

Under the Banner of Heaven

by Jon Krakauer

About the Book

Jon Krakauer's literary reputation rests on insightful chronicles of lives conducted at the outer limits. He now shifts his focus from extremes of physical adventure to extremes of religious belief within our own borders, taking readers inside isolated American communities where some 40,000 Mormon Fundamentalists still practice polygamy. Defying both civil authorities and the Mormon establishment in Salt Lake City, the renegade leaders of these Taliban-like theocracies are zealots who answer only to God.

At the core of Krakauer's book are brothers Ron and Dan Lafferty, who insist they received a commandment from God to kill a blameless woman and her baby girl. Beginning with a meticulously researched account of this appalling double murder, Krakauer constructs a multi-layered, bone-chilling narrative of messianic delusion, polygamy, savage violence, and unyielding faith. Along the way he uncovers a shadowy offshoot of America's fastest growing religion, and raises provocative questions about the nature of religious belief.

Praise for the Book

"Fantastic. . . . Right up there with *In Cold Blood* and *The Executioner's Song*."
— *San Francisco Chronicle*

"Powerfully illuminating. . . . Almost every section of the book is fascinating in its own right, and together the chapters make a rich picture. . . . An arresting portrait of depravity."
— *The New York Times Book Review*

"This year's most audacious work of nonfiction. . . . A white-knuckle mix of true-crime reporting and provocative history."
— *New York Post*

"Scrupulously reported and written with Krakauer's usual exacting flair, *Under the Banner of Heaven* is both illuminating and thrilling. It is also the creepiest book anyone has written in a long time — and that's meant as the highest possible praise."
— *Newsweek*

Courtesy of Anchor Books

About the Author

Jon Krakauer

American writer (1954–)

Updated : 09/21/2004

Personal Information: Born 1954, in Brookline, MA; son of Lewis Krakauer (a physician) and an art teacher; married Linda Moore, 1980.

Education: Hampshire College, MA, early 1980s.

Hobbies and other interests: Mountain climbing.

Addresses: Agent: Doubleday, 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

E-mail: ddaypub@randomhouse.com.

Career: Journalist. Contributing editor to *Outside* magazine. Worked previously as a carpenter and commercial fisherman.

Awards: National Magazine Award nominee for an article that formed the basis of *Into the Wild*; American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults citation, 1998, for *Into Thin Air*.

WORKS:

- *Eiger Dreams: Ventures among Men and Mountains* (essay collection), Lyons & Burford (New York, NY), 1990.
- (Photographer) David Roberts, *Iceland: Land of the Sagas* (travelogue), Abrams (New York, NY), 1990.
- *Into the Wild* (nonfiction), Villard (New York, NY), 1996.
- *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster*, Villard (New York, NY), 1998.
- (Editor) Roland Huntford, *The Last Place on Earth: Scott and Amundsen's Race to the South Pole*, revised edition, Random House (New York, NY), 1999.
- (Editor) Gaston Rebuffat, *Starlight and Storm: The Conquest for the Great North Faces of the Alps*, Random House (New York, NY), 1999.
- (Editor) Francis Parkman, *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West*, Random House (New York, NY), 1999.
- (With David F. Breashears) *High Exposure: An Enduring Passion for Everest and Unforgiving Places*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2000.
- (Editor) Tim Severin, *The Brendan Voyage, Volume 1*, Random House (New York, NY), 2000.
- (Editor) Chauncey Loomis, *Weird and Tragic Shores, Volume 1*, Random House (New York, NY), 2000.
- (Editor) Robert Dunn, *The Shameless Diary of an Explorer*, Random House (New York, NY), 2001.
- *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 2003.

Contributor to several books, including foreword to *The Mountain of My Fear*, by David Roberts, Mountaineers Books, 1991; foreword to *Escape Routes: Further Adventure Writings of David Roberts*, by David Roberts, Mountaineers Books, 1997; introduction to *Touching My Father's Soul: A Sherpa's Journey to the Top of Everest*, by Jamling Tenzing Norgay with Broughton Coburn, Harper San Francisco, 2001; and preface to *In the Land of White Death: An Epic Story of Survival in the Siberian Arctic*, by Valerian Albanov, introduction by David Roberts, expanded edition, Random House, 2001. Contributor to periodicals, including *Smithsonian*, *Outside*, and *Playboy*.

Media Adaptations: *Into Thin Air* was adapted for television by TriStar Television and broadcast on ABC-TV, 1997. It was also adapted into an audiocassette read by Krakauer by BAD, 1997.

Sidelights

Jon Krakauer is a journalist whose highly praised writings on mountain climbing and other sports combine the knowledge of the insider with the writer's sense of dramatic and well-timed storytelling. Born in Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1954, Krakauer was two years old when his family moved to the more rugged locale of Corvallis, Oregon; he began mountain climbing at the young age of eight. Krakauer's father, who led the hike up Oregon's ten-thousand-foot South Sister Mountain, was an acquaintance of climber Willi Unsoeld, who had been a member of the first American expedition to Mount Everest in 1963. As a boy, Krakauer idolized Unsoeld and fellow climber Tom Hornbein, and he dreamed of being like them and ascending to the summit of Everest some day. Krakauer eventually attended Hampshire College in Massachusetts during the early 1970s. While at school, he met climbing writer David Roberts, who regaled him with stories of the excellent climbing in Alaska. In a *People* interview with William Plummer, Krakauer said, "I became a climbing bum. I worked as a carpenter in Boulder, Colorado, five months of the year, climbed the rest." In 1974, Krakauer climbed the Alaskan Arrigetch Peaks in the Brooks Range, ascending three peaks that had previously been unexplored. As a result, the American Alpine Club asked Krakauer to write about the climbs for its journal; this was the first article Krakauer wrote. Three years later, he published an article on climbing the Devil's Thumb in the British magazine *Mountain*. This article paid well enough for Krakauer to decide to become a freelance writer, and in 1983 he quit doing carpentry work and became a full-time writer.

"I have never received any formal training as a writer," Krakauer commented in *Outside Online*. "Whenever I read something that moves me, I re-read it many times to try and figure out how its author has worked his or her magic. . . . Like any craft, the longer and harder you work at your writing, the more likely you are to get better at it." Krakauer drew on his own experience to write his articles, using his carpentry experience to write about architecture for *Architectural Digest* and his experience as a commercial fisherman to write on commercial fishery for *Smithsonian*. He sent out about ten query letters a week, asking various editors if they were interested in his articles, and getting enough

positive responses back to make a living. “I wanted to pay the bills, so I worked really hard,” he wrote in an online *Bold Type* interview.

In the late 1970s, Krakauer met Linda Moore, a student at the University of Colorado at Denver, and married her in 1980. Moore, who was also a climber, thought Krakauer would stop climbing because of the risks involved. Although he promised her he would quit, he was unable to tear himself away from the mountains, and as he said in an *Outside Online* interview, “I came within a millimeter of wrecking our marriage. So, then we went through a bunch of years when climbing was a big issue. Now it is less of an issue. It is how I make my living, to no small degree. . . . It’s a huge part of who I am, and I wouldn’t be a writer if it wasn’t for climbing, and Linda understands that and she accepts it.”

As his writing career progressed, Krakauer found that he wrote best when he focused on outdoor subjects. His first book, *Eiger Dreams*, was a collection of magazine articles, which originally appeared in *Outside* and *Smithsonian*. Krakauer wrote about his own experiences climbing Mount McKinley, the North Face of the Eiger in Switzerland, and many other mountains, and tried to answer the question of why anyone would risk death by climbing these peaks. In the *New York Times Book Review*, Tim Cahill wrote, “The reader who knows little about climbing will learn much from *Eiger Dreams*, but Mr. Krakauer has taken the literature of mountains onto a higher ledge. His snow-capped peaks set against limitless blue skies present problems that inspire irrefutable human experiences: fear and triumph, damnation and salvation. There is beauty in his mountains beyond that expressed in conventional sermons. His reverence is earned, and it’s entirely genuine.”

In 1992, editors at *Outside* asked Krakauer to write about the life and death of Christopher McCandless, a twenty-four-year-old honors graduate who, prompted by the writings of Leo Tolstoy, decided to give away all his possessions and go to the wilderness to experience transcendence. McCandless renamed himself Alex Supertramp and wandered through the American West, eventually reaching Alaska. Near Alaska’s Denali National Park, he hiked into the bush, planning to live off the land. He carried with him only a .22 shotgun, a bag of rice, and some books. Four months later, his body was found: he had starved to death. Near the body was a desperate note in which he begged to be saved.

Krakauer used McCandless’s journals and postcards, as well as interviews with those who knew him, to reconstruct the last two years of McCandless’s life and write an article about it. However, McCandless’s story fascinated Krakauer, and he expanded the article into a book, *Into the Wild*. In his introduction to the book, Krakauer wrote, “I was haunted by the particulars of the boy’s starvation and by vague, unsettling parallels between events in his life and those in my own.” Like McCandless, Krakauer had hitchhiked to Alaska in his early twenties. There, he set off into the wilderness to climb the Devil’s Thumb, a forbidding peak, ignoring the pleas of family and friends that it was a foolhardy, dangerous undertaking. “The fact that I survived my Alaskan adventure and McCandless did not survive his was largely a matter of chance; had I died on the Stikine

Icecap in 1977, people would have been quick to say of me, as they now say of him, that I had a death wish. . . . I was stirred by the mystery of death; I couldn't resist stealing up to the edge of doom and peering over the brink. The view into that swirling black vortex terrified me, but I caught sight of something elemental in that shadowy glimpse, some forbidden, fascinating riddle."

Although McCandless's death was commonly greeted with derision or apathy by Alaskans, who pointed to the arrogance inherent in his ill-equipped and untutored attempt to live off the land, Krakauer presented a sympathetic portrait of the young man and his yearnings. He wrote in the introduction to the book that in trying to understand McCandless, "I inevitably came to reflect on other, larger subjects as well: the grip wilderness has on the American imagination, the allure high-risk activities hold for young men of a certain mind, the complicated, highly charged bond that exists between fathers and sons." In the *New York Times Book Review*, Thomas McNamee wrote that as Krakauer "picks through the adventures and sorrows of Christopher McCandless's brief life, the story becomes painfully moving. Mr. Krakauer's elegantly constructed narrative takes us from the ghoulish moment of the hunters' discovery [of McCandless's body] back through McCandless's childhood, the gregarious effusions and icy withdrawals that characterized his coming of age, and, in meticulous detail, the two years of restless roaming that led him to Alaska. The more we learn about him, the more mysterious McCandless becomes, and the more intriguing."

Krakauer's next book, *Into Thin Air*, was also the result of a request by *Outside*. Asked to write about the increasing commercialization of Mount Everest climbing expeditions, Krakauer joined a climbing team led by Rob Hall, who had previously ascended the peak seven times. In the article that preceded the book, "Into Thin Air," Krakauer wrote that although he had previously abandoned his childhood dream of climbing the mountain, "When the call came to join Hall's expedition, I said yes without even hesitating to catch my breath. Boyhood dreams die hard, I discovered, and good sense be damned." In *Outside* online Krakauer noted that at base camp, situated at an altitude of 17,600 feet, he saw that "there's a lot of inexperienced people here — and many people would say I'm one of them — and that's sort of scary. There's a lot of people here who shouldn't be here. And maybe I shouldn't be here. . . . People who wouldn't have the time and the experience — but they have the money — can do this."

He added that when he finally reached the summit of Everest, "straddling the top of the world, one foot in Tibet and the other in Nepal, I cleared the ice from my oxygen mask, hunched a shoulder against the wind, and stared absently at the vast sweep of earth below. I understood on some dim, detached level that it was a spectacular sight. I'd been fantasizing about this moment, and the release of emotion that would accompany it, for many months. But now that I was finally here, standing on the summit of Mount Everest, I just couldn't summon the energy to care." He also noted, "Reaching the top of Everest is supposed to trigger a surge of intense elation: against long odds, after all, I had just attained a goal I'd coveted since childhood. But the summit was really only the halfway point. Any impulse I might have felt toward self-congratulation was immediately extinguished by apprehension about the long, dangerous descent that lay ahead."

As Krakauer began the long, arduous descent down the mountain, a winter storm struck, stranding several climbers behind him. Krakauer managed to reach the safety of his camp in the darkness of the storm and the coming night, and he thought the other climbers would be close behind him. He was unaware that one of his teammates was already dead and that twenty-eight climbers were still on the mountain, struggling for their lives. It was a struggle that eight climbers, including Hall, lost. Krakauer, haunted by guilt because he was unable to do anything to save any of those who died, wrote about the trek for *Outside*, but as in *Into the Wild*, he wanted to explore the events more deeply than a relatively short magazine piece would allow. He expanded the article into the best-selling book *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster*. In the book, he wrote, “Days later . . . people would ask why, if the weather had begun to deteriorate, had climbers on the upper mountain not heeded the signs? Why did veteran Himalayan guides keep moving upward, leading a gaggle of amateurs . . . into an apparent death trap? Nobody can speak for the leaders of the two guided groups involved, for both men are now dead. But I can attest that nothing I saw early on the afternoon of May 10 suggested that a murderous storm was about to bear down on us.”

The book was roundly criticized by friends and families of the climbers who died, as well as by other climbers who survived; they accused Krakauer of profiting off others’ tragedy and of being too judgmental of the actions of the survivors. However, in *Outside*, Krakauer defended himself, commenting, “In writing the book I tried very hard to recount the events truthfully, in an even-handed, sympathetic manner that did not sensationalize the tragedy or cause undue pain to friends and families of the victims.” In a discussion with *Outside* writer Mark Bryant, Krakauer said, “Plenty of people have said to me, ‘Who are you to assess someone else’s role or lack of experience or skill?’ But I’m a working journalist, and I was there, and I was there to do a job — to tell what happened as best I could. I certainly feel that some people are hurt by my assessments, but somebody needed to step up and tell what went on up there.”

Critics, on the other hand, praised the book, and readers kept it on the best-seller list for months. In *Forbes*, James M. Clash wrote, “Every once in a while a work of nonfiction comes along that’s as good as anything a novelist could make up. Krakauer’s new book . . . fits the bill.” In the *New York Times Book Review*, Alastair Scott wrote that Krakauer “has produced a narrative that is both meticulously researched and deftly constructed. Unlike the expedition, his story rushes irresistibly forward.” *Sports Illustrated* writer Ron Fimrite commented, “In this movingly written book, Krakauer describes an experience of such bone-chilling horror as to persuade even the most fanatical alpinists to seek sanctuary at sea level. Not that they’re likely to do so.”

In order to write the book, Krakauer filled up nine notebooks with detailed notes and observations. He told a *Boldtype* interviewer, “I sort of take notes the way photographers take photos. You just sort of scattershot everything, because you never know what’s going to prove invaluable when you get back down. . . . The only time I didn’t take notes was on summit day. I tried at 27,600 feet . . . but they’re basically illegible, and they make no sense because my brain wasn’t working [as a result of the low oxygen level at

that altitude].” He also said that while writing the book, “I wanted more than anything else to show the complexities and ambiguities of this tragedy. . . . I wanted to tell the story in its full complexity.”

In 2003, Krakauer departed from his series of books about the outdoors and people’s passion for nature to discuss another kind of passion: religious fanaticism. *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* examines the lives of polygamy-practicing Mormons who live in remote areas of the American West. According to Matthew Flamm in *Entertainment Weekly*, Krakauer said he wanted to understand “the terrible things people do . . . in the name of God.”

Krakauer told Bryant, “I guess I don’t try to justify climbing, or defend it, because I can’t. There’s no way to defend it, even to yourself, once you’ve been involved in something like this disaster. And yet I’ve continued to climb. I don’t know what that says about me or the sport other than the potential power it has. What makes climbing great for me, strangely enough, is this life and death aspect. It sounds trite to say, I know, but climbing isn’t just another game. It isn’t just another sport. It’s life itself.”

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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- *Choice*, October, 1997, review of *Into Thin Air*, p. 334.
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- *Kirkus Reviews*, February 1, 1990, p. 159; March 1, 1997, review of *Into Thin Air*, p. 357.
- *Kliatt*, September, 1997, review of *Into Thin Air*, p. 29; September, 1997, review of *Into the Wild*, p. 3; May, 1998, review of *Into Thin Air*, p. 28; September, 1998, review of *Into Thin Air*, p. 4; March, 1999, p. 63.
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Author Interview

Jon Krakauer Responds to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints' Official Response To *Under The Banner of Heaven*

At the end of June 2003, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints issued an official “response” to my new book, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*. Disseminated nationwide more than two weeks before my book was scheduled to appear on bookstore shelves, this preemptive attack was authored by Richard E. Turley, Jr., a high-ranking church official who serves as managing director of the LDS Family and Church History Department. In his lengthy, carefully worded screed, Elder Turley characterized *Under the Banner of Heaven* as “a decidedly one-sided and negative view of Mormon history.” According to his assessment, my book was written as “a condemnation of religion generally,” and the Mormon faith in particular.

It saddens me that Elder Turley, speaking for the LDS leadership (and by extension for the church as a whole), elected to regard my book in such a reductionist light. Other reviewers have assessed *Under the Banner of Heaven* quite differently. As critic Edward Morris wrote in the July issue of *Bookpage*, “Raised among Mormons he greatly admired, Krakauer treats their religion — in all its theological shades — quite seriously. There’s never a snide remark or sarcastic aside. But the studiously balanced reporting can’t soften the savagery of the [Lafferty murders].”

In fact it is impossible to comprehend the actions of the murderous Lafferty brothers, or any other Mormon Fundamentalist, without first making a serious effort to plumb their theological beliefs, and that requires some understanding of LDS history, along with an understanding of the complex and highly fluid teachings of the religion’s remarkable founder, Joseph Smith. The life of Smith and the history of his church may be considered from myriad perspectives, of course. And therein lies the basis for the Mormon leadership’s profound unhappiness with my book.

The leaders of the modern LDS Church deem the history of their religion to be sacred, and have long endeavored to retain tight proprietary control over how that history is presented to the world. Indeed, LDS leaders have explicitly stated that they believe accounts of Mormon history should be, above all else, “faith promoting” — that is to say, accounts of Mormon history should be celebratory rather than critical, and should downplay, omit, or deny sensitive or unsavory aspects of that history. As Apostle Boyd Packer (presently second in line to become LDS President and Prophet) declared in a notorious 1981 speech, “There is a temptation . . . to want to tell everything, whether it is worthy or faith-promoting or not. Some things that are true are not very useful. . . . In an effort to be objective, impartial, and scholarly, a writer or a teacher may unwittingly be giving equal time to the adversary. . . . In the Church we are not neutral. We are one-sided. There is a war going on, and we are engaged in it.” That war is for the minds and souls of the earth’s human population — a war that Latter-day Saints wage with all the resources at their disposal.

Dissent from official church teachings is not tolerated in the LDS faith. Because of this obsession to rigidly control how the Mormon past is interpreted and presented, histories sanctioned by the LDS Church tend to be exceedingly partisan and notably incomplete. For example, in 1997 the church released a manual (published in 22 languages, and designated as required reading for virtually every Mormon adult) titled the *Teaching of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, in which this great Mormon leader was intentionally portrayed as being monogamous — despite the fact that few scholars, Mormon or otherwise, would dispute that Young actually was married to at least twenty women, and was probably married to more than fifty. Even a cursory survey of other LDS sanctioned publications will reveal a similarly disturbing sanitization of the historical record.

According to the eminent Mormon historian D. Michael Quinn, “The tragic reality is that there have been occasions when Church leaders, teachers, and writers have not told the truth they knew about difficulties of the Mormon past, but have offered to the Saints instead a mixture of platitudes, half-truths, omissions, and plausible denials.” As I wrote in *Under the Banner of Heaven*, Dr. Quinn argued that a “so-called ‘faith-promoting’ Church history which conceals controversies and difficulties of the Mormon past actually undermines the faith of Latter-day Saints who eventually learn about the problems from other sources. One of the most painful demonstrations of that fact has been the continued spread of unauthorized polygamy among the Latter-day Saints during the last seventy-five years, despite the concerted efforts of Church leaders to stop it.” Quinn pointed out that after officially renouncing the doctrine of plural marriage in 1890, the highest leaders in fact continued to sanction polygamy, covertly, for many years. And this casuistry, he insisted, has driven many Mormons into the embrace of fundamentalism.

“The central argument of the enemies of the LDS Church,” Quinn said, “is historical, and if we seek to build the Kingdom of God by ignoring or denying the problem areas of our past, we are leaving the Saints unprotected.” For his part, Quinn possesses what he describes as ‘a complex testimony.’ As he explains, “Instead of a black/white view of Mormonism, I have an *Old Testament* sort of faith. The writers of the *Old Testament* presented the prophets as very human vessels, warts and all. Yet God still chose them to be His leaders on earth. That’s how I see Mormonism: It is not a perfect church. It has huge flaws, in both the institution and the people who lead it. They are only human. And I have no trouble accepting that. It’s all part of my faith.

“On the very first page of *The Book of Mormon*,” Quinn continues, “Joseph Smith wrote that if it contained mistakes or faults, ‘it be the mistakes of men.’ And this same thing is stated in various ways throughout the text that follows — that errors in this sacred book are possible, even likely. I have always believed that Mormonism was the one true church, but I don’t think it has ever been infallible. And I certainly don’t believe it has a monopoly on the truth.”

I happen to share Dr. Quinn’s perspective. The LDS Church aggressively asserts that it is mankind’s “one true church,” and currently has more than 60,000 missionaries roaming the globe, intent on converting the world to the teachings of Joseph Smith. It seems to me

that if Mormons are willing to make such a strong assertion — if Mormons aspire to convince non-believers that their religion is more valid than other faiths, and that the doctrines of Joseph Smith are truly handed down from God — Mormons should be equally willing to open the archives of the LDS Church to all interested parties, and to actively encourage a vigorous, unfettered examination of the church's rich and fascinating past.

I am therefore disappointed that the men who direct the LDS Church and its twelve million members adamantly believe otherwise. I am disappointed that they 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.

Jon Krakauer
July 3, 2003

Courtesy of www.bookbrowse.com

Discussion Questions

1. In his prologue, Jon Krakauer writes that the aim of his book is to “cast some light on Lafferty and his ilk,” which he concedes is a daunting but useful task for what it may tell us “about the roots of brutality, perhaps, but even more for what might be learned about the nature of faith” [p. XXIII]. What does the book reveal about fanatics such as Ron and Dan Lafferty? What does it reveal about brutality and faith and the connections between them?
2. Why does Krakauer move back and forth between Mormon history and contemporary events? What are the connections between the beliefs and practices of Joseph Smith and his followers in the nineteenth century and the behavior of people like Dan and Ron Lafferty, Brian David Mitchell, and others in the twentieth?
3. Prosecutor David Leavitt argued that “People in the state of Utah simply do not understand, and have not understood for fifty years, the devastating effect that the practice of polygamy has on young girls in our society” [p. 24]. How does polygamy affect young girls? Is it, as Leavitt claims, pedophilia plain and simple?
4. Joseph Smith claimed that the doctrine of polygamy was divinely inspired. What earthly reasons might also explain Smith’s attraction to having plural wives?
5. When Krakauer asks Dan Lafferty if he has considered the parallels between himself and Osama bin Laden, Dan asserts that bin Laden is a “child of the Devil” and that the hijackers were “following a false prophet,” whereas he is following a true prophet [p. 321]. No doubt, bin Laden would say much the same of Lafferty. How are Dan Lafferty and Osama bin Laden alike? In what ways are all religious fundamentalists alike?
6. Krakauer asks: “if Ron Lafferty were deemed mentally ill because he obeyed the voice of God, isn’t everyone who believes in God and seeks guidance through prayer mentally ill as well?” [p. 297] Given the nature of, and motive for, the murders of Brenda Lafferty and her child, should Ron Lafferty be considered mentally ill? If so, should all others who “talk to God” or receive revelations — a central tenant of Mormonism — also be considered mentally ill? What would the legal ramifications be of such a shift in thought?
7. Krakauer begins part III with a quote from Bertrand Russell, who asserts that “every single bit of progress in humane feeling, every improvement in the criminal law, every step toward the diminution of war, every step toward better treatment of the colored races, or every mitigation of slavery, every moral progress that there has been in the world, has been consistently opposed by the organized churches of the world” [p. 191]. Is this a fair and accurate statement? What historical examples support it? What improvements in humane feeling and social justice has the Mormon church opposed?

8. How are mainstream and fundamentalist Mormons likely to react to Krakauer's book?
9. Much of *Under the Banner of Heaven* explores the tensions between freedom of religion and governmental authority. How should these tensions be resolved? How can the state allow religious freedom to those who place obedience to God's will above obedience to secular laws?
10. Joseph Smith called himself "a second Mohammed," and Krakauer quotes George Arbaugh who suggests that Mormonism's "aggressive theocratic claims, political aspirations, and use of force, make it akin to Islam" [p. 102]. What other similarities exist between the Mormon and Islamic faiths?
11. How should Joseph Smith be understood: as a delusional narcissist, a con man, or "an authentic religious genius" [p. 55], as Harold Bloom claims?
12. Krakauer suggests that much of John Wesley Powell's book, *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*, particularly his account of his dealings with the Shivwit Indians, should be regarded with a "healthy dose of skepticism," and that it embellishes and omits important facts [p. 245]. Is Krakauer himself a trustworthy guide to the events he describes in *Under the Banner of Heaven*? Are his writing and his judgments fair and reasonable? What makes them so?
13. What patterns emerge from looking at Mormon history? What do events like the Mountain Meadow massacre and the violence between Mormons and gentiles in Missouri and Illinois suggest about the nature of Mormonism? Have Mormons been more often the perpetrators or the victims of violence?
14. At the very end of the book, former Mormon fundamentalist DeLoy Bateman says that while the Mormon fundamentalists who live within Colorado City may be happier than those who live outside it, he believes that "some things in life are more important than being happy. Like being free to think for yourself" [p. 334]. Why does Krakauer end the book this way? In what ways are Mormons not free to think for themselves? Is such freedom more important than happiness?

Courtesy of Anchor Books