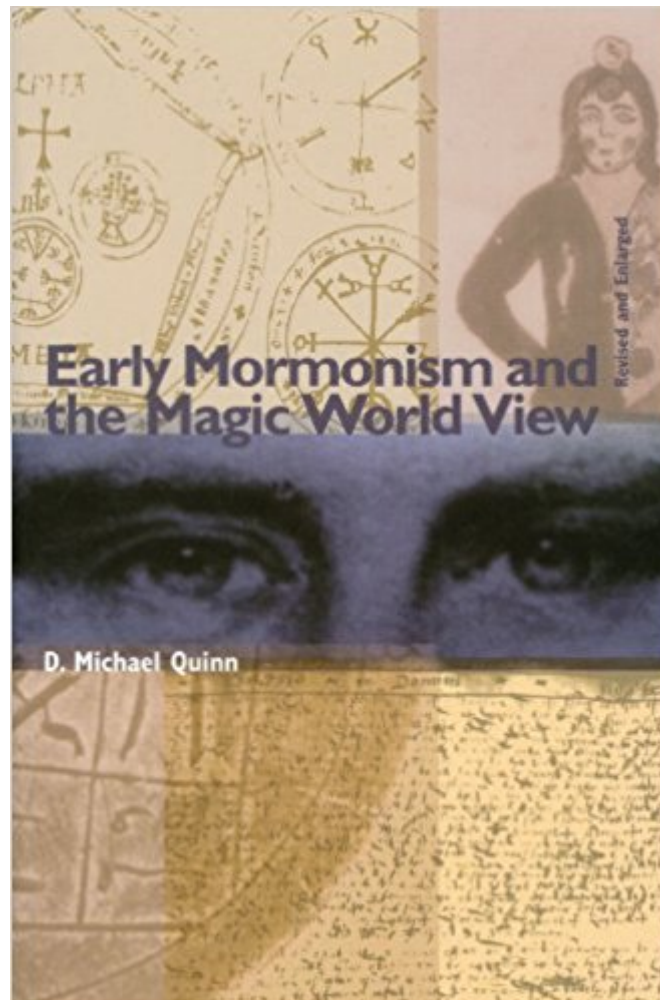




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# Early Mormonism And The Magic World View



## Synopsis

In this ground-breaking book, D. Michael Quinn masterfully reconstructs an earlier age, finding ample evidence for folk magic in nineteenth-century New England, as he does in Mormon founder Joseph Smith's upbringing. Quinn discovers that Smith's world was inhabited by supernatural creatures whose existence could be both symbolic and real. He explains that the Smith family's treasure digging was not unusual for the times and is vital to understanding how early Mormons interpreted developments in their history in ways that differ from modern perceptions. Quinn's impressive research provides a much-needed background for the environment that produced Mormonism. This thoroughly researched examination into occult traditions surrounding Smith, his family, and other founding Mormons cannot be understated. Among the practices no longer a part of Mormonism are the use of divining rods for revelation, astrology to determine the best times to conceive children and plant crops, the study of skull contours to understand personality traits, magic formula utilized to discover lost property, and the wearing of protective talismans. Ninety-four photographs and illustrations accompany the text.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

D. Michael Quinn was born in 1944 in Pasadena, California. He studied English and philosophy at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah; interrupted by a two-year LDS proselytizing mission to England (1963-65); and graduated in 1968. Then followed three years of military service in Germany as a counter-intelligence agent. When he returned from Europe in 1971, Quinn began a

master's program in history at the University of Utah and half-time employment at the LDS Church Historian's Office. He received his M.A. in 1973, then moved to New Haven, Connecticut, to continue his studies in history at Yale University. While a graduate student Quinn published in Brigham Young University Studies, the Journal of Mormon History, New York History, the Pacific Historical Review, and Utah Historical Quarterly. When he received his Ph.D. from Yale in 1976, his dissertation on the Mormon hierarchy as an elite power structure won the Frederick W. Beinecke and George W. Egleston awards. That same year Quinn began twelve years of employment as a member of BYU's history faculty. He received post-doctoral training in quantitative history at the Newberry Library in Chicago in 1982, and the next year served as associate director of BYU's Vienna study-abroad program. In 1984 he received full professorship; two years later he became director of the graduate program in history. In 1986 Quinn received his most cherished award: Outstanding Teacher by vote of BYU's graduating history majors. While at BYU Quinn served on the board of editors for three scholarly journals and on the program committee for the Western History Association. He gave formal papers at annual meetings of the American Historical Association (AHA), the Mormon History Association (MHA), the Organization of American Historians, Sunstone Theological Symposium, Western History Association, the World Conference on Records, and by invitation to a conference jointly sponsored by the Fondation de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and the Laboratoire de Recherche sur L'Imaginaire Americain (University of Paris). He received best article awards from the Dialogue Foundation, the John Whitmer Historical Association (JWHA), and MHA. His last article as a BYU faculty member appeared in *New Views of Mormon History: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington* (University of Utah Press, 1987). His first book, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years* (Brigham Young University Press, 1983), received the best book award from MHA. *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Signature Books, 1987) received best book awards from MHA and JWHA, as well as the Grace Arrington Award for Historical Excellence. However, due to disputes with BYU administrators over academic freedom, Quinn resigned his tenured position at BYU in 1988. Since then he has worked as an independent scholar. After resigning from BYU he received long-term fellowships from the Huntington Library in southern California (twice), the National Endowment for the Humanities (twice), and Indiana University-Purdue University, as well as a major honorarium from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has edited *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* (Signature Books, 1992) and published essays in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past* (Norton, 1992), *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Signature Books, 1992), *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (Signature Books, 1992),

Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education (University of Chicago Press, 1993), the New Encyclopedia of the American West (Yale University Press, 1998), and American National Biography (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). In May 1994 he received the T. Edgar Lyon Award for Excellence from MHA. He has subsequently completed four books: *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Signature Books, 1994); *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (University of Illinois Press, 1996), which received the 1997 AHA award for best book by an independent scholar; *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Signature Books, 1997); and the revised *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Signature Books, 1998), which is twice the size of the original edition. He has begun preliminary work on a social history of late-twentieth-century sexuality. Quinn has served in the 1990s as a historical consultant for four Public Broadcasting Service documentaries: *Joe Hill*, *A Matter of Principle*, *The Mormon Rebellion*, and *Utah: The Struggle for Statehood*, and for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's *L'Etat Mormon (The Mormon State)*. He has been a guest lecturer at the Graduate School of Claremont Colleges and at four Utah universities. In addition, he has been the keynote speaker at meetings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, the Chicago Humanities Symposium, the Utah chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Washington State Historical Society. In 1998 he served on an NEH panel for selecting recipients of year-long fellowships. Quinn has been featured in *Christianity Today*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Lingua Franca*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Time*, and the *Washington Post*. In 1997 a biographical sketch and discussion of his writing techniques appeared in *Contemporary Authors*.

Eleven years ago my Introduction expressed confidence that LDS believers did not need to fear including occult beliefs and magic practices in the history of Mormonism's founders. In 1992 LDS church headquarters affirmed that view in its official *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, which mentioned the influence of treasure-digging folk magic (see ch. 2) in five separate entries concerning Joseph Smith. These articles did not list my book in their source-notes, but one did cite an anti-Mormon minister's article about this topic in a Protestant evangelical magazine. Nevertheless, I was pleased to see this ripple-effect from the splash of *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. As Richard L. Bushman recently wrote in a review for *FARMS*, "the magical culture of nineteenth-century Yankees no longer seems foreign to the Latter-day Saint image of the Smith family."

D. Michael Quinn's analysis of Early Mormonism is an essential read to anyone studying the faith's

origins and history. I know Quinn has been excommunicated as a part of the church's opposition to academia and intellectualism, but I read little in this book that feels like a criticism of the faith, rather it reads like a historical perspective of the origins. In fact, as a former member of the church, I, for example, enjoyed reading about the "treasure hunting" tendencies of many people of time. Put in context Joseph Smith's hunting and finding doesn't seem "crazy" or discredit him, but normalizes him. Or his seeing of visions: according to Quinn and his research, many were seeing visions at the time. I guess normalizing somethings and rationalize Joseph Smith both serve to his credit and discredit which I could see as problematic for some believers, but for others, history is simply that. I highly recommend this very interesting read.

An amazing and very well documented book. Anyone can make critics, but the strong arguments based on facts rather than the author's opinions, makes from this book a wonderful apologetic book but from a different perspective. Yes, it is controversial from a limited point of view, but a piece of art for a eclectic, open, and sincere mind. On my opinion, the strength of the book is its extensive quotes, and that the book, having an apologetic aim, was developed by a former Mormon, whom, having all reasons to talk in a negative manner, goes all the way around talking positive "from the road less traveled by". I strongly recommend the book ONLY for well grounded Mormons with a strong spiritual base and open mind and heart.

This is the definitive LDS game-changer. My own research (over 35 years now) has shown the validity and objectivity of Quinn's insights. My own discoveries are about to shake the foundation out from under all modern versions of Christianity, but that's another story. The REAL (original) Mormonism was inextricably linked to both the "magic world view" of early America, as well as to occult practices, at least in Joseph and his immediate family's case. This is NOT a bad thing, it is the same for ANY true (substitute OLD) form of original Christianity of Judaism. Only modern versions of the once esoteric religions are false. I high recommend this book to anyone seeking true illumination. This is not anti-mormonism, it is about REAL Mormonism. It only enhances the claims of the prophet Joseph Smith, but not as most people understand them. Ironically, it is the very people who need to read this...who would not be caught dead doing so. This is the real problem.

This book presents a history of Joseph Smith and his family and friends as never heard before. I found it very interesting to the core. Mr. Quinn's bibliography is equal in size to the text of the book which underscores his writing. Sometimes I found Mr. Quinn's detail to be a bit boring and

seemingly irrelevant to the subject but this is an excellent book.

Michael Quinn is one of the best early church historians hands down. This is a very interesting book how the Prophet Joseph received revelation. A bit differently than some of us were taught in Sunday School, but doesn't make Joseph Smith any less valid. "By their fruits he shall know them."

if your reading about this book, you already have some idea about what it is. some of it was quite far fetched... and there are pages of reviews written about this already. i enjoyed seeing the founders and historical values and situations in different perspective and telling, than what we usually get on the crisp and clean print of Sunday school manuals. it was nice to read about the emotion and non-structured spiritual involvement that propagated the church from a single family into its modern population of millions. it was curious to read about the "magical" practices made by these men had- it filled in some curious "plot" holes in the church history for me, such as Oliver cowdrey, and the Hiram page incident. i am a faithful LDS RM, and i have learned that history is still just a story told through the eyes of the beholder. D michael quinn sheds light on some of the uncomfortable aspects of LDS history in an engaging and intriguing way. alot of the other reviews have attempted to use this or other historical explorations as justification to abandon the LDS church, or vocalize distrust or lack of testimony. After reading and studying this work i think that it'll magnify your own previous personal opinions, to either faith that god works in mysterious ways, or rejection. i believe that the author writes from a faith-full perspective while giving the perspective that early leaders and the cultural practices of magical thinking, good luck, superstition the realistic possibility that those practices were a common thing in "pioneer" times, before our modern obsession with scientific proof.

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