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### The Evolution of my Views on the Mormon Church.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has been subject to criticism throughout its history. The church has been called a menace(Cullom, 381) but it has also been respected for the charitable activities that the church and its members sponsor(Barnes, par 1). Despite these criticisms and its relatively small size, the church has had a significant impact on the economy of the United States.

Many mormons hold high level positions in major corporations, two examples are Jon Huntsman and David Neeleman who founded Huntsman Corp and JetBlue Airways respectively(“Mormons in Business”). The church itself also holds a massive real estate empire that exceeds one billion dollars in value(“LDS Church Real-Estates Holdings Include Farms, Ranches, Buildings.”).

My history with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints goes back a very long time. My family has been in the church for many generations, some family lines go all the way back to the founding of the church in the early 19th century; my ancestors were some of the first converts and were influential in the early history of the church and its exodus to Utah. Even today, the church is a strong influence in my family; my parents, their siblings, their parents, and my cousins were all born into the church. Most of them attended Brigham Young University and served a two year mission and even if they don’t practice to this day, the culture of the church has had a tremendous impact on their lives. My family in particular has a crisis of faith that

resulted in the loss of our faith and our believe in the church; we stopped going to church when I was 11. To this day, I still believe that the church is not true, but my beliefs about the benefits of being a member of the Mormon Church have evolved from over time. This is because Mormonism promotes a culture that is distinct from modern western society that I, and others, believe is potentially healthier, both physically and psychologically.

In my youth, I never thought that the culture that I was being raised in was different from the rest of the state of Arkansas. The scriptures of the Mormon Church has what is essentially a health code called the Word of Wisdom(*The Book of Mormon*, Doctrine and Covenants. Section 89. Verse 5-17). The Word of Wisdom, advises against such activities as drinking, use of tobacco products, “hot drinks” like tea and coffee, as well as the overconsumption of meat(*The Book of Mormon*, Doctrine and Covenants. Section 89. Verse 5-17). In my church experience all members are strongly compelled to abide by these guidelines and I believe it is working. At least in my family and extended family, no one smokes, uses illegal drugs, and the only ones who drink are those that have since left the church and they still drink in moderation. In regions where there is a mormon majority I believe that the Word of Wisdom has had a statistical impact on the health of the region. The population of Utah is about 62% mormon(Canham, Par. 2) and because of this I believe that it is no coincidence that Utah has the lowest smoking rate in the United States, is one of the most physically active states, and has a decreasing rate of cardiovascular disease(“Americas Health Ranking”). Because of this, I realized at a young age that the church was a physically healthy religion but I still believed that it was a waste of time because it was a religion. This view began to change when I began to see the psychological and personal benefits that the church can provide.

In the Mormon church, responsibility is very important. As they get older and prove themselves to be good members of the church, they take on increasing responsibility. Young men hold several offices of increasing importance as they age. Starting at age twelve they receive the priesthood and all the responsibilities that come with holding that office. When young mormons graduate from high school, the men are then required to serve a two year mission to spread the Mormon Faith; this mission is optional for women. I believe that this system of increasing levels of responsibility helps to install important attributes such as a good work ethic. I also believe that this work ethic that they develop is shown in the strength of Utah's economy. In 2013, Utah's GDP grew by 4.5% from January to July alone("Utah's Economy: Busy Bees"). Utah also has the 5th lowest unemployment rate in the country at 4.6%("Utah's Economy: Busy Bees"). Technology companies are also very prevalent in Utah as well. Adobe has an 1,100 worker in Lehi, Utah; IM Flash also has a major fabrication plant in Lehi("Utah's Economy: Busy Bees"). These are just a few of the many technology companies that call Utah home. Despite the very capitalist values of the state, income inequality in Utah remains the lowest in the country("Utah's Economy: Busy Bees"). I believe that these incredible economic attributes are partially a result of the strong mormon influence in the state. In addition to the economic benefits, I have also come to believe that there are also strong social benefits to the Mormon Church. I believe that these benefits are manifested in the family statistics of Utah.

Utah has the lowest teen pregnancy and abortion rate in the US as well as the lowest number of births to single mothers("Sampling of Latter-day Saint/Utah Demographics and Social Statistics from National Sources."). Utah remains the state with the lowest percent of single mothers and out of wedlock births("Sampling of Latter-day Saint/Utah Demographics and Social Statistics from National Sources."). Utah also has one of the lowest child poverty rates in the

country despite Utah spending less on public welfare than almost all other states(“Sampling of Latter-day Saint/Utah Demographics and Social Statistics from National Sources.”). All of these statistics indicate that Utah is a prime place to raise a family even if you are not mormon.

When my family first stopped attending church I was of the ardent belief that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was not true and that there was no real benefit to be gained from being in the church. However, those view have changed as I have visited Utah and researched the values and ethics that the church emphasizes on its members. While I still believe that the church is bogus, I have also come to the conclusion that the psychological, physical, and fiscal benefits would, in many cases, outway the benefits of not participating in the Mormon church.

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