more often than not there was confusion in the resulting newspaper and television reports wherein the reader or listener might not have been able to differentiate between the various groups. Moreover, at the public announcement of the charges against Brian David Mitchell and Wanda Barzee, Smart's abductors, the rumors and suggestions of sexual assault seemed to be confirmed.<sup>73</sup>

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72. Kevin Cantera and Michael Vigh, "Elizabeth a 'Plural Wife'?" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 March 2003; "Polygamy May Be Motive," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 16 March 2003; Tomas Alex Tizon and David Kelly, "Abduction May Be Rooted in Polygamy," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 March 2003; Dean E. Murphy, "Utah Girl's 9-Month Ordeal Poses a Puzzle Strange and Biblical," *New York Times*, 16 March 2003; "Hostage Girl 'Wed' Abductor," *Daily Mirror* (London), 15 March 2003; and Duncan Campbell, "Kidnapped Girl's Ordeal Over after Nine Months," *Guardian* (Manchester), 14 March 2003. The 17 March 2003 issue of the *National Enquirer* ran front-page pictures of Elizabeth Smart in the robes and veil she was forced to wear in public with the headline, "Elizabeth Smart's Life on the Run," and a subheadline that read, "Their Shocking Wedding Night."

73. See the *National Enquirer* source mentioned in note 72, and "Charges Delayed in Elizabeth Smart Case," *Washington Post*, 17 March 2003; Nick Madigan, "Abducted Girl's Relatives Say Her Captor Brainwashed Her," *New York Times*, 17 March 2003; "Suspects Charged in Utah Teen's Abduction," *Washington Post*, 18 March 2003; "Charges Filed in Utah Abduction," *USA Today*, 19 March 2003; Kevin Cantera, Michael Vigh, and Stephen Hunt, "Accused Abductors Charged with Felony Sexual Assault," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 19 March 2003; and the description of charges filed on 18 March 2003 found at [www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/mitchellcharge1.html](http://www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/mitchellcharge1.html) (accessed 19 April 2004).

Taking advantage of sensational headline news, Krakauer quickly did some rewriting and added a chapter about Elizabeth and her subsequent return to her home and family. *Under the Banner of Heaven* mentions Mitchell's desire to make Smart a "polygamous concubine." Krakauer concludes that Smart would have been susceptible to Mitchell's "weird, self-styled wedding ritual" to "seal" her to himself in "the new and everlasting covenant"—a Mormon euphemism for polygamous marriage" (p. 44). He then explains:

Raised to obey figures of Mormon authority unquestioningly, and to believe that LDS doctrine is the law of God, she would have been particularly susceptible to the dexterous fundamentalist spin Mitchell applied to familiar Mormon scripture. The white robes Mitchell and Barzee wore, and forced Elizabeth to wear, resembled the sacred robes she had donned with her family when they had entered the Mormon temple. When Mitchell bullied Elizabeth into submitting to his carnal demands, he used the words of Joseph Smith—words she had been taught were handed down by God himself—to phrase those demands. (p. 45)

To back up his claim, Krakauer quotes Debbie Palmer, a former fundamentalist plural wife and currently an antipolygamy activist, as follows: "Being brought up as she was made her especially vulnerable. . . . Mitchell would never have been able to have such power over a non-Mormon girl" (p. 45).

These two statements demonstrate not only a bias that any scholar or informed journalist would seek to avoid but also, as already suggested, an ignorance of Latter-day Saint doctrine and practice. Two examples will suffice. First, Krakauer stated that Elizabeth would have worn temple robes when she accompanied her family into a Latter-day Saint temple (p. 45). This, of course, is false. As she was born in the covenant, she would not have gone into the temple to be sealed to her parents. And with the exception of being sealed to their own parents, youth are allowed only in specific parts of the temple, such as the baptismal font. Even if she had not been born in the covenant and

had later been sealed to her parents, Elizabeth would not have worn the temple robes since she would not, at that time, have gone through the endowment ceremony.

Second, the statement by Debbie Palmer turns out to be ludicrous. Palmer moved with her parents to the fundamentalist community of Creston Valley, British Columbia, when she was two years old. She was raised in this community and entered into her own plural marriage when she was fifteen years old. Eventually she left the fundamentalist community and has since been an outspoken critic of so-called Mormon fundamentalism (pp. 30–37).<sup>74</sup> Therefore, for Krakauer to use Palmer as an expert on whether or not Mitchell would have influence over a girl who has been raised in the Church of Jesus Christ is unreasonable.

This brings us to another point of concern—the numerous examples of highly charged, inflammatory, and prejudicial language that appear to be used for shock value and to reinforce negative stereotypes. In discussing the origins of the church, Krakauer borrows heavily from polemical works on Mormonism, picking up on the ever-present theme of Joseph Smith’s treasure hunting and folk magic. For example, he describes Smith’s “scrying” and “money digging.” “Soon his necromantic skills,” according to Krakauer, “were sufficiently in demand that he was able to command respectable fees to find buried treasure for property owners” (pp. 56–57).

Krakauer also attributes to Joseph Smith a “nimble mind and an astonishingly fecund imagination” (p. 55). Indeed, according to Krakauer, Smith “could sell a muzzle to a dog” (p. 55) and thus was able to invent something that would appeal to people. This involved dabbling in folk magic. “Joseph’s flirtation with folk magic as a young man had a direct and unmistakable bearing on the religion he would soon usher forth” (p. 56). In fact, in introducing Moroni’s original

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74. Ancestral File, William Blackmore Family Group Record; “The Bishop of Bountiful,” as found at CBC News, at [www.cbc.ca/fifth/polygamy/debbie.html](http://www.cbc.ca/fifth/polygamy/debbie.html) (accessed 15 July 2003); and Robert Matas, “Woman to Bring Suit against Mormon Church,” *Globe & Mail*, 19 November 2002, at the Utah State site of the American Atheists, 64.177.238.218/UtahAA/flds.html (accessed 15 July 2003).

visit, Krakauer writes that “peep stones and black magic would again loom large in Joseph’s life” (p. 57).

Krakauer’s accusations of Joseph Smith’s supposed involvement with black magic are not original and are certainly not well founded. Indeed, such accusations appeared in print as early as 1830 when Abner Cole, under the pseudonym of Obadiah Dogberry, published “The Book of Pukei” in the *Palmyra Reflector*.<sup>75</sup> Stories and charges of Smith’s practicing black magic swirled about during his lifetime and continue to the present.<sup>76</sup> While it has been debated by historians whether or not Joseph and other members of the Smith family actually practiced magic, there is consensus that the type of magic the Smiths might have practiced would have been folk magic. This type of magic is sometimes referred to as white magic. Folk magic was common and socially acceptable among common or backwoods people throughout most of the nineteenth century. Black magic was viewed with understandable fear and loathing by these common people and would not have been practiced by the Smiths.<sup>77</sup>

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75. Obadiah Dogberry [pseudonym for Abner Cole], “The Book of Pukei,” *Palmyra Reflector*, 12 June 1830, 36–37, as quoted in Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?” *Mormon Historical Studies* 2/2 (2001): 48.

76. Craig Foster, *Penny Tracts and Polemics: A Critical Analysis of Anti-Mormon Pamphleteering in Great Britain, 1837–1860* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2002), discusses the mid-nineteenth-century imagery of Joseph Smith and early Mormons practicing magic. Two tracts of William J. Schnoebelen and James R. Spencer, *Whited Sepulchers: The Hidden Language of the Mormon Temple* (Idaho Falls: Triple J, 1990) and *Mormonism’s Temple of Doom* (Idaho Falls: Triple J, 1987), are examples of the sensational and illogical accusations of Smith’s involvement in black magic that exist to the present.

77. The most detailed and important discussion of the Smiths’ purported belief in and practice of folk magic is D. Michael Quinn’s *Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987; 2nd ed., 1998). Quinn’s premise is that the Smiths were part of the social and cultural milieu of the time. Alan Taylor, in “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780–1830,” *American Quarterly* 38/1 (1986): 29 n. 10, suggested that for Joseph Smith, “treasure seeking represented a relatively immature but sincere manifestation of [his] religious concerns.” Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson, “Joseph Smith and ‘Magic’: Methodological Reflections on the Use of a Term,” in *To Be Learned Is Good If . . .*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 143, conclude that “to the extent that treasure seeking was practiced by Joseph Smith, it was . . . a ‘deeply spiritual’ exercise, and was viewed as being done by the power of God.” Alan

Perhaps Krakauer's most volatile statements appear when he discusses one of the main themes of his book, plural marriage. He introduces the topic by announcing that "the LDS leadership has worked very hard to persuade both the modern church membership and the American public that polygamy was a quaint, long-abandoned idiosyncrasy practiced by a mere handful of nineteenth-century Mormons" (p. 5). He then suggests that Joseph Smith introduced plural marriage in part because he "remained perpetually and hopelessly smitten by the comeliest female members of his flock" (p. 118) and because "it was impossible for Joseph to conceal so much illicit activity from his followers" (p. 122). "Neither Emma's tears nor her rage" (p. 118), nor her haranguing him about his "philandering" (p. 124), "were enough to make Joseph monogamous" (p. 118). Thus he took multiple women as wives. According to Krakauer, "Not even this profusion of wives, however, managed to sate his appetite" (p. 121) nor stop his "sexual recklessness" (p. 122).

Even more astounding to Krakauer are the "still pubescent girls" (p. 120) whom Joseph married. Falling into the same trap as many people and even some historians, he places his own modern values onto another place and time and, when their marriage patterns do not conform to his worldview, he looks upon it and writes about it with an open-mouthed, suitably shocked, and offended approach. For example, Krakauer suggests in an interview that Mormons would be uncomfortable with how he portrayed their history, "They will not like the fact that I point out that Joseph Smith told 14-year-old girls

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Taylor, in his article "Rediscovering the Context of Joseph Smith's Treasure Seeking," *Dialogue* 19/4 (1986): 18–28, concludes that treasure seeking and the practice of folk magic were good and could be practiced only by those who were pure. Two very informative essays place folk magic and treasure seeking in its historical and cultural setting: W. R. Jones, "'Hill-Diggers' and 'Hell-Raisers': Treasure Hunting and the Supernatural in Old and New England," in *Wonders of the Invisible World, 1600–1900: The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings 1992*, ed. Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University Press, 1995), 97–106, and Wayland D. Hand, "The Quest for Buried Treasure: A Chapter in American Folk Legendry," in *Folklore on Two Continents: Essays in Honor of Linda Dégh*, ed. Nikolai Burlakoff and Carl Lindahl (Bloomington, IN: Trickster, 1980), 112–19. See also Mark Ashurst-McGee, "A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet" (MA thesis, Utah State University, 2000).

‘God says you should marry me, if you don’t . . .’ His way of getting laid doesn’t reflect well on him.”<sup>78</sup>

Beyond being simply offensive, Krakauer’s comments are problematic in several ways. First, Joseph Smith did not marry a plurality of fourteen-year-olds as suggested by Krakauer. In fact, only Helen Mar Kimball can be positively identified as being fourteen.<sup>79</sup> While Nancy Maria Winchester could have been fourteen years old, she was probably fifteen by the time of her marriage. Second, the idea that Smith married a parcel of pubescent girls is sheer fallacy. Along with the fourteen-year-old and probable fifteen-year-old who married Smith, only two sixteen-year-olds married him. While there were three seventeen-year-olds, there were no known eighteen-year-olds and only three nineteen-year-old women who married Smith. As puberty is traditionally recognized as the time period surrounding menarche, or the onset of menstruation, and, since the average age of menarche was about fourteen to fifteen years at that time, only one to two of Joseph Smith’s wives could possibly have qualified as a “pubescent girl.”<sup>80</sup>

Besides, marriages of younger girls were not uncommon in the past. Peter Laslett, the noted social historian, published an interesting essay concerning the age at menarche in Europe since the eighteenth century. Laslett noted that while girls in Britain and Western Europe reached menarche at a later age, girls in America and Eastern Europe started menstruating at a younger age. Indeed, according to Laslett’s research, in eighteenth-century Belgrade, Serbia, girls as young as eleven and twelve were not only marrying, but having children. In

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78. Nashawaty, “Jon Krakauer Gets Religion,” 47.

79. According to Richard Lloyd Anderson and Scott H. Faulring, “The Prophet Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives,” review of *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, by Todd Compton, *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 79, Kimball was nearly fifteen at the time of her sealing to the Prophet.

80. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 4–8, 604–7. Joseph Smith’s sixteen-year-old wives were Fanny Alger and Flora Ann Woodworth. While Joseph Smith had ten wives who were teenagers at the time of their marriage, he had thirty-three known wives and eight possible wives, for a total of forty-one wives. Thus, only a quarter of his plural wives were teenagers.

fact, at one point, eighty-seven percent of all women between the ages of fifteen and nineteen were married.<sup>81</sup> On the American side of the Atlantic, between 1634 and 1662 about 220 marriageable girls were brought to Quebec to marry. These girls were called *les Filles du Roi*, or the king's daughters. While most of the girls were sixteen to twenty years old and the second largest group were between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, at least seventy-six (the fourth largest grouping statistically) were between the years of twelve and fifteen. Thus it was not surprising to have women marrying and bearing children at a younger age. Indeed, it was common in newer regions of settlement and farming in both the United States and Canada for women to marry at a younger age.<sup>82</sup>

For example, in seventeenth-century Chesapeake Bay and environs, it was common for young women to marry at age sixteen or younger. Both brides and grooms were very young in colonial America.<sup>83</sup> In fact, American marriage laws borrowed heavily from traditional English common law.<sup>84</sup> Under the common law, the age at which the law conferred nuptial rights on individuals was twelve for women and fourteen for men. Most states and territories accepted those two ages as the minimum ages for marriage. Even as late as the turn of the

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81. Peter Laslett, "Age at Menarche in Europe since the Eighteenth Century," in *Marriage and Fertility: Studies in Interdisciplinary History*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 291. Basically, one-third of all fifteen-year-old girls and over half of all sixteen-year-old girls already had husbands (*ibid.*, 293).

82. Peter J. Gangné, *King's Daughters and Founding Mothers: The Filles du Roi, 1663–1673* (Pawtucket, RI: Quintin Publications, 2001), 1:17–23; Silvio Dumas, *Les Filles du Roi en Nouvelle-France: Étude Historique avec Répertoire Biographique*, Cahiers d'histoire 24 (Quebec: La Société Historique, 1972), 67; and Richard A. Easterlin, George Alter, and Gretchen A. Condran, "Farms and Farm Families in Old and New Areas: The Northern States in 1860," in *Family and Population in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Tamara K. Hareven and Maris A. Vinovskis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 39–40. Naturally, Quebec's situation was different to a degree from other new frontiers. Even so, these patterns are comparable to other American regions.

83. Michael Gordon, ed., *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, 3rd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), 16, and Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 674–75.

84. Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 106.

twentieth century, seven states still allowed twelve-year-old girls to marry. Utah's minimum age for girls was fourteen.<sup>85</sup>

While the marriage age for both women and men has risen over the years in the United States and other parts of the Western world, there are still some ethnic and social groups that continue to accept and even encourage marriages between younger couples. Most recent was the international debate over acceptable marriage ages caused by the union of a twelve-year-old Gypsy (or Roma) girl and a fifteen-year-old boy in Romania: "Marriage age for [Gypsies] has been 11 to 14 years old for hundreds of years."<sup>86</sup> Simply stated, among certain groups and cultures, marrying at a young age continues to the present.

Thus, Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven* offers a flawed and biased story. He demonstrates his own ignorance in regard to histori-

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85. S. N. D. North, comp., and Desmond Walls Allen, ed., *Marriage Laws in the United States, 1887-1906* (Conway: Arkansas Research, 1993), 2, information arranged alphabetically by state and territory.

86. Alison Mutler, "Child Bride Protests Wedding: 12-Year-Old Girl Stalls Arranged Roma Ceremony," *Kansas City Star*, 28 September 2003; "Child Bride: Sex Abuse or Cultural Diversity?" from BBC News at news.bbc.co.uk (accessed 7 October 2003); and, "Child Bride Fuels Ire in Romania," *USA Today*, 1 October 2003. An example showing the obvious misunderstandings and how values and prejudices can be projected onto other people and cultures is demonstrated in the declaration that the fifteen-year-old boy could be charged with rape because "a bloodied bedsheet [was shown wedding guests] to prove the marriage had been consummated." In reality, among Middle Eastern, North African, Gypsy, and other cultures, the practice of showing a bloody bedsheet or garment is not to show that the marriage was consummated but to prove that the bride was a virgin. Since gifts and money are traditionally exchanged between the families of the bride and groom, and since a wife is traditionally considered property of the husband, her virginity needs to be proven. A discussion of this custom can be found in the following: Edward Westermarck, *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 159, 228, etc. (see index, s.v. "Virginity, marks of the bride's"); Hilma Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village* (Helsinki: Akademische Buchhandlung, 1931-35), 2:127-30; and I. Ben-Ami and D. Noy, eds., *Studies in Marriage Customs* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1974), 54, 174, 260, 262, as cited in Jeffrey H. Tigar, "Examination of the Accused Bride in 4Q159: Forensic Medicine at Qumran," n. 1, found at ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jwst/4q159.htm (accessed 22 April 2004). Regarding this practice among Gypsies or Romani, W. R. Rishi, in *Excerpts from Roma*, www.romani.org/rishi/rmoral.html (accessed 22 April 2004), wrote, "A Romani girl has to prove her virginity on the night of consummation of her marriage; otherwise she is sent back to her parents as no boy would accept such a girl." While this practice is repugnant to most Westerners, it is, nonetheless, a tradition of these people which must be placed within their historical and cultural context.

cal research and analysis. And, while some errors can be expected from a novice attempting to deal with the Latter-day Saint past, not everything Krakauer has done in his book can be viewed as innocent mistakes. Indeed, with whatever agenda in mind, Krakauer appears to have created a book that focuses on the negative and sensational in order to portray the church in an unflattering light.

Krakauer portrays himself as a martyr in behalf of truth and honesty. He vacillates publicly between anger and belligerency, hurt and puzzlement. In a *Salt Lake Tribune* editorial, he admits to being sad that the church had “elected to regard [his] book in such a reductionist light.” He then proceeds to accuse the church of sanitizing their historical record and concludes by lamenting, “I am disappointed that [church leaders] continue to do everything in their considerable power to keep important aspects of the church’s past hidden in the shadows. And I am especially disappointed that they feel such an urgent need to attack writers, like me, who present balanced, carefully researched accounts of Mormon history that happen to diverge from the official, highly expurgated church version.”<sup>87</sup>

Krakauer’s denials of being an anti-Mormon fly in the face of his comments. In addition, his book-signing schedule not only at bookstores but also at churches—including the First Parish of Cambridge Church (Cambridge, Massachusetts), Unity Church (Boulder, Colorado), First Congregational Church (Portland, Oregon), and Unity Temple on the Plaza (Kansas City, Missouri)—seems to lend credence to the application of this designation.<sup>88</sup> It is not difficult to imagine why these churches hosted book signings for Krakauer, given the nature of the subject. No doubt they invited their congregations to attend and hear the dark side of Mormonism.

Further adding to the perception that *Under the Banner of Heaven* is an anti-Mormon book in a fancy cover are the reactions found on various online anti-Mormon sites and in their publications. For example,

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87. Jon Krakauer, “Krakauer: Church Rigidly Controls Its Past,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 13 July 2003.

88. [www.randomhouse.com/features/krakauer/appearances.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/features/krakauer/appearances.html) (accessed 21 July 2003).

the Mormonism Research Ministry Web site recommends the book for “those who would like to better understand the polygamist mindset,”<sup>89</sup> and John L. Smith, an anti-Mormon from Marlow, Oklahoma, describes Krakauer’s book as “the most fascinating” book he has read in years. In addition, he offers the book for sale to the readers of his publication, the *Newsletter*.<sup>90</sup> And the negative impact of Krakauer’s book extends beyond American borders. In November 2003, the *Ghanaian Chronicle* claimed that Krakauer had “revealed the Mormon Church as a fertile breeding ground for killers, child abusers, racists, polygamists and white supremacists.”<sup>91</sup>

In conclusion, Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven* has not lived up to expectations nor to its pre- and postpublication publicity. Moreover, his obvious biases against both religion in general and the Church of Jesus Christ in particular have made the book nothing more than a flawed, sensationalistic work that, it is hoped, will soon be forgotten along with many similar anti-Mormon works of the past.

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89. Johnson, “Under the Banner of Heaven.”

90. John L. Smith, “A Fabulous New Book,” *Newsletter* 2/18 (November–December 2003): 2. John L. Smith recently began a newsletter not associated with UMI, which operation he sold several years ago and in which he no longer has any input.

91. Nicholas Wapshott, with additional files from Raymond Archer, “The Mormons Are No Saints . . . And They Are Not About to Change,” *Ghanaian Chronicle on the Web*, 20 November 2003. The article is very critical of the Church of Jesus Christ. The second paragraph announces that Krakauer had concluded in his book that “the Church is an authoritarian, racially intolerant, homophobic organization, whose members encourage extreme-right militias and [are] reluctant to shake off their polygamous past.” The article, which is not only unfriendly toward the church but also toward the political party in power, suggests that the church has “the closest links with the Central Intelligence Agency” and bribed the Minister of Information and Presidential Affairs when it was trying to build the temple in Accra, which was dedicated in January 2004.