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MOVIE REVIEW | '8: THE MORMON PROPOSITION'

8: The Mormon Proposition (2010)

In the documentary "8," exploring the Mormon money trail, Reed Cowan interviews Chris Butters, a Utah State senator.

Marching in the War on Gay Marriage

By **STEPHEN HOLDEN**
Published: June 17, 2010

Reed Cowan's polemical film "8: The Mormon Proposition" examines [the successful campaign](#) against gay marriage in California that was heavily financed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is implacably opposed to homosexuality. The highly emotional documentary is narrated by Dustin Lance Black, the screenwriter for "Milk," who, like Mr. Cowan, is gay and grew up in a Mormon household.

More About This Movie
8: The Mormon Proposition

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The degree to which money influences politics is suggested by the passage of [Proposition 8](#), the California constitutional amendment, enacted in November 2008, stating that "only a marriage between a man and woman is valid or recognized" in the state. The proposition overturned the California Supreme Court ruling that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to marry.

Gay marriages that took place between June 16, 2008, and Nov. 5, 2008, remain legally recognized and retain full state-level marriage rights, including recognition of the legal term "marriage."

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After the proposition passed, San Francisco's mayor, Gavin Newsom, an advocate of gay marriage, declared he was disturbed by California's being the first state in the United States to take rights away from people by changing its constitution.

The film dives angrily into the fray. It uncovers the classified church documents and the largely concealed money trail of Mormon contributions that paid for a high-powered campaign to pass Proposition 8. The [Mormon involvement](#), the film persuasively argues, tilted the vote toward passage, by 52 percent to 48 percent, in its final weeks.

That involvement was concealed under the facade of a coalition with Roman Catholics and evangelical Christians called the National Organization for Marriage. Mormons raised an estimated \$22 million for the cause. In the final week of the campaign, the film says, \$3 million came from Utah. The money financed a sophisticated media barrage that involved blogs, Twitter and YouTube videos, as well as scary (and, according to the movie, misleading) [television ads](#), and an aggressive door-to-door campaign whose foot soldiers were instructed on how not to appear Mormon.

The film personalizes the issue with interviews with Tyler Barrick and Spencer Jones, a gay couple from Mormon backgrounds, who married in San Francisco in June 2008 and were devastated to find their marriage legally delegitimized.

The documentary is really two films roughly stitched together. The first two-thirds tells the history of Proposition 8; the final third is a wrenching exploration of the effects on gay Mormons of the church's strict taboo on homosexuality. We meet gay teenagers who were exiled from their families and are told about a rash of suicides at Brigham Young University. The reason Utah's suicide rate is the highest of any state, the movie suggests, is the Mormon church's absolute rejection of homosexuality, which one church elder calls "contrary to God's plan." Chris Buttars, a proudly homophobic Utah state senator, compared male coupling to bestiality. The movie shows the depth of religion-based loathing of homosexuality, like that of abortion, to be primal.

In the meantime [the struggle to repeal](#) Proposition 8 is under way.

8

The Mormon Proposition

Opens on Friday in Atlanta; Boston; Chicago; Dallas; Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Honolulu; Houston; New York; Los Angeles; Phoenix; Salt Lake City; San Diego and Washington.

Written and directed by Reed Cowan; narrated by Dustin Lance Black; directors of photography, Mr. Cowan and Chris Volz; edited by Steven Greenstreet, John Kinhart and Brian Bayerl; music by Thomas Chase Jones; produced by Mr. Greenstreet, Mr. Volz and Emily Pearson; released by Red Flag Releasing. Running time: 1 hour 20 minutes. This film is not rated.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: June 22, 2010

A film review on Friday about "8: The Mormon Proposition," which looks at the campaign against gay marriage in California, referred incorrectly to the current status of same-sex marriages in that state from the time licenses for them began being granted in June 2008 until a constitutional amendment in November of that year limited

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