

American Heroes

Just hours after graduation tomorrow, the 2009 Voice of the Rivers team embark on their journey along the Catawba River to its destination at the Atlantic Ocean in Charleston, S.C. For this, our final issue of 2008-2009, The Clarion wishes to honor those faculty and students who will be making the journey. We wish them all the best for their expedition.

Follow their journey online at www.brevard.edu/VOR.

- **Thomas Allison**
- **Jenny Baxter**
- **Robert Dye**
- **Jennifer Gift**
- **Kristina Holland**
- **Charles Jordan**
- **Patrick Lawrence**
- **Karen Love**
- **Jordan Martin**
- **Dean Mobley**
- **Kelli Tysinger**
- **Kimberly Williams**
- **Jay Wolfe**



On April 17-19, VOR members began their expedition by visiting the rim of the Linville Gorge, N.C., 3,600 feet above their final destination, Charleston, S.C.

Historical novel probes polygamist past

by Joseph Chilton
Editor in Chief

Book Review

Polygamous Mormons seem to be the fascination du jour in America right now.

HBO's "Big Love" has been renewed for a fourth season, the state's removal of children from a Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints compound in Texas was a hot button issue in the news media for the entire last year, and just two years ago, prophet Warren Jeffs ascended to the top of the FBI's "Most Wanted" list. Mormons pique the interest of our culture so much that there are even plans in the works for a Broadway musical to be made about LDS theology—to be written by the creators of South Park, no less.

With those factors in mind, it appears as if David Ebershoff's "The 19th Wife" could not have been released on paperback at a better time. Random House will release the sprawling 507-page epic on June 8, and Ebershoff will make a tour stop in Asheville on June 10.

Ebershoff's topic would make one think that

the author is simply pandering to a current fad, but the author's multi-faceted approach to the perils and motivations behind polygamy adroitly maneuver past the perils of that situation, as he skillfully weaves fascinating church history in with a page-turning modern-day murder mystery.

The book's title comes from the fictional memoir Ebershoff creates for a real-life champion of the late-19th century crusade against polygamy, Eliza Ann Young, a former wife of Brigham Young who rejected the doctrine of "celestial marriage" (or plurality of wives) and spearheaded a movement to eradicate the practice.

Ebershoff provides the reader excerpts from the memoir he has written for Young in between chapters of the narrative of a young man reared in modern polygamous society. Jordan in 20, has been expelled from his family's compound for not being pious enough, and has now returned to the site of his banishment to investigate the murder of his father.

In 2003, Jon Krakauer's "Under the Banner of Heaven" made multiple best-seller lists by outlining the gratuitous violence running

through Mormon history. Ebershoff builds on Krakauer's motif, and the more Jordan discovers about his father's murder, the more correlations are seen between the plight of polygamous Mormons now and in the mid-19th century.

The author's ambition is admirable, as he attempts to combine two mammoth works into one volume. His subtle characterization makes his prose a pleasure to read, although the murder mystery is clearly not Ebershoff's forte, as that sub-plot unfolds in not nearly such a subtle manner.

But the book is not to be a Dennis Lehane-esque mystery novel, and Ebershoff's lack of skill in that genre is only a minor detractor from what he has accomplished. "The 19th Wife" is a quick read of a mystery novel on the surface, but given the current debate on polygamous institutions such as the one raided in Texas last year, it's social scope is much broader. Ebershoff succeeds in drawing historical parallels in to an enjoyable modern narrative, and in doing so evinces valuable insight on the motivations behind plural marriage and the effects that the institution has on all members of a family.