

# THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MORMONS

The textbook said some things about the Church that seemed wrong, but I had to find out for myself—and my classmates.



By Elise Mackley

High school. A necessary evil, I guess. Well, it's not really evil, but the homework is. Especially in history. In my U.S. history class we'd learned about the Pilgrims and Puritans, the Founding Fathers, and the expansion from the original colonies. It all sounded familiar.

But when we got to the part about Manifest Destiny and the role Mormons played in the settlement of the West, I couldn't believe what I was reading. I knew that there were some controversial events and even controversial figures in Church history, but it seemed like the authors of my textbook were presenting the most negative interpretation possible rather than a factual overview.

"Mom, is this really true?" I asked.

I pointed to the page I was on, and my mom read the first paragraph and then stopped. "Wow," she said. "Where did they come up with that information?"

The book had no footnotes, so we started checking some of the statements. It took hours,





but we checked in the Doctrine and Covenants, cross-checked manuals online at [LDS.org](https://www.lds.org), and found original documents at [JosephSmithPapers.org](https://www.josephsmithpapers.org). It was so cool to see the handwritten petition for redress, which Joseph Smith personally delivered to President Martin Van Buren (President of the United States) and to learn more about what really forced the Saints to leave Missouri and settle in Nauvoo. We also searched for a few of the quotes and found more original documents online at the Illinois and Missouri State Historical Societies. They showed what the textbook had taken out of context.

My high school has over 1,600 students, and I'm one of only two Mormons. I didn't want what we were reading to be the only thing the kids in my class ever learned about the Church. (I also checked and found out that this U.S. history book was first published in 1981, which means thousands of high school students had been taught false information.)

I'm not the type to draw attention to myself, but because I'd found out that so much of what was in our textbook was wrong, I decided to ask my teacher if he would let me make a presentation to my class. My mom

helped me type up the corrections, but when I showed my teacher the pages of information, he just glanced at them and said, "When authors have to cover 80 years of history in a couple of paragraphs, they aren't going to be able to include all the details."

I was really disappointed. I knew I could talk with my friends and point out specific errors, but there was no way for me to help the 25 other kids in my class—not to mention the kids in my teacher's other classes—understand the truth about Mormons. I didn't know what to do.

A week later my teacher changed his mind. He'd actually read the information I'd given him and realized that the authors hadn't just skipped parts of Church history or shown one side of it; they'd actually made up things that weren't even based on the truth. He wanted our class to know what was real, and he even wanted to publish what I'd given him so all the teachers in our school district could use it as a resource!

Like the scriptures say, even a little candle, when set on a hill, can give a lot of light (see Matthew 5:14–16). **NE**  
*Elise Mackley lives in Washington, USA.*