In Search of Punishment:
Mormon Transgressions and the Mountain Meadows Massacre

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by
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To Mom and Dad.
Abstract
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Janiece Johnson

The Mountain Meadows Massacre occurred in 1857 on a now infamous 11 September when Mormons and Paiute Indians massacred an emigrant train from Arkansas. The central topic of this thesis is not the massacre itself, but rather the creation of a discourse that sought to describe the massacre as an incursion on expanding American civilization. Though Mormon polygamy received the lion’s share of attention, the scrutiny that Americans placed on Mountain Meadows in the second half of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century demonstrated that polygamy was not Mormonism’s only offence. The massacre lurked on the edges of the “Mormon Problem.” This thesis examines the American quest for punishment through official legal channels and in the popular press from the 1850s to the 1920s. It also explores the relationship between efforts to convict individual perpetrators and punitive endeavours aimed at a minority religion. As the legal investigation and prosecution of the massacre proceeded in the decades following the massacre, reports in the popular press spread across the United States becoming more specific and more elaborate as time went on. The story of the massacre catalogued a multitude of Mormon sins focusing on race, savagery, manhood, and theocracy—specific junctures where Mormons breached widely held American sensibilities about civilization. Tailor-made for the explosion of sensational literature, the story of the meadows became a tool to encourage government action against the Mormons or to warn against the “Mormon Menace” and played a notable role as Mormons battled for complete enfranchisement in the American citizenship conflicts of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Closely examining the relationship between the prosecution for the massacre and the popular story of the massacre, this thesis illuminates both a notorious moment in Mormon History and the Americans who told its story.
Acknowledgements

As one whose path to a doctorate has been rather circuitous, the number of people who have encouraged, sustained, and aided me has multiplied with each bend in my path travelled over years. I don’t think it possible adequately thank each and every one. I am grateful for all, named and unnamed. In this most recent phase, George Lewis and James Campbell with their joint appointments in the School of History and the American Studies Centre at the University of Leicester have been stellar advisors. They have been supportive, encouraging, entertaining, and valuable respondents to my work pushing me to further cultivate my skills as a historian.

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A number of different archival collections have been essential to this work. The amazing and daunting collection at the National Archives and Records Administration both in Washington D.C. and College Park, Maryland was vital—despite the sense at times that I might be circling Dante’s inferno. A number of individuals in the Pioche Country Courthouse, the Beaver County Recorder’s Office, and the Fifth District Court in Beaver City, Utah gave me access to their backrooms, basements, and vaults to find documents long thought lost. Archivists at a number of depositories have gone above and beyond their regular scope of duties to help me. I cannot name all of those at the LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah who have provided research assistance, friendship, and feedback. Janet Seegmiller and Paula Mitchell at the Leavitt Special Collections of the Gerald R. Sherratt Library at Southern Utah University; Peter Blodgett at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California; Brandon Metcalf (then) at the Utah State Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah;
Russ Taylor and John Murphy at the BYU Special Collections have all kindly and astutely helped direct my research.

I began working on the history of the Mountain Meadows Massacre as a research assistant for the generous Ron Walker in 2001. After several months, I left to continue my graduate education at Vanderbilt University’s Divinity School. I didn’t feel done with Mountain Meadows, but never supposed that after a two-year hiatus I would return to the massacre for more than a decade. I am grateful for Richard E. Turley’s role directing that return, offering me my own—ever expanding—project and being a consistent example of faith and dedication. Andrea Maxwell, Alison Gainer, Patricia Spilsbury, Jay Parry, Michael Shamo, Chad Orton, Reid Neilsen, Matt Grow, and the brilliant LaJean Purcell Carruth all supported that project and provided the initial foundation for this work. Brian Reeves and Chad Foulger have been my men Friday, helping me mine the depths of the Mountain Meadows Massacre Research Files, pointing me to obscure sources I read three years previously but hadn’t seen since, and consistently encouraging me in my continued journey. Richard and Claudia Bushman, the late Truman Madsen, Stephen Robinson, Carol Madsen, Brent Top, Jessie Embry, and Kathleen Flake have all mentored me at critical junctures along my winding path.

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Introduction

“The Most Indubitable Proofs” of the Mormon Problem: A Mormon Massacre

By the mid-nineteenth century, Mormons—members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—had been the focus of sustained attention from Americans for almost thirty years.¹ Though Mormonism was categorically a home-grown American religion, some Americans consistently contested the place of Mormons within both the American religious landscape and the American polity for much of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. After decades of local clashes that pushed Latter-day Saints from upstate New York across the North American continent, Mormons felt secure in their mountain refuge. The land they called Deseret was Mexican territory when they arrived in 1847, though it soon became a part of the United States with the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In 1850 the U.S. federal government called the place Utah and granted it territorial status. Mormons publicly announced polygamy in 1852 certain that freedom of religion guaranteed what they interpreted as the practice of their religion. Polygamy garnered attention and quickly became a lightning rod for criticism from Protestant reformers and sensational novelists in the east. A handful of anti-polygamy novels in the 1850s were only the beginning of what would become a stockpile of anti-Mormon literature. Concerns over Mormon polygamy and theocracy transformed Mormonism from an item of local concern to one

¹ The official name of the church popularly known as the Mormon Church is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—The LDS Church. Though originally a pejorative, this project will generally use Mormon as Americans most frequently used that appellation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—as they do today.
of the hot national topics of the day—“a veritable national pastime.”

Articles on the “Mormon Question” or the “Mormon Problem” routinely filled newspaper column space.

In 1857, on a now notorious 11 September a group of fifty Mormon men from a local militia and their recruited male Paiute Indian confederates destroyed an emigrant train in a remote mountain meadow valley in southwestern Utah Territory. The emigrants were from Arkansas journeying through Utah on the southern trail to California. The perpetrators lured the emigrants from circled wagons and then slaughtered about 120 men, women, and children—mostly women and children. This event soon became known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

It did not take long for news of the massacre to travel to the west coast and then across America. The first rumours of an Indian massacre followed the California trail and reached southern California at the beginning of October with details gleaned from Mormon freighters and two emigrants who travelled for a time with the massacred train. Within a week, the rumours began to take shape, soon suggesting that those allied with the Indians were Mormon. A month after the massacre, residents of Los

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3 Scholars of violence consistently debate the precise definition of massacre. A number of scholars conform to the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition which dictates that a massacre comprises: “The indiscriminate and brutal slaughter of people or (less commonly) animals; carnage, butchery, slaughter in numbers; an instance of this.” In contrast, within the current academic discourse virtually anything can be literally called a massacre, for some it might be considered a term of quality due to the “brutal nature of the act” rather than quantity of individuals murdered. The term is highly malleable and can therefore be bent to fulfill specific academic needs. Benjamin Madley defines massacres as “largely one sided intentional killings of five or more non-combatants or relatively poorly armed or disarmed combatants, often in surprise.” Madley’s definition is both operable and useful and will be used throughout this project while still acknowledging the complexity of the term. Scholars now agree that 120 persons were murdered and therefore this work uses the term massacre freely. Lyndall Ryan, “The Massacre and History,” in Philip Dwyer ed. *Theatres of Violence: Massacre, Mass Killing and Atrocity Throughout History* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2012), xii. Benjamin Madley “Tactics of Nineteenth Century Colonial Massacres: Tasmania, California, and Beyond” in *Theatres of Violence: Massacre, Mass Killing and Atrocity throughout History*, 138.

Los Angeles “convened at the Pavillion, on the Plaza” in a “mass meeting.” Their goal was “to investigate the facts in the recent massacre, on the Salt Lake road of more than one hundred Americans.” Two days later, a citizen committee “unanimously adopted” a series of resolutions condemning the massacre and the "rapidly gathering cloud of troubles" the Mormons caused. The Los Angeles residents’ petition declared, “We firmly believe the atrocious act was perpetrated by the Mormons, and their allies the Indians.” They petitioned "the President of the United States, to exert the authority vested in him by the Constitution; that prompt measures may be taken for the punishment of the authors of the recent appalling and wholesale butchery of innocent men, women and children." If the President did not act, the Los Angeles committee argued, "many emigrant trains, now on their way from the Western States to California, [were] liable to meet the same fate." Despite this apparent fear of additional violence, massacres were not their only concern. The committee additionally urged the California state government to punish nearby San Bernardino residents “living in open violation of one of the most important and sacred laws of our State.” This “important and sacred law” was not murder, but marriage. The link between a massacre in Utah and polygamists in California was clear for the petitioners—both offending groups were Mormons. The petition was ordered published in local newspapers, the Los Angeles Star and El Clamor Público, in both English and Spanish.

Specifically what “prompt measures” the United States might take against the Mormons remained open to question in the 1850s, as it would for decades to come. The latter request from the citizens of Los Angeles to prosecute local polygamists was a part of the larger question of whether or not Mormons fit into the American polity. Los Angeles residents focused their concerns on the alterity of the Mormon people as a

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whole—an Other—instead of the specific individuals at fault. The association of the massacre with the issue of polygamy demonstrates that the citizens of Los Angeles interpreted violence at the Mountain Meadows in the context of larger questions about Mormon citizenship and, moreover, believed that the federal response to the massacre should target the Mormon community as a whole rather than the perpetrators of the violence specifically. As well, such anti-Mormonism offered disparate groups of Americans an opportunity to unite in their opposition against the Mormons.7

Two weeks later, the news of the massacre reached San Francisco, a city already rife with conflict between pro- and anti-Mormon newspapers.8 The Alta California republished the demands of the Los Angeles residents to which the editors added their own specific requests. The Alta immediately called on the federal government to act:

What shall the government do? Continue to pursue the temporising policy which has permitted the growth of this at first insignificant and diminutive community into a powerful legion of armed men, daily growing stronger and better prepared to resist us?—or shall not a determined effort be made to root out this social cancer?"

Carefully framing the question as a social problem they highlighted the moral issue whilst including specific instructions for protecting the California road with a military presence. Beyond safeguarding American emigrants, the Alta editors demanded “immediate and determined action” be taken “that the Mormon traitors…be rooted out of our territory, fully and finally.” Building upon the already present antagonism towards the Mormons, the Alta editors argued that war with the Mormons was inevitable as soon as the government “received the most indubitable proofs” of their “treacherous, murderous conduct.” The Alta’s report of Mountain Meadows was soon

7 In California, Hispanic-Americans clashed with Anglo-Americans after United States annexation. Notwithstanding his increasing anti-American imperialism, Clamor Público editor Francisco Ramirez united with Anglo-Americans in their anti-Mormonism. Rather than honing in on the specific Mormon and Indian participants in the massacre, the petition united southern California residents—Anglo-American and Hispanic-American—in opposition to the Mormons. Nicolás Kanellos, “‘El Clamor Público’: Resisting the American Empire,” California History 84, no. 2 (1 Dec. 2006): 10–18.

on its way to Washington offering those “most indubitable proofs.”9 These California efforts marked the beginnings of a saga of searching for action to punish the Mormons for the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

The central topic of this project is not simply the massacre itself, but rather the creation of a discourse that described it as an incursion on expanding American civilization. This thesis will carefully investigate the quest for punishment for the Mountain Meadows Massacre through official legal channels and in the American popular press from the 1850s to the 1920s. It will examine the relationship between efforts to convict specific individual perpetrators and punitive endeavours aimed at a minority religion, and how the massacre became a tale to enumerate Mormon transgressions—specific junctures where Mormons contravened popular American sensibilities and the limits of many Americans’ conception of civilization. This story of the massacre, known as Mountain Meadows, would not quickly pass away. Massacre reports met contemporary consternation over the Mormon Problem head-on. Just as it had in both Los Angeles and San Francisco, the story of a Mormon massacre built upon existing perceptions of the Mormons.

This introduction will outline the work at hand, its source material and methodology. It will also assess the current historiography and present a brief introduction to the aftermath of the massacre and the almost forty years of federal legal proceedings that followed it. Though polygamy received a preponderance of attention, the scrutiny that Americans placed on Mountain Meadows in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth century—like the earliest stories in Los Angeles—demonstrated that polygamy was not the only Mormon offence. The explosion of popular sensationalist literature became the perfect medium for the story of Mountain Meadows. As the legal investigation and prosecution of the massacre proceeded, reports in the popular press spread across the United States becoming more specific and more elaborate as time went on fitting the contours of public

expectation. Newspapers in major urban centres reported on the massacre, as did those in small towns across the country. Mountain Meadows made the cover of Harper’s Weekly in 1859, two weeks before Americans could read Horace Greely’s famous interview with the Mormon Prophet Brigham Young. Mountain Meadows became a presence lurking on the edges of the Mormon Problem.

Very literally demonstrating the massacre’s place, in one of many political cartoons commenting on the Mormon Problem (image 1) a freakish jack-in-the-box has popped up out of the domed Mormon Tabernacle (the most obviously Mormon building prior to the completion of the Salt Lake Temple in 1893). The emerging clown uses his four hands to trap dozens of women in his polygamous grasp. Beyond polygamy, the folds of the jack-in-the-box neck label threats of pervasive Mormon fanaticism, deceit, falsehood, and despotism. A Mountain Meadows signpost to the right reminds the reader of the massacre—a sure Mormon sin, as well as elevating the perception of Mormonism from a moral danger to a real physical threat. Meanwhile, around the edges of the cartoon various newspaper editors attempt to break down the ignorance and superstition protecting the clown. In actuality, attacking the Mormon Problem or debating the Mormon Question was not just the work of newspaper editors. Ministers, novelists, entertainers, authors of all kinds, cartoonists, federal officials, and interested individuals similarly spread the warning of the meadows. Mountain Meadows correspondingly became a frequent rallying cry for disgruntled Utah federal judges in their letter writing to Washington.


11 “Mormonism (Jack-in-the-Box),” n.d., Charles W. Carter Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU.

Washington briefly began to discuss the massacre in March 1860 as the Senate resolved to act and gathered all pertinent reports. Though the documents collected as a result of the resolution would become a major Mountain Meadows source for later historians, the information resulted in little substantive action against the perpetrators of the massacre. The Civil War also curbed action regarding the massacre, however the federal government did not completely forget about the Mormon Problem. Two years later Congress passed the Morill Act both barring polygamy and attempting to limit the power of the Mormon hierarchy. It had been four years since the massacre, yet as Congress debated polygamy and the Mormons, Mountain Meadows was not yet specifically a part of the discussion notwithstanding Representative Thomas A. R. Nelson of Tennessee’s claim that between 1850 and 1860 Mormons murdered 708 immigrants as they tried to pass through Utah. In 1863 former Utah Judge Cradlebaugh went to Washington attempting to give a speech on Utah and the Mormons including a specific emphasis on Mountain Meadows Massacre only to be denied time on the House floor.


Image 1. “Mormonism” (Jack-in-the-Box), n.d., Charles W. Carter Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU.
Though Cradlebaugh had to settle for publication of the speech in the appendix of the *Congressional Globe*, it would later circulate widely.\(^\text{15}\)

With the conclusion of the Civil War, American attentions turned to the Mormons with greater earnestness. Mountain Meadows gained significant notoriety in its own right, and over time, became a salient feature of most anti-Mormon literature—invariably alongside discussions of polygamy. One author noted that although the massacre was only one of “many other murders and outrages committed by the authority and the connivance of the Mormon Church,” Mountain Meadows was the “most notable” and could teach Americans all they needed to know beyond polygamy. Beginning with this 1866 anti-polygamy volume, a chapter on the massacre became almost standard in anti-Mormon literature.\(^\text{16}\) Though not explicitly a part of the Mountain Meadows prosecution, polygamy provided the omnipresent context.

In the 1870s, Mountain Meadows headlines were once again common throughout the United States. In 1871 massacre participant and former Mormon bishop turned confessor Philip Klingensmith published an affidavit detailing the events at Mountain Meadows. Klingensmith’s confession precipitated an onslaught of legal activity and in 1874 nine individuals were indicted by a grand jury for participation in the massacre. The following year, massacre participant John D. Lee was brought to trial.\(^\text{17}\)

One modern observer has labelled Lee’s first trial “the nineteenth-century equivalent of the 1995 O. J. Simpson verdict.”\(^\text{18}\) After a hung jury in his first trial, Lee would be


convicted after a second trial in 1876 and executed the following March. By the end of the decade, Americans could see representations of Lee and Mormon leader Brigham Young in three different wax museums in Chicago. After multiple headline cover stories in *Harper’s Weekly*, front-page stories about the massacre also appeared in magazines such as *Thistleton’s Jolly Giant* and *The Independent* and repeatedly in newspapers like *The Chicago Tribune* and *The New York Times.*

Beyond magazines, and novels, performance also combined with news of the prosecution to create a narrative of Mountain Meadows for Americans to consume in the nineteenth century. During the 1880s theatres produced several anti-Mormon melodramas featuring the massacre as an element in depictions of the Mormon problem. The last indictment for the massacre was dropped in 1896 marking the end of official legal action for the massacre, but the story would continue to be resurrected in the popular press. As the U.S. Senate debated between 1904 and 1907 whether or not they would seat Reed Smoot, the elected Senator from Utah, the press again returned to stories of Mountain Meadows. Though the congressional hearings only briefly mentioned the massacre, the senators and other District of Columbia residents could read about Mountain Meadows in their morning paper and see depictions of it as they attended a

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Wild West Show for diversion in the evening.\textsuperscript{20} The Mountain Meadows Massacre became a significant feature of how many Americans saw Mormons.

For most Mormons, in contrast, the massacre was a horrific aberration of Mormon history. Mormons had lived through persecution that pushed them west over the frontier to settle in the desert. They did not see themselves collectively as persecutors. Rather, they saw the individual perpetrators of the massacre as murderers or did not recognize Mormon participation. Yet most nineteenth-century Americans did not see the Mountain Meadows Massacre as an exception to otherwise good Mormon citizenship. Non-Mormons did not consider the massacre a tragic convergence of circumstances, decisions and personalities; the narrative crafted around the massacre worked to assure Americans that their prior suspicions about the Mormons were correct. As the main character in one anti-Mormon melodrama dramatically declared, “Murder an’ massacretion” was just what the Mormons did.\textsuperscript{21}

The growing sensational story of the massacre catalogued a multitude of nineteenth-century Mormon sins—specific points where Mormons were perceived to transgress the limits of civilization. As such, the Mountain Meadows Massacre narrative is better understood as a part of the larger “Mormon Question.” The massacre played a notable role as Mormons battled for complete enfranchisement in the American citizenship conflicts of the nineteenth century. The search for punishment was never wholly concerned with the prosecution of the individual massacre participants. In the same way as the citizens of Los Angeles united together in their opposition to the massacre and polygamy, the religious affiliation of the white perpetrators was always primary to the investigators, lawyers, judges, and politicians who pushed forward the prosecution and the editors, journalists, authors and entertainers who publicised it. The sensational narrative of the massacre taught American readers and audiences that such behaviour was not singular, but represented the greater whole of Mormon sin.


\textsuperscript{21} Captain Jack Crawford, \textit{Fonda; Or, The Trapper’s Dream}, 1888.
The prosecution for the massacre lasted for nearly forty years. In all that time only one individual was brought to trial. This project began as an attempt to fill a historical lacuna of understanding John D. Lee’s two trials. In evaluating the court records it quickly became clear that despite prior historical analyses, this was not just a narrative about John D. Lee, and the project expanded. For this thesis, four specific tropes powerfully emerged in the initial stages of documentary analysis of the official investigation by federal appointees—principally in the legal action leading to prosecution and John D. Lee’s first trial which though briefly mentioned by a number of historians had never been adequately interrogated. Similarly, though many historians had previously waded through much of the sensational press of the massacre, trying to construct a complete history of the meadows, most disregarded popular perception in their search to uncover the veracity of the event (or unwittingly used elements of the popular narrative as accurate representations of the event). What people believed to be true—no matter how outlandish—was significant. The themes that pervade the court records significantly align with the proliferating popular press accounts of the massacre. The official investigation and prosecution was clearly connected to the enduring popular attention to the massacre—a story that would continue to flourish long after the prosecution ended.

In individual chapters this project examines those four tropes of Mormon sin highlighted by the Mountain Meadows narrative in American sources: repudiated whiteness, hyper-savagery, relinquished manhood, and despotic theocracy. These were generally not themes about individual Mormons, but rather about the Mormon community as a whole. The themes all closely fit with a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American conception of civilization. Chapter one will address the contested racial identity of the Mormons, its role in the prosecution and the popular massacre narrative, and the larger Mormon question in regard to American expansion. Chapter two examines the perception of the Mormon relationship with American Indians, claims to Mormon savagery and violence prior to and during the prosecution, and how those claims evolved in the wake of the massacre. Chapter three evaluates the centrality of manhood to the prevailing discourse on civilization, that discourse’s specific role in the prosecution for the massacre, and the growth of a popular narrative both highlighting
the failings of Mormon men and also opening the possibility for Mormon redemption. In particular, it will address the role of manhood and redemption in John D. Lee’s path to execution. The fourth chapter addresses the function of theocracy in the story of Mountain Meadows, the incrimination of Brigham Young in the massacre narrative, its change over time from rumour and innuendo to a generally accepted narrative of guilt for Young, and how authors used the massacre narrative to critique the Mormon theocracy. The epilogue will address the most recent resurgence of attention to the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

Examining the official and popular sources that constructed the massacre discourse for Americans establishes the relationship between the official investigation and prosecution for the massacre and a growing popular narrative that would spin around the historical event. Official sources include voluminous correspondence, reports, affidavits, and requests for action on the part of the federal government that came through official channels in the investigation and prosecution, in addition to extensive court records over almost forty years. The correspondence and reports detail some of the growing rumours surrounding the massacre and the Mormons as well as confirming details of the event. The court records include the exertions of federal judges, grand jury activities, indictments, arrest warrants, subpoenas, the extensive trial transcripts for two court trials, appeals, and dismissals. The transcripts of John D. Lee’s first trial are a precious cache of source material. Attempting to collect all the extant legal documents created a collection of almost five thousand pages that have been investigated in full. This work is not intended to be a legal analysis of the prosecution for the Mountain Meadows Massacre—that should be the work of legal scholars. However,

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22 As general editor of the forthcoming *Mountain Meadows Massacre Legal Papers*, my team and I worked to gather and prepare a complete history of the official investigation and prosecution for the massacre from 1857 to 1890 by searching archives across the United States. Sources were found in a wide swath of repositories, but a considerable segment of the records were found in Utah State Archives in Salt Lake City, Utah; the local state repository at the Southern Utah University, Cedar City, Utah; the United States National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. and College Park, Maryland; and the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. The effort worked to be comprehensive while acknowledging the limitations in definitive claims. Janiece Johnson, general editor, *Mountain Meadows Massacre Legal Papers*, MS in author’s possession.
by thoroughly evaluating the legal record alongside the stories that were told about the massacre this work seeks to better understand the narrative that surged out of this single event, that narrative’s relationship to the larger American social and political context, and to further understand how Americans created and policed the boundaries of civilization.

This work further relies on an abundance of popular sources collected and evaluated to supplement the history of the official legal investigation. Popular sources include: political cartoons, newspaper articles, sensational novels, memoirs, histories, anti-Mormon entertainment, and lectures.23 Hundreds of examples were gathered using extensive archival collections at the LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah and Brigham Young University’s L. Tom Perry Special Collections in the Harold B. Lee Library in Provo, Utah in addition to available Internet newspaper and magazine archives. The British Library also provided an extensive collection of obscure anti-Mormon novels and Mountain Meadows fiction, though rarely catalogued as such. These sources span the period from the late 1850s to the 1930s demonstrating change over time.

To confirm the widespread coverage of Mountain Meadows and popular participation in the construction of the narrative, this project works to analyse this wide swathe of sources from across what would become the United States—territories and states, small towns and large cities, sparse frontier settlements and burgeoning urban centres. The goal is not to argue that the narrative was quantifiably the same from place to place or region to region, but to create a sense of the narrative as a whole and its relationship to the larger American discourse of civilization. The crusade against Mormon polygamy and theocracy provide an essential backdrop; both were often

23 In an attempt to be thorough, I have searched popular newspaper archives stretching from California to Maine looking for potential regional differences as I worked to understand the widespread popular narrative. I have worked to include sources from different regions of the country, though New York, Chicago, California, and Utah are most widely represented. The sensational novels, memoirs, histories, anti-Mormon melodramas, and lectures were published and performed across the country.
intertwined with the massacre in the nineteenth-century American press.\(^2^4\) Moreover, the newspaper archive of the British Library has allowed the examination of seventy-five British news articles on the massacre for purpose of comparison. Many of the pieces were published in both the United States and in Britain. Though American authors often used the language of Americanness to exclude Mormons, British accounts suggest that this was not a uniquely American phenomenon—the discourse of civilization spread beyond national boundaries reaching a trans-Atlantic world. (Image 2 replicates a political cartoon originally published on the front cover of Frank Leslie’s Illustrated; it was also published for a British anti-Mormon pamphlet Hell Upon Earth published in Exeter, England in 1884.\(^2^5\))

Despite the historical cleft between the event of the Mountain Meadows Massacre and some of the farfetched elements of the popular narrative, both worked together to create a larger story of the massacre for Americans. The investigation and prosecution of the massacre at times uncovered the facts of the affair and at times built on a larger sensational narrative of Mormon transgressions. Over time it became difficult to separate history from the popular discourse that swirled around the massacre; this work is not most concerned with teasing out every historical or theological claim made about the massacre or the Mormons. Nor does it centre on the Mormon response to the discourse. The perception of the massacre became reality for many Americans. As news of the massacre spread, the massacre narrative was simultaneously constructed; it was often more dependent on larger perceptions of Mormons breaching civilization’s limits than actual evidence from the massacre. The discourse of civilization in America was pervasive throughout the last half of the


nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. A number of scholars including David Axeen, George Stocking, Jr., Nancy Cott, and Gail Bederman have examined
concepts of civilization through the lenses of gender, war, anthropology, and race. Discourse is a prevailing set of structural ideals motivating and shaping society over time. It is never constructed with exactness; by definition discourse is adaptable and at times paradoxical claims can be made using the same overarching discourse. The fluidity of the discourse in this context enabled it to be protean in its applications providing space for counterhegemonic discourse of civilization in the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. As such, it yields insights into those Americans who created the discourse as well as the specific subject matter. As the analysis begins to demonstrate the discursive shape of the Mountain Meadows times paradoxical claims can be made using the same overarching discourse. The fluidity of the discourse in this context enabled it to be protean in its applications providing space for counterhegemonic narratives. The understanding of the majority of Americans created the hegemonic discourse of civilization in the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. As such, it yields insights into those narrative, we can better understand the American concerns that expanded the narrative over time.

The analysis of the official alongside the popular creates an illuminating microhistory that highlights the profound concerns many Americans detected in Mormonism—that which “lurked” behind polygamy and might violently erupt. Sometimes the goals were vague anti-Mormonism or meeting a popular clamour for violent and salacious tales, but generally the massacre narrative became a tool sensationally deployed in an attempt to reach a wide variety of goals. Evaluating the role


of the massacre within the American perception of Mormons helps us to better understand the battle for American citizenship in the latter half of the nineteenth century and to understand the “Mormon Problem” more wholly. Furthermore it enables a more complete understanding of why the Mountain Meadows Massacre was a consistent stumbling block to full enfranchisement and acceptance of Mormons as Americans and begins to yield insight into why, for some, the Mountain Meadows Massacre continues to be used as a tool emblematic of the problematic potential of Mormonism.

Historiography

This thesis engages with and contributes to several distinct fields of historical scholarship and lenses of inquiry. It draws on works on North American violence, the American West, American religious minorities, freedom of religion, gender, race, and citizenship. Though the history of the Mountain Meadows Massacre can fit into a narrative of four centuries of violence on the North American continent, the way in which the story of Mountain Meadows was told requires a variety of intersections of scholarship. Understanding the context that shaped the general narrative of the massacre over time is critical in understanding the role of the massacre in the larger perception of the Mormons and ideas about American citizenship and civilization. In the narrow field of Mormon History, a host of books on the perception of Mormons and America’s “Mormon Problem” has consistently mentioned the massacre without working to understand its role in that larger perception. Moreover, amongst manifold Mountain Meadows Massacre books none has moved beyond the contested details of the event to recognize the enduring power of the sensationalized story of the massacre as it grew in the fertile debates over American citizenship in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
Violence in American history is almost ubiquitous with a wide spectrum from the personal to state sponsored violence. Within the particular study of the American West the literature regarding violence is bifurcated. One side argues for the West as a wildly violent place fitting the mythic perception of the Wild West. Historians of the other perspective maintain that the reality of the West was much more placid involving more cooperation and work than the myth would suggest. The latter group does not agree for an absence of violence, but contends that the violence in the West was not exceptional—comparatively it was similar to violence in other parts of the United States. There is no scholarly consensus as to the historical reality, but the perception of the West as a violent place is clear. The perception of the Wild West grew simultaneously with the expansion of the American West.

Though it has not yet been adequately addressed a connection between Mormonism and violence also developed in the popular mind during the nineteenth century before the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Later chapters will begin to examine this perception of Mormon violence and its relationship to Mountain Meadows, as well

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as explore whether or not Mountain Meadows can arguably be considered as one of the times when “myth and reality” of violence in the West “intersected.”\textsuperscript{32} Mountain Meadows clearly fits within a narrative of bloodshed on the western frontier, however questions of citizenship complicated by race, religion, and gender both support and provide interesting intersections within the larger narrative.\textsuperscript{33}

The classic historiography of America’s post-bellum period defines Reconstruction as a Southern issue with the locus of its failure in racism. In 1971, Gustive Larson argued that the “Mormon Problem” was a part of Reconstruction, however this was not a widespread argument until more recently.\textsuperscript{34} Beginning with the turn of the twenty-first century a variety of different scholars broadened the narrative of the second half of the nineteenth century. Heather Cox Richardson argued that Reconstruction was not just a southern phenomenon, but the West played a critical role in “a new definition of what it meant to be American [which] developed from a heated debate over the proper relationship of a government to its citizens.”\textsuperscript{35} On this basis Richardson concludes that the Reconstruction period should be relabelled the “Era of Citizenship,” a time when American-ness and what made a true American was consistently at issue in this debate over who would be included in the remade nation.\textsuperscript{36} In recent years, historians have identified many significant aspects of this debate, such as the role of special interests versus the middle class, the role of black agency and racist ideologies, the role of nationalism and imperialism, and the role of religion to both re-


\textsuperscript{34} Mountain Meadows is not mentioned in Larson’s monograph. Gustive O. Larson, The “Americanization” of Utah for Statehood (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1971).

\textsuperscript{35} Heather Cox Richardson, West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2007), 1.

segregate and consolidate federal power to redefine religion.\textsuperscript{37} The analysis of the Mountain Meadows Massacre in this thesis is a further contribution to this larger project as historians continue to better understand a complicated period.

Race, class, and gender have proved central to this debate in the last decade of historiography—though religion has at times been absent. As Ariela Gross contends in her history of legal racial classification, there are two dimensions to citizenship: First, there is formal or legal citizenship determining who could be naturalized and secondly there is “full social and political membership in the polity.”\textsuperscript{38} Though Mormons were never systematically excluded from formal citizenship or suffrage as a whole, at times both elements of citizenship were denied to individual Mormons. Mormons did not have a coherent ancestral heritage, but the consistent American perception of Mormons in the nineteenth century shares many of the same elements as peoples linked by race or ethnicity.\textsuperscript{39} This work will also demonstrate that the Mormon experience shares many similarities with the Native American experience as well as African Americans and other marginalized racial groups in their search for citizenship and inclusion.\textsuperscript{40} Though ultimately offered suffrage and inclusion in varying degrees, it was a part of several


marginalized groups’ shared experience to find themselves outside definitions of Americanness in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as America worked to redefine itself. The Mormon Question stood at the convergence of many battling crosscurrents.

However, for many minority groups exclusion was not new. Jenny Franchot’s work interprets anti-Catholicism as an “imaginative category of discourse” that tested the limits of mainstream Protestantism.\(^{41}\) Different groups have consistently tested the limits of Americanness since the birth of the new nation. The many nineteenth-century parallels between Catholicism and Mormonism have been oft discussed. Furthermore Masons were similarly maligned for the impression of secrecy and conspiracy.\(^{42}\) As David Brion Davis argues, the perception of a common enemy has consistently offered solidarity to heterogeneous groups of Americans. Despite distinct rationales for the presumed conspiracies, the shape of response to conspiracy was consistently similar in form: nativist press, sensational exposés, and “countless fantasies of treason and mysterious criminality.”\(^{43}\)

Scandalous stories of compulsion, sexual deviance, and violence worked to alienate many marginalized groups in the popular American mind. The Mountain Meadows narrative reinforces much of this analysis—exposés of Mormon violence worked to demonstrate Mormon Otherness to many Americans, but Mormons were not exceptional in this regard. Tales of Indians capturing whites have a long history in

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North America.\textsuperscript{44} Accounts of black men raping white women expanded and grew without regard for evidence in the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{45} Reports of young girls entrapped by Catholic priests to serve out their lives in convents similarly scattered across the country.\textsuperscript{46} These narratives were published as sensational serials and their depictions of Others became normalized for many Americans. In similar fashion, the scandalous plots that spun from the Mountain Meadows Massacre painted Mormons in shocking crimson hues that many Americans thought to be too steeped in blood for the American flag. The stories that swirled around the violence at the meadows taught Americans that Mormons did not belong. More recently, historians have shown comparable efforts against a wide variety of groups, both classified as different for perceived racial differences or economic differences as well as their non-white Anglo-Saxon Protestant religion.

Despite the establishment clause of the Constitution, free practice of religion has been consistently contested over time in the United States and the law has frequently been a location to limit plurality. American clashes with non-white Anglo-Saxon Protestant religions have consistently resulted in limiting minority religious groups. In his monograph \textit{The Myth of American Religious Freedom}, David Sehat articulately argues that America has wholly subscribed to a three-fold myth regarding religious freedom: the myth of separation of church and state, American religious decline, and the idea of exceptional liberty. These three elements create a “narrative so ingrained in American consciousness that it has become an orthodoxy of sorts.”\textsuperscript{47} Mormons provide a significant foil to this orthodox civil belief of American religious freedom as did Catholics, Jews, Jehovah’s Witnesses and agnostics. With the Mormons, Sehat focuses

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{44} For a comprehensive analysis of Indian captivity narratives see Richard Slotkin, \textit{Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier} (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973).
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Ida B. Wells feverishly worked to dispel the myth of the “Negro rapist.” See Bederman, \textit{Manliness and Civilization}, 45-76.
  \item \textsuperscript{46} For salacious convent tales see Rebecca Reed, \textit{Veil of Fear: Nineteenth-Century Convent Tales} (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999) and Franchot, \textit{Roads to Rome}.
\end{itemize}
almost exclusively on the federal battles over polygamy, while the rhetoric surrounding the Mountain Meadows Massacre might further establish his argument that under disestablishment Protestants vigorously and sometimes violently fought to circumscribe their definitions of religion in an effort to protect American moral fibre. Mountain Meadows was used as a motivating example of how civilization might regress without proper boundaries. It was often a critical element in attempts to define or exclude Mormonism from the category of acceptable religion.\textsuperscript{48}

In the nineteenth century the category of Mormonism was consistently in flux. Mormons were often not even afforded the label religion; it took most of a century for Mormons to earn the label of a heretical religion.\textsuperscript{49} Examining a Florida religious freedom case study, Winifred Sullivan maintains that despite constitutional guarantees, freedom of religion is an impossibility.\textsuperscript{50} Sullivan argues that the perception of a need to limit religion—not just anything can be religion—and consistent subjectivity of definition will always problematize freedom of religion. Like amorphous standards for pornography—“I know it when I see it”—what is defined as religion will never be a circumscribed nor a static thing.\textsuperscript{51} The majority, those in power, will always define religion. The U.S. Attorneys prosecuting the Mountain Meadows Massacre used the category of religion as another way to exclude the Mormons.

Moreover, law is seen as a distinctive kind of discourse that is particularly privileged in the United States despite the interdependence between religion and law. Rather than law being immune from the vagaries of historical context, in an earlier study

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item 51 Justice Potter Stewart, concurring opinion in Jacobellis v. Ohio (1964).
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of Supreme Court decisions Sullivan contends that both religion and law are “structurally related and they construct each other.” Sullivan argues that is it more useful to think of church versus state cases as a religious majority (the Protestant hegemony) versus a religious minority. The state consistently reflected the view of the majority.\textsuperscript{52} Carole Weisbrod correspondingly proposes that rather than cases of church versus state, it is more accurate to see such cases as contests between competing ideas about religion “acted out in a court of law.”\textsuperscript{53} These arguments demonstrate further parallels to the Mormon experience.

In the prosecution for the Mountain Meadows Massacre the Latter-day Saints were not arguing that murder was within the scope of their religious freedom as citizens. Officially the LDS Church was not involved in either of John D. Lee’s trials for murder at Mountain Meadows. Nevertheless the U.S. Attorneys in Lee’s first trial pulled the LDS Church into the trial and used their arguments during the trial to firmly place the Mormon Church outside of civilization and beyond the boundaries of Americanness. The courtroom became a location to officially identify and gauge the breaches of Americanness by a minority religion. The prosecutors’ efforts worked with the popular press to create a narrative that utilized sensationalism to reinforce the Otherness of the Mormons. While Mormon exclusion through enforcement of anti-polygamy statues is well documented, analysis of the prosecution for Mountain Meadows demonstrates further ways that Mormons were excluded from complete citizenship. Moreover, by examining the relationship between the official investigation of and prosecution for the massacre and the popular narrative of the event, we can better understand the interrelatedness of law and culture as well as the power of perception and the manner in which it is constructed.


\textsuperscript{53} As cited in Mazur, \textit{The Americanization of Religious Minorities}, xvi.
Mormon History

In the past the distinctive social and religious make-up of Utah caused historians of the American West to often ignore the state. One historian labelled this the “donut phenomenon,” arguing, “there is a hole in the middle of [the] West where Utah and the Mormon story ought to go.” 

Ignoring Utah’s place within the history of the American West, as well as American History in general, offered an unbalanced view of the past and expanded inaccurate ideas of Mormon exceptionalism. The “donut phenomenon,” however, was not just a problem for historians of the American West; Mormon history has consistently been insular and moreover often proprietary, focusing only on the donut hole. Mormons make theological claims with their history and as such their history has always been highly contested space. In response to voluminous anti-Mormon works over at least a century, for many years Mormon historians—including many professional scholars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—followed in an apologist vein very closely focused on getting the narrative “right.” Claiming exceptionalism, Mormon historians too often miss the larger movements and trends that help us to better understand the place of Mormons in American history. The Mormon Question did not stand alone in the nineteenth century. Americans questioned everything: the Missouri Question, the Oregon Question, the Woman Question, the Indian Question, the Chinese Question, the Slavery Question and more. In the recent past a number of innovative scholars of Mormonism—Mormon and non-Mormon alike—less concerned with defensive strategies have begun to closely analyse the place of the Mormon Question in a larger American context. Their efforts are crucial precursors to this work. Yet while all have mentioned Mountain Meadows to some degree it has been a liminal issue.

Terryl Givens’ 1997 *Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* was the first extensive analysis of anti-Mormon popular literature. He categorizes most of it as fiction impersonating as history or memoir. Givens argues that the long

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history of antagonism towards Mormonism produced these popular fictions that evolved into myths. Rather than reflecting the reality of the Mormon experience, anti-Mormon fiction revealed cultural anxieties. For Givens, these critiques are always essentially religious and reveal the construction of Mormonism as a heresy. A cadre of scholars has built on Givens’ foundation. Though Givens mentions Mountain Meadows as a significant event in Mormon history, his analysis does not single out any aspect of Mountain Meadows in his sample of anti-Mormon literature. Moreover, the Mountain Meadows narrative demonstrates more Mormon transgressions than simply heresy.

Megan Sanborn Jones analyses the dramatic category of nineteenth-century anti-Mormonism in *Performing American Identity in Anti-Mormon Melodrama* (2009). Evaluating specific roles of the Mormon as rapist, murderer, and Turk she argues that these malfeasant Mormon characters enabled Americans to unify themselves against the Mormons while reifying cultural notions of gender and race. Jones offers only a brief analysis of Mountain Meadows as she focuses on murder as a consistent trope. While not all anti-Mormon melodramas focused specifically on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, Mormon murder and mayhem were enduring features of the genre.

In *The Mormon Menace* (2011), Patrick Mason addresses the late nineteenth-century violent turn of anti-Mormonism in the American South, examining how Mormons breached the South’s circumference of acceptability. The advance of Mormon missionaries exacerbated fears of polygamy. This fear separated Mormons from Southerners and at times resulted in violence. Mason argues that in the South, Mountain Meadows became “the most infamous example of Mormon tyranny.” The emigrants’ Arkansas roots likely intensified the response to the massacre in the South. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the massacre was specifically used on multiple occasions to incite violence against the Mormons—even four decades after the

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Though threats of vigilante violence against the Mormons came in response to Mountain Meadows in other parts of the country, particularly the West, these Southern acts of violence provide an extreme sample of reactions to the Mountain Meadows narrative.

Cristine Hutchison-Jones’s 2011 PhD dissertation examines the transitioning of Americans between “reviling” and “revering” the Mormons in the period 1890 to 2008. She recognizes the consistent place of Mountain Meadows within the imagery of Mormons perpetuating violence throughout the twentieth century and argues that the rhetoric softened over time. Hutchison-Jones maintains that by the middle of the twentieth century more pragmatic appraisals of Mountain Meadows began to enter American history as an element of frontier lore contributing to the larger myth of the American West. Such accounts might place Mountain Meadows in the context of frontier violence, Mormon persecution, or begin to see Mormons as individual actors rather than an amorphous and oppositional Other. Mountain Meadows sources beyond those included in Hutchinson-Jones’ sample only further supports her analysis.

Most recently, in “A Peculiar People”: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America (2012), J. Spencer Fluhman concisely analyses shifts in anti-Mormon thought as Protestant America sought to define the limits of the free enterprise of religion. Fluhman argues that anti-Mormon claims shifted throughout the nineteenth century from labelling the religion as fake to foreign to heretical. In contrast with Givens, Fluhman argues that it was a long hard fight for Mormonism to gain the position of a heretical religion: most nineteenth-century Americans would not afford Mormonism the label religion. While his categories are useful, within the Mountain

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59 Cristine Hutchison-Jones, “Reviling the Revering the Mormons: Defining American National Values, 1890-2008” (Boston University, 2011).

Meadows discourse examined in this thesis, they are more fluid over time than Fluhman argues.

Fluhman provides essential context for this project, but only mentions Mountain Meadows as an extreme—a “grisly” example providing “grist for these discursive mills” of anti-Mormonism—without any specific analysis. Similarly, historian Kathleen Flake notes that the massacre was merely “grist for the newspaper campaign” surrounding the contested seating of LDS Senator Reed Smoot; she asserts Mountain Meadows was not a significant part of the congressional hearings. Toward the end of the hearings Mountain Meadows was invoked in the Congressional debate on at least one occasion. Flake’s larger argument eloquently contends that the LDS Church and Progressive-era Protestants created a new model for the relationship between church and state during the fight to seat Utah elected U.S. Senator Reed Smoot. As Flake’s focus is the congressional debate and the broader ramifications of the outcome, the sensational attention to Mountain Meadows in the popular press is not part of her analysis. However, the manner in which the massacre narrative is used in the post-Smoot period supports her argument that anti-Mormonism transitioned to arguments of heresy rather than political subversion after the hearings.

For Sarah Barringer Gordon, the massacre pointed to the violence that “lurked” behind polygamy. The connection between polygamy and Mountain Meadows became

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61 Fluhman notes in his introduction that he would not cover the massacre because of the “richness and comprehensiveness of modern accounts of…the Mountain Meadows Massacre,” however no Mountain Meadows account has yet analysed the affect of Mountain Meadows on anti-Mormonism. Fluhman, A Peculiar People, 12.


“an old and well-worn story.” 65 In her monograph, The Mormon Question (2001), Gordon persuasively details the church and state battles of Utah Mormons and anti-polygamist crusaders between 1852 and 1890 and their relationship to the fight against slavery. She argues that Mormon polygamy generated a pivotal “constitutional conflict over the meaning and scope of liberty and democracy in the United States” and in the process redefined the establishment clause. 66 This fight over polygamy became a reconstruction in the West. While Gordon’s dense analysis is persuasive, her view does not extend beyond polygamy. Within her narrative, polygamy subsumes any other Mormon sin that might have separated Mormons from Americans. She mentions the role of the Mountain Meadows Massacre in propelling the polygamy prosecution forward without any discussion of how it was significant other than providing fodder for sensational reporters who saw violence behind polygamy.

For Gordon, the “vast quantities of ink and paper” devoted to polygamy demonstrate the centrality of “the Mormon question” to a wide spectrum of individuals. It spelled destruction for the Mormons. She claims that, “by 1860, anti-polygamy so overwhelmed other forms of political anti-Mormonism that it subsumed them almost entirely.” 67 Yet, was polygamy the origin of the clash with America or was it the lightening rod that attracted the surging electric charge? If so, then why did the focus on Mormonism continue long after the public disavowal of polygamy? Mormonism’s “excess of authority” is an omnipresent theme of Gordon’s narrative. Yet, in contrast to Todd Kerstetter’s God’s Country, Uncle Sam’s Land, for Gordon the autocratic theocracy is not the source of the Mormon problem. For Kerstetter theocracy was central to the Mormon conflict with America and made nineteenth-century Mormons more like the 1890 Lakota Ghost Dancers and the 1993 Branch Davidians as the government violently attempted to curb religious belief deemed too radical to be tolerated. 68 Gordon’s


68 Todd M Kerstetter, God’s Country, Uncle Sam’s Land: Faith and Conflict in the American West (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008).
account lacks the analysis of some of the earlier pre-polygamy Mormon conflicts that might temper her claim. If it was just polygamy, then why did so many still consider Mormonism a threat long after the practice of plural marriage died out within the LDS Church? What about that which “lurked” behind polygamy?

All of these works generally subscribe to R. Laurence Moore’s theory that by studying the margins we learn more about the centre. Moore argues that Mormons consistently “aroused opposition because they were so profoundly a part of the American scene.” By studying different dimensions of Mormon exclusion we learn more about America and Americanism as a whole. While almost all of these works mention Mountain Meadows as a recurrent theme of anti-Mormon criticism, many make assumptions about massacre rhetoric without examining its role in any depth. The massacre as a negative is considered a given, yet further analysis beyond the massacre’s role as grist in sensationalist nineteenth-century discourse is absent. The role of Mountain Meadows remains a significant blind spot in terms of the larger project of how American observers defined Mormons and, equally, of how notions of Americanism sought to cope with Mormonism.

The Mountain Meadows Massacre

The lack of incorporation of the Mountain Meadows narrative into the larger story of the Mormon Question cannot be explained by an absence of primary source material about the massacre. Print reports of the massacre garnered widespread attention in the press on both coasts and among competing Utah papers almost immediately. In the years that followed it the story of the massacre would spread

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across the nation. Furthermore, not long after the massacre, Mountain Meadows became a regular feature of a growing collection of anti-Mormon literature. Sarah Barringer Gordon argues that "stories of murderous bands of Mormon zealots...made good copy and added spice to the claim that behind polygamy lurked bloodshed." This "good copy" expanded and multiplied through the end of the nineteenth century and on into the early twentieth century. The reports range from the authentic to the spurious and clearly ridiculous. A few books and pamphlets were written specifically about the massacre itself after Lee’s execution and in the three decades that followed. Perhaps more significantly, a chapter on the Mountain Meadows became a consistent element in most anti-Mormon books, a number of works of fiction, lectures, and scores of anti-Mormon political cartoons throughout the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth century.


in Utah and then later that same year with a new title—*A Lady’s Life among the Mormons*.\(^73\) Thomas’s book-length treatise on the Mormons, *Rocky Mountain Saints*, was published in 1863 including a significant section on Mountain Meadows.\(^74\) In 1866, Catherine Van Valkenberg Waite, wife of a Utah Territorial Judge, published another exposé of the Mormons and included a chapter on the massacre.\(^75\) In 1874, for the first time Fanny Stenhouse included a chapter on the massacre in her once again newly titled book, *“Tell It All”: The Story of a Life’s Experience in Mormonism*.\(^76\) The following year a former wife of Brigham Young, Ann Eliza Young, would follow suit with her own exposé and similarly include a chapter on the massacre.\(^77\) These four sources built upon one another; furthermore each introduced their own unique elements into the narrative. Their stories of the Mormon massacre became more extensive and more widespread with each subsequent edition. Their accounts furthermore became a foundation for any number of anti-Mormon books and histories. Despite the prolific life of these four principal sources for Mountain Meadows, ultimately nothing would compare with John D. Lee’s autobiography edited and published by his attorney, William W. Bishop after Lee’s execution in 1877.\(^78\) Bishop was rewarded for his efforts with multiple editions.


\(^{75}\) Waite, *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem: Or, An Authentic History of Brigham Young, His Numerous Wives and Children*.

\(^{76}\) Fanny Stenhouse, *“Tell It All”: The Story of A Life’s Experience in Mormonism* (Hartford, CT: A. D. Worthington & Co., 1874).

\(^{77}\) Ann Eliza Young, *Wife No. 19; Or, The Story of a Life in Bondage, Being a Complete Expose of Mormonism, and Revealing the Sorrows, Sacrifices and Sufferings of Women in Polygamy, by Brigham Young’s Apostate Wife* (Chicago, IL: Dustin, Gilman & Co., 1875).

\(^{78}\) John Doyle Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled; Or, the Life and Confessions of Late Bishop, John D. Lee; (written by Himself) Embracing a History of Mormonism from Its Origin down to the Present Time, with an Exposition of the Secret History, Signs, Symbols and Crimes of the Mormon Church. Also the True History of the Horrible Butchery Known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre* (St. Louis, MO: Bryan, Brand & Co., 1877).
Further editions and summary pamphlets, likely unauthorized, also added to the circulation of this exposé. All of these sources will be later examined in more depth.

Following W.W. Bishop’s lead and the public desire for trial records, multiple individuals involved in Lee’s trials hoped to profit from their participation and worked to publish something on the massacre. U.S. Attorney Sumner Howard was compensated for his less-sensationalized version of Lee’s confession published in newspapers after Lee’s death. Judge Jacob Boreman intended to publish the trial proceedings in book form. He had the court stenographer’s shorthand notes re-transcribed into the complete transcript for publication along with specific commentary on the legal aspects of the case—but this desire for publication was never realised.\textsuperscript{79} Salt Lake Tribune reporter, Frederic Lockley published all of his writings on Lee’s first trial in a pamphlet, adding to the Tribune’s monetary gain from the trial.\textsuperscript{80} Moreover, Lockley used a boisterous commentary on the prosecution for the massacre as the backdrop to a piece of fiction he named “The Romance of a Suspender Buckler.”\textsuperscript{81}

Though many accounts presented as historical included many fictional and highly sensationalized elements, many novelists similarly saw the massacre as fertile ground for creative endeavours. A number of western novels included elements of the Mountain Meadows Massacre just as fictionalized narratives of the massacre also contributed to a number of anti-Mormon novels. At the centre of ’49 Gold Seeker of the Sierras is an heiress from St. Louis whose parents were supposedly murdered at Mountain

\textsuperscript{79} The transcription of the court reporter’s shorthand notes was a lengthy and costly process. It is possible that the time required inhibited the realisation of the attempt. But Boreman’s unrealised effort provides a major trial and massacre source. It is unknown what happened to the original transcript of the trial shorthand used for Lee’s appeal. Jacob S. Boreman, “Jacob S. Boreman Collection,” n.d., Huntington Library. Shorthand transcriber LaJean Purcell Carruth made complete new transcriptions of the shorthand for Janiece Johnson, general editor, Mountain Meadows Massacre Legal Papers, MS in author’s possession.

\textsuperscript{80} Frederic Lockley, “Lee’s Trial,” Salt Lake Tribune, 16 July 1875.

\textsuperscript{81} Frederic Lockley, “Romance of a Suspender Buckle,” n.d., Frederic Lockley Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
Meadows. In *Wild Life in the Far West* nine Mormon mule stealers were lynched in retribution for the “Green Meadows Massacre.” Though written before any Mountain Meadows indictments, coincidentally nine would be the same number of individuals originally indicted for the massacre. Anti-polygamy novels had already produced a new subgenre of American captivity tales in the form of Mormon captivity tales, Mountain Meadows easily fit into tales of kidnapping and polygamy. In a heroic tale of forty-niners in the California Gold Rush, in *The Lions of the Lord*, author Harry Wilson tells the story of a “romance within a romance” in the chapter on the Mormons—the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

Mountain Meadows had a prolific life in print and performance was lucrative in a similar fashion. The massacre carved a significant facet of popular anti-Mormon melodramas and Wild West shows in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. The 1870s anti-Mormon violent melodrama *The Danites* was already successful when playwright Arthur Rankin banked on the public fervour for Mountain Meadows after Lee’s 1877 execution. Passing out pamphlets he established a new context for his play—“deadly ambushes of emigrant travellers” similar to Mountain Meadows. The new version of the play continued for twenty years, reportedly earning Rankin $300,000 (more than 8 million in 2014 dollars). After the initial success, Rankin decided on

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83 James Hobbs, *Wild Life in the Far West; Personal Adventures of a Border Mountain Man. Comprising Hunting and Trapping Adventures with Kit Carson and Others; Captivity and Life among the Comanches; Services under Doniphan in the War with Mexico, and in the Mexican War against the French; Desperate Combats with Apaches, Grizzly Bears, Etc., Etc.* (Hartford, CT: Wiley, Waterman & Eaton, 1872).


85 Though lion of the Lord was a nickname for Brigham Young, in this novel the “Lions of the Lord” are the forty-niners. Harry Leon Wilson, *The Lions of the Lord. A Tale of the Old West* (Boston, MA: Lothrop Publishing Company, 1903); Harry Leon Wilson, *The Lions of the Lord* (London: Grant Richards, 1911).

another Mountain Meadows melodrama, titled 49. It was not quite as lucrative as *The Danites*, but it still played across the country through the 1880s.87

In the past many historians dismissed sensational literature for its association with cheap crime literature or discounted its power merely to titillation—crime for the sake of crime. More recently cultural historians, such as Daniel Cohen, Michael Trotti, Karen Halttunen, and Joy Wiltenberg have earnestly engaged sensational literature including execution sermons, crime literature, trial transcripts, gothic novels, and reports of murder to better understand the link of the sensational to popular perceptions of issues.88 The word sensational originated in the mid-nineteenth century, though the origins of the concept are rooted centuries earlier. The word reflected a goal of appealing to the emotions and the personal, not just opportunities to titillate. Examining the roots of sensationalist literature in the sixteenth century, Wiltenberg argues that over time sensational literature was a persuasive “means of interpreting breaches of social bonds.”89 A primary role of Mountain Meadows discourse became interpreting Mormon transgressions.

The rise of the penny press and the transformation of popular journalism began in the 1830s. Though attention to crime stories began a century earlier, coverage on the specific details of crimes became widespread after the turn of the nineteenth century. Replacing execution sermons, popular attention to reports of court trials proliferated including published trial transcripts and summaries in newspapers, pamphlets, books, and as the basis for many a successful novel. All of these elements converged with the growth of sensationalism through the latter half of the nineteenth century until it was, as


89 Wiltenburg, “True Crime.”
David Cohen maintains, in “full and lurid flower.” The convenient story of a Mormon massacre would mushroom alongside these developments.

Though many sensational crimes would pass quickly from popular consciousness, those that had enduring power demonstrated elements that captivated the public. In his case study of a Richmond, Virginia murder in 1885, Michael Trotti argues that those crimes that had particular staying power “struck a chord in the community.” The chord “resonat[ed] strongly enough to maintain a passionate public interest for months.” Within the story of the Mountain Meadows Massacre a number of chords converged: the obvious murder and violence were compounded with religion, race, and gender. Gender and violence were consistent themes of what Cohen labels the literature of legal romanticism that expanded throughout the nineteenth century. The basic elements of the Mountain Meadows story offered many opportunities for romantic (often gothic) expansion to further embed Mormon transgressions of civilization in popular American consciousness. The Mountain Meadows Massacre would continue to reverberate in popular literature for decades as sensationalism flourished and many authors embellished the foundational elements of the massacre into novels or other forms of “fiction masquerading as memoir or history.”

A comprehensive historical treatment of the massacre was not written until the mid-twentieth century. A massacre participant’s deathbed confession compelled Juanita Brooks, a Mormon schoolteacher in Southern Utah, to write the first scholarly analysis—contrary to a local sentiment that preferred to forget about southern Utah’s most notorious moment. In 1950 Stanford University Press published her monograph:

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The Mountain Meadows Massacre. She laid the foundation for all future narrative accounts of the massacre. At least ten other monographs have followed Brooks' lead and focused solely on the massacre, particularly since the turn of the twenty-first century. During the same time there has similarly been a new surge in anti-Mormon publications with a section on Mountain Meadows and new novels with the massacre as a backdrop. The epilogue will briefly examine the new surge of interest in Mountain Meadows.

In response to some of these accounts, beginning in 2001 the LDS Church demonstrated a willingness to examine the massacre in detail for the first time. With massive institutional support, two LDS Church historians and a Brigham Young University professor published Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy in 2008. The authors publicly announced the project at the Mormon History Association Meeting in 2002. Richard Turley, one of the authors and then managing director of the Church History Department for the LDS Church, called Mountain Meadows “the darkest chapter in Latter-day Saint history.” He proposed that, “candid evaluation of that tragedy can produce catharsis—a cleansing spiritual renewal among those who still feel the wounds from this mid-nineteenth century event.” He added that the authors

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(and presumably the larger institutional church) were "anxious to tell the story of the massacre fully and completely." Another historian suggested, that, "despite the suspicion and guilt that still linger[ed] among a few descendants on both sides [of the massacre], an environment now exists where honest inquiry can take place." It had been more than a century since any explicit LDS Church sponsored confrontation of Mountain Meadows.

Myriad chapters and articles supplement these Mountain Meadows monographs. The massacre is clearly still contested history as authors argue over many components of the chronology, motivations, and responsibility. Though newer accounts have built on Brooks’ narrative foundation considerably, all of these accounts follow her lead of creating a chronological narrative of the massacre. Though there is value in getting a complicated historical narrative right, greater contextualization might help further reveal why Mountain Meadows was notable beyond Utah Territory, why it was perceived differently than other similar nineteenth-century massacres, what role Mountain Meadows Massacre plays in the larger narrative of the American nineteenth century, and why, for some, the massacre remains consequential enough to continue to publish on Mountain Meadows. As an exception to the strict narrative histories, Edward Firmage and Richard Mangrum offer a brief but cogent and contextualized analysis of the


prosecution for Mountain Meadows within the larger context of “The War against Mormon Society” in their monograph Zion in the Courts.\(^{99}\)

Within these sources the history of the prosecution for the massacre is a significant historical gap. Most books on the massacre touch only lightly on John D. Lee’s prosecution—or focus on the perceived lack of prosecution of any others involved—with limited knowledge and analysis. Accounts of the trials differ from author to author with varying levels of accuracy and depth; most operate with very limited source material and minimal context. Such histories often rely strongly on contemporary newspaper accounts of the trial. News reports provide some of the actual narrative of the trial, along with some fascinating colour commentary. However news reports are limited in some degree: they mix up facts, accidentally misquote, misunderstand key issues, and exhibit biases from a variety of angles. They are particularly limited when used exclusively as recitation of fact. Newspapers make a noteworthy contribution to the understanding of the prosecution, but by themselves they do not provide a complete and balanced picture of the trials. A comparison of the distinct versions of the trial transcripts combined with newspaper reports and official correspondence give the most complete version of the investigation and prosecution.\(^{100}\)

Most historical treatments revolve around John D. Lee, the only massacre participant ever brought to trial, and a quick summary of his two trials, creating Lee-centric narratives of the investigation and prosecution.\(^{101}\) While Lee’s role is central to the prosecution, it is only one facet of the story. The investigation and prosecution for Mountain Meadows chronicles an almost forty-year history—from early massacre

\(^{99}\) Firmage and Mangrum, Zion in the Courts, 247–248.


\(^{101}\) This is briefly covered in somewhere between a low of two paragraphs and a high of nineteen pages.
reports to the dismissal of the last indictment in February 1896. Attorney Robert Briggs is the only author who has provided any more extended analysis of John D. Lee’s first trial. Though Briggs’s recent treatment addresses a gap in the scholarship, it lacks much of the source material that could provide a more complete understanding. Admittedly, until the forthcoming *Mountain Meadows Massacre Legal Papers* is published the knowledge base will remain supremely scattered and unwieldy for any historian only briefly considering the prosecution for the massacre.

One of the greatest analytical difficulties of understanding the aftermath of the massacre is recognizing and processing the many events that occurred concurrently, and not succumbing to the temptation to place the massacre prosecution in a vacuum. Historian Annie Hyde maintains that the mid-nineteenth century in America was “a moment of utter chaos.” Different outside forces contributed to both the massacre and the investigation and prosecution for the massacre—they were distinctly different phenomena. A variety of relevant issues and situations—including the surging popular narrative—always complicated the massacre prosecution. The outside chaos always affected the process. In closely examining the relationship between the prosecution for the massacre and the popular story of the massacre it is possible to better understand the significance of a notorious moment in Mormon history and the Americans who told its story.

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102 No action was ever taken on several of the indictments. The dismissal of John M. Higbee’s indictment was the final action taken on any Mountain Meadows indictment; that dismissal occurred in February 1896, just after Utah statehood.


104 Johnson, *Mountain Meadows Massacre Legal Papers*.

Chapter 1

“The White Hell-hounds”:
The Racialization of Atrocity

On the campaign trail in July 1857, U.S. Presidential candidate Stephen Douglas addressed the Mormon Problem. He proclaimed that once “authentic evidence” against the Mormons appeared and if it “establish[ed] the facts which [were] believed to exist” then it would “become the duty of Congress to apply the knife and cut out this loathsome, disgusting ulcer.” After applause he concluded that, “No temporizing policy—no half way measures will then answer.” Douglas used the Mormons as a distraction as he attempted to tread a middle ground between the North and the South in the tense years immediately before the Civil War and broaden his base of political support. Earlier he had defended the Mormons claiming they merely participated in “peculiar practices:” now he played into the current popular fervour against the community in an attempt to bolster his flailing campaign. Douglas’s political manoeuvring was not original; as he spoke, a large contingent of U.S. Army troops was on the march to Utah Territory to quell the Mormons that U.S. President James Buchanan had declared to be in rebellion.

The Mountain Meadows Massacre on 11 September 1857 came two months after the Douglas speech. Mormon involvement in the massacre fuelled the already burning fires of anti-Mormonism. Some Americans would see the massacre as the

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1 Stephen Arnold Douglas, Remarks of the Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, on Kansas, Utah, and the Dred Scott Decision (Chicago, IL: The Daily Times Book and Job Office, 1857). The Supreme Court had just handed down a decision in Dred Scot v. Sandford (1857) denying African-American eligibility for citizenship and ensuring the expansion of slavery into the territories, the Dred Scott decision furthermore denied the power of the federal government to circumscribe the rights of slaveholders moving their slaves through free states. The decision had many ramifications including nullifying the Kansas-Nebraska act—Douglas’s prior stand on popular sovereignty.

“authentic evidence” of which Douglas spoke—evidence that justified action to cut out what Douglas so vividly described as the “ulcer” of Mormonism. This chapter will examine the significant tropes of distinction—like Douglas’ “ulcer”—that resulted in the racialization of the Mormon people in the massacre prosecution and the Mountain Meadows narrative. Analysing the concerted focus on the whiteness or non-whiteness of the Mormons as part of the dispute over their contested citizenship, it will evaluate how debates over Mormon race shaped the prosecution for the massacre and reinforced American ideals of expansion, empire, and exclusion with claims of Mormon foreignness and their rejection of civilization. Furthermore, it will examine ironically how the theme of racialization simultaneously opened the way for Mormon redemption. Notwithstanding the American origin of the LDS Church, how Mormons might be categorized was still very much in flux in the latter half of the nineteenth century. For some, these were not Americans valiantly conquering the West; they were an alterity—an Other. America was still deciding how to behave towards these Others.

In the first federal action against the Mormons President Buchanan dispatched the federal army to Utah in May 1857 after hearing reports of Mormon tyranny and rebellion from absconding federal judges. He acted against the advice of his cabinet and was determined to prove popular sovereignty did not absolve Mormon accountability. More than a year passed before the federal troops on their Utah Expedition entered the Salt Lake Valley. The federal occupation of Utah from May 1857 to June 1858, dubbed by historians as the Utah War, was a largely bloodless standoff between the U.S. federal government and the Mormons on the eve of the Civil War—at the outbreak of war the Army’s largest detachment was still in Utah. Buchanan’s war did not excise the ulcer. As Spencer Fluhman argued, Buchanan only “applied the knife, awkwardly”; and the Mormon Question continued. Though the massacre occurred during this period, its exact connection to the Utah War has long


been contested.\(^5\) As troops compelled Utahns to accept federal appointees, the visitors to Utah began a new period of intense scrutiny of the Mormons and the Mormon Question.

Non-Mormon observers debated what should be done with the Mormons. Brevet Major James H. Carleton focused on the massacre as he came to Utah with the Army. Travelling through the Mountain Meadows on another assignment in spring 1859, Carleton and his military company were directed “to bury the bones of the victims of that terrible massacre.” They reburied the human remains and constructed a monument to the victims. While there, Carleton investigated the massacre on his own and created a special report for his superiors. Carleton acknowledged that his report was not customary—“I have made this Special Report, because the information here given . . . I thought to be of such grave importance it ought to be put permanently upon record . . . distinct from a report on the ordinary occurrences of a march.”\(^6\) On 1 July 1859, Carleton wrote another report including an appendix—“Some account of the Mormons in Utah.”\(^7\)

Though not part of his official duties, Carleton took it upon himself to expose the Mormons. Carleton’s “special report” became a widely used source for information on the massacre notwithstanding problematic assumptions and claims.\(^8\)

\(^5\) President Buchanan issued a pardon for all those involved in the Utah War. Though some thought that this included the massacre, there was no significant argument made to this end.


\(^7\) James Henry Carleton, “James H. Carleton to William W. Mackall,” 1 July 1859, Cover sheet and addendum to James H. Carleton, Report to Major W. W. Mackall, 1 July 1859, in Collected Material Concerning the Mountain Meadows Massacre, CHL.

To Carleton, “nearly the whole Mormon population, from Brigham Young down” was responsible for the massacre. Carleton argued that the Mormons were “an ulcer upon the body politic. An ulcer which needs more than cauterity to cure. It must have excision; complete and thorough extirpation.” As with Stephen Douglas’s imagery of a cancerous tumour, Carleton believed this ulcer was serious enough to require surgical excision. Within their chosen language mere palliative measures or restraints on the ulcer would not cure the ills Mormonism created for the nation. As Carleton forwarded his report to his major, he heightened his rhetoric again and demonstrated that rather than merely a hyperbolic assertion; he wanted to reinforce the necessity of Mormon extermination. He railed, “No exorcism but that of force will ever banish [the Mormons] from our midst. Give them one year, no more.”

Though an extreme assessment, for Carleton the events at Mountain Meadows certified the need to end Mormonism, or at least exile the Mormons to somewhere where they could no longer damage civilization. As Carleton saw it, the expanding United States could not include the Mormons.

The use of the term “ulcer” was a graphic trope often calling for military action. The use of such images was part of a longstanding tradition of anti-Mormon rhetoric. It stood as a reminder to the Latter-day Saints of how they had been...
violently pushed across the country. In his oft-cited 1842 exposé of Mormonism, Mormon defector John Bennett argued, “Nothing short of an excision of the cancer of Mormonism will effect a cure of that absorbing delusion, and the strong arm of military power must perform the operation at the edge of the sword, point of the bayonet, and mouth of the cannon.”

The powerful metaphor of cancer would be parroted repeatedly—sometimes as an ulcer that could be cancer, but was not necessarily. In contrast to cancer, some ulcers could be healed. In the nineteenth century the presence of cancer was not certain without visual clues. Once the cancer was visually apparent, it was serious enough to require excision of the ulcer or tumour. The cancer imagery could be hyperbolic to attract attention, but for many non-Mormon Americans exile for the Mormons was not enough as civilization moved west. Even as hyperbole the cancer metaphor justified further—perhaps even drastic—action against the Mormons.

Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs had attempted the extreme with his 1838 Extermination Order—“the Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the state if necessary for the public peace—their outrages are beyond all description.” Boggs and the Missourians had violently expelled the Latter-day Saints from their state. Just six years later, after originally welcoming the Mormons, an Illinois militia and citizen mob killed Joseph Smith, Jr.—the first Mormon prophet—and pushed the Mormons from their state. The Mormons then self-selected themselves for exile by moving beyond the borders of the United States. But tensions persisted after the Mormons’ move to Utah—clearly geographical separation was not enough. It only intensified the Otherness of the Mormons.

For some Americans, legal manoeuvres would never be enough to quell the Mormons. Violence often engendered violence, and the Mountain Meadows narrative

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12 John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints; Or, An Expose of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston, MA: Leland and Whiting, 1842), 151.

13 Missouri Governor (Boggs), *Governor’s Message [To the Senate and House of Representatives]*. ([Jefferson]: [Calvin Gunn], 1838).
was often used to promote a violent response to the Mormon Problem. In the South, Mountain Meadows became a rationale for several instances of vigilantism against Mormons in the latter-half of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{14} In his monograph \textit{God's Country, Uncle Sam's Land}, Todd Kerstetter cogently argues that faith and conflict in the American West often ended in violence.\textsuperscript{15} In this vein J. Spencer Fluhman argues that the Mormon expulsion was considered acceptable for the “fear of the Mormons’ tyrannical and violent potential.”\textsuperscript{16} Though ultimately legal channels would trump violence to contain the Mormons and Americanize them, the possibility of violence hung like a spectre over the Mormon Problem and the prosecution for the massacre.

Another Utah visitor, U.S. Army Surgeon Bartholow travelled with the Utah Expedition. On his journey he examined Utah not unlike an explorer detailing fascinating foreign populations. Alongside his descriptions of Utah’s fauna—grizzly bears and prairie dogs—he noted that the presence of unique \textit{homo sapiens} was the most important discovery. Bartholow noted that these humans were “most curious in every relation” and eagerly declared the creation of a new Mormon race. Polygamy had given birth to this new race and it was clearly evident in the physiognomy of the Mormons. Oriental polygamists were prepared for polygamy “as a recognized domestic institution for ages”; time had moulded Oriental polygamists to the practice—it was not degrading to them. In contrast, Bartholow asserted that Mormon women saw “their wide departure from the normal standard of Christian civilization.” For whites, Mormonism had the same effect as miscegenation.\textsuperscript{17} According to Bartholow’s rationale, the purity of their blood and therefore their race was devalued. Whites could not participate in such uncivilized behaviours without becoming degraded. Bartholow argued that, if left alone the Mormon race


\textsuperscript{15} Todd Kerstetter, \textit{God’s Country, Uncle Sam’s Land} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008).


would die out because polygamy was contrary to their original race—this racial dissonance would lead to Mormon destruction.\(^\text{18}\)

Though Bartholow’s work was widely published, the idea that Mormons constituted a new race was challenged. Some Americans would theorize and debate the possibility of Bartholow’s new Mormon race in official settings.\(^\text{19}\) Meanwhile some Mountain Meadows writers and politicians informally worked through a similar understanding of Mormon racial dissonance as they investigated Mountain Meadows and evaluated what should be done with the Mormons. Most did not go as far as Bartholow in making explicit declarations as to the existence of a new Mormon race (that would exterminate itself) nor as far as James Carleton (arguing the necessity of action to exterminate the Mormons). However their debates centred on where the Mormons fit—the racial classification of the Mormons. Polygamy was a possible example of the Mormon retreat from civilization, but for many the Mountain Meadows Massacre was concrete evidence of Mormon racial dissonance.\(^\text{20}\)

This nation-wide discussion asked what was to be done with the Mormons. Could legal efforts effectively reform the Mormons? Could the ulcer be healed? Or would something more drastic be required—did the ulcer need to be cut out? Race was a central concern for many of these Americans who obsessed about the progress of civilization in the latter-half of the nineteenth century. As Spencer Fluhman maintains, Mormonism was in the “vexed space between white and non-white in the American minds.”\(^\text{21}\) Americans were not entirely sure what to do with

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\(^\text{20}\) In a similar vein, Marta Erthman argues that the Mormons were guilty of race treason—for Erthman this includes the social treason of polygamy and the political treason of theocracy. Mountain Meadows expanded the narrative beyond polygamy and theocracy. Marta M. Erthman, “Race Treason: The Untold Story of America’s Ban on Polygamy,” *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law* 19:2 (2010): 287–366.

\(^\text{21}\) Fluhman, *A Peculiar People*, 120.
Mormonism and the massacre discourse became a place to work out this Mormon racial complexity. Prior to the flourishing of polygamy prosecutions in Utah (and to a lesser extent Mountain Meadows Massacre prosecutions), Mormons were not collectively disenfranchised, yet their worthiness for citizenship was consistently debated—could they be worthy of full social and political citizenship? Mormons were never a category of persons explicitly denied naturalization, as were Native Americans or African Americans, but nevertheless their full enfranchisement was consistently contested throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

In 1960, David Brion Davis argued that anti-Mormonism was part of a standard American fear of difference. In his seminal article “Some Themes in Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic and Anti-Mormon Literature,” followed by his classic collection of documents, Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present, Davis identifies a pervasive American fear of subversion and some of its manifestations. Davis includes Masons and Catholics with the Mormons—all three were frequently a target of conspiracy fears. Americans often found solidarity against a common foe, notwithstanding a frequent lack of evidence. Despite distinct derivations, the shape of the conspiracy was remarkably similar in form: nativist press, sensational exposés, and “countless fantasies of treason and mysterious criminality.” For Davis the Mormon Problem resulted from a contest over economic and political power of a group perceived to garner unquestionable allegiance from its followers. Catholics, Masons, and Mormons were only a few of those considered un-American or not suitable for full American citizenship during the nineteenth century. Richard Hofstadter in “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” similarly sees the nineteenth-century paranoia surrounding Mormons, Catholics, and Masons as a manifestation of a consistent trend in


American perceptions of conspiracy. More recently, historians have shown comparable suspicions and efforts at separation against a wide variety of deviation—both difference from white Anglo-Saxon Protestant religion, as well as perceived racial differences, gender, political or economic differences.

The question of race was one way that Americans classified Mormons. Numerous historians now persuasively argue that race is a fluid social construction, rather than a static biological determinant. As Historian Colin Kidd eloquently argues

race is "a realm not of objective science, but of a cultural subjectivity and creativity." The vast majority of American historians now convincingly argue that individuals construct race and those constructions evolve over time. In response to earlier scholarship that conflated race and skin colour, in the last twenty years a litany of monographs have begun to untangle these constructions. Grace Elizabeth Hale, David Roediger, and Matthew Frye Jacobsen define whiteness as colour or colours, rather than merely the absence of colour, examining the complexity of racial definitions and their central role in American history at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Mark Smith continues this historiographical trend as he details multi-sensory constructions of blackness in his brilliant and succinct monograph, How Race is Made.

Philip Deloria argues that “Americans—particularly white Americans—have been… fixated on defining themselves as a nation” and race has “been a characteristic American obsession.” Though the fixation was consistent, the historically constructed categories of race shift over time. Americans constructed categories of difference between racial groups to better order their experience—the categories were often contradictory and even paradoxical. As Grace Elizabeth Hale maintains race became a

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27 Kidd, Forging of Races, 7.


“crucial means of ordering a newly enlarged America.” 31 Hale specifically argues that the rupture in America caused by the Civil War initiated new categories of race. However the enlargement of America was not only through emancipation—western expansion also enlarged America and brought about new debates of citizenship. Western expansion was a central part of the enlargement of America and posed additional complications. 32 Since the Naturalization Act of 1790 “free white persons” had been eligible for American citizenship, although definitions of white changed over time. At the time of the act’s inception, the whiteness of Jews and Catholics was debated—though unlike the Mormons, both Jews and Catholics were traditionally members of fixed ethnic groups. 33 Over time this discussion of “free white persons” would expand to other immigrant groups. It would take nearly a century for the Irish and the Italians to be considered white. 34

The one-drop rule originated in the antebellum period. In contrast to earlier multiple mixed-race categories, blackness was then determined by the presence of any amount of African blood. Though not codified until the 1920s, the Civil War “accelerated” the concept, until it was the generally accepted manner to divide whites and blacks. 35 Expanding definitions of blackness gave whites from a wide variety of national and geographical backgrounds solidarity as they defined themselves against anyone labelled black in a strict black/white binary. In the period of flux before codification of the one-drop rule, legal inconsistencies were consistent. In 1857 Louisiana, for example, Alexina Morrison, a slave with “blue eyes and flaxen hair” sued

31 Grace Elizabeth Hale, Making Whiteness, 6.

32 Heather Cox Richardson, West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).


34 Jacobsen, Whiteness of a Different Color, 22–38.

her master James White for kidnapping and enslaving her—though her mother was also enslaved. In three consecutive trials Morrison’s attorneys convinced courts that she looked and behaved like a white woman as she interacted with other whites. The courts refused to rely on the testimony of White’s attorney’s “experts” who categorized Morrison as black, because she acted like she was white.36 A decade later in 1866 Michigan, William Dean’s right to vote had been challenged as a Native American. Michigan’s state constitution limited voting rights to “white male citizens of inhabitants, and certain civilized male inhabitants of Indian descent.”37 Dean’s representation argued that his lack of membership or participation in a specific tribe demonstrated his civilization. In contrast, after a physical examination the state determined that more important than any Native American tribal connection or estrangement, Dean was a part African—no more than one-sixteenth, but still African—even though he looked white. Despite his apparent “civility” and his personal claim on his Native Americanness, the state argued he should not be allowed to vote. In this instance, the court ruled that heritage trumped appearance, but the Supreme Court judge writing the majority opinion proposed legally extending whiteness so that anyone under one quarter black could be considered white.38 Race was never objectively determined. Even after the Civil War performance and appearance were key elements in determining citizenship.

The popular attention to the Mormon Question in the nineteenth century made Mormons prime candidates for categorization and racialization. The manner in which the massacre was classified became a way to signal difference from other similar events. The massacre moved some Americans to determine that Mormons were not white notwithstanding their appearance—they argued that their performance was more important than appearance or heritage. This strain of thought labelled Mormons with an alterity that exists outside whiteness. At times descriptions of Mormons appeared strikingly similar to those of blacks and other racialized groups—some pictorial

37 Kidd, Forging of Races, II. Emphasis added.
representations depicted Mormons similar to a variety of minorities.\(^{39}\) Within the massacre discourse the possibility that Mormons were not white became evident in claims to Mormon foreignness, yet there was a concurrent strain of the discourse that consistently focused on Mormons as whites. If Mormons were white, how could they kill other whites? This would lead some to the possibility that Mormons were whites who had rejected their whiteness. At times it could seem that the racial designation of Mormons was situational—it was more dependent on the context than any other single factor. Moreover, the discourse surrounding the massacre was never clearly and carefully delineated, often paradoxical claims worked in tandem to more forcefully emphasize Mormon Otherness.

An Unparalleled Atrocity

In August 1859 the new U.S. Indian Agent Jacob Forney described a “massacre of … unparalleled magnitude on American soil” to U.S. Indian Superintendent, Alfred Greenwood. Later in the same letter he reiterated that the massacre had “no parallel in American history for atrocity.”\(^{40}\) His annual report similarly pled that “a massacre of such unparalleled magnitude, on American soil, must sooner or later demand thorough investigation.”\(^{41}\) For Forney, it was the “white hell-hounds” that made this massacre different—though the “hell-hounds” were the individual whites that participated in the massacre, not the whole of the Mormon people. However, Forney was in the minority

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\(^{40}\) Jacob Forney, “Jacob Forney to Alfred B. Greenwood,” Aug. 1859, Messages of the President, Numbers 10 and 42, 211–21, 36th Congress, Papers Pertaining to the Territory of Utah, 1849–1870, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, NARA. See also SDoc 42, 75–80.

\(^{41}\) Jacob Forney, “Extract from Superintendent Forney’s Annual Report, of September 29, 1859,” Sept. 29, 1859, Messages of the President, Numbers 10 and 42, 241–46, 36th Congress, Papers Pertaining to the Territory of Utah, 1849–1870, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, NARA. See also SDoc 42, 87–89.
amongst federal officials. Many more antagonistic federal officials quickly made the jump from the individual participants of the massacre to action against Mormonism as a whole. Though his repetition may highlight Agent Forney’s limited vocabulary to describe the massacre as he used the same terms in multiple sources, he was not alone. There is surprisingly significant consistency in the chosen superlatives to classify the massacre no matter the source. It was described as “unparalleled,” the “most atrocious,” the “most perfidious act of cruelty,” or an act “never excelled in horribleness” amongst an extensive variety of Mountain Meadows sources—both official and popular.

Though there was some variety in the scope of comparison, this superlative categorization was often used to demonstrate the need for punishment. As the Los
Angeles Daily Star reported in 1857, “This is the foulest massacre which has ever been perpetrated on this route, and one which calls loudly for the active interposition of the Government.”

Writing to his superior officer in 1859, Brevet Major James Henry Carleton queried, “The question [of] how this crime that for hellish atrocity has no parallel in our history, can be adequately punished, often comes up, and [one] seeks in vain for an answer.”

Utah Second District Judge Jacob Boreman called it “one of the most cruel butcheries ever known to civilized society” in his charge to the grand jury in September 1874 as he urged them to bring charges against participants of the massacre. The consistent need to categorize the Mountain Meadows Massacre as something without an adequate horrific comparison highlights which facets of the massacre were perceived as the most egregious and how Americans fit the massacre and Mormons into a larger narrative.

A litany of Americans, both those in official positions and those writing in the popular press saw Mountain Meadows as a massacre without parallel within America. However, the nineteenth-century American frontier was replete with examples of massacres; they became almost commonplace. There were hundreds of smaller contemporary massacres throughout the country in the nineteenth century. Several other massacres left hundreds of dead in their wake: the 1846 Sacramento River Massacre (at least 175), the 1863 Utah Bear River Massacre (250), the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre (140), the 1870 Marias River Massacre (173), the 1871 Camp Grant or


Aravaipa Massacre (at least 100), and the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre (325). (All numbers of the dead are estimates.) Native Americans were virtually wiped out in a genocidal wave in nineteenth-century California. All these massacres involved white military or militias murdering Native Americans. During the Dakota War of 1862, Indians in Minnesota killed hundreds of whites. However the Sand Creek and Wounded Knee massacres were perhaps the only massacres to receive comparable contemporary nationwide attention to Mountain Meadows. The U.S. army killing Indians was at times considered to be a part of the forward march of civilization across the American continent; tribes of Indians killing whites was expected—perhaps as unavoidable collateral damage from the expansion of civilization. In the nineteenth century, Indian on white violence and white on Indian violence was almost expected.

Significantly, here Indians aided a white militia to kill other whites. Military or militias initiated many massacres. Yet, the popular narrative that was spun around the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the investigation, and prosecution essentially ignores any military component. Though a few images depicting the massacre exhibit what looks like a militia line formation (see image 3), a naval magazine is a singular example of a nineteenth-century account of the massacre that explicitly focuses on the local militia. Nevertheless, the egregious effect of Mormonism on society prefaced the analysis of the militia. Notwithstanding militia involvement, the narrative produced about Mountain Meadows did not see resemblance.

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Notwithstanding the numerical similarities between Mountain Meadows and other contemporary massacres, these Americans writing about the massacre saw no comparison. The tale of Mormons in league with Indians killing whites superseded any potential narrative of military atrocity. Without white Mormon participation the massacre might return to the multifarious mundane atrocities of the nineteenth century—it would simply be one further example of white or Indian violence. Moreover, some of those elements of the Mountain Meadows narrative that could have been used to highlight exceptionality, were ignored. Whites killing whites in nineteenth-century America was not rare, but using the label massacre when whites killed whites was a rarity. Whites did not collude with Indians to kill other whites in civilization. John Turner notes in his recent biography of Mormon leader Brigham Young, the Haun’s Mill Massacre—when a Missouri state militia killed seventeen Mormon men and boys in 1838—stands as perhaps one of the only other examples of a white militia killing other whites.54 However, predictably these authors did not see a comparison when the Mormons were victims rather than the perpetrators.

In a principal point of difference, Mountain Meadows deviated from the assumed racial make-up of nineteenth-century massacres, the Indians were not the principal aggressors nor were they victims. And perhaps more importantly, at Mountain Meadows white Mormons killed white Americans. Those atrocities labelled massacres did not include the sum of all nineteenth century violence. However, nor did authors see a comparison in either the contemporary Bleeding Kansas or America’s very bloody Civil War. The violence in turbulent Kansas (and in neighbouring Missouri) was consistent over a six-year period preceding the start of the Civil War, even if the actual number of deaths in Kansas was greatly exaggerated.55 However, the brutality of the Civil War did


not need to be exaggerated. And not a single Mountain Meadows source saw a
comparison in the violence of either Bleeding Kansas or the Civil War. Though the war
years saw a significant drop in the number of Mountain Meadows publications, the
decades that followed offered many opportunities for comparison that were
consistently ignored. This conspicuous absence further cements the perceived
Otherness of Mormons. Mountain Meadows was not simply understood as one of the
many political conflicts of the tumultuous 1850s and 60s—the Mormons were guilty of a
different kind of violence.

Additionally, most Mountain Meadows Massacre stories and histories emphasize
the lack of prosecution, arguing that only one individual, John D. Lee, ever came to trial
and Lee, the scapegoat, was the only one who ever paid the price for the massacre with
his life.56 However, out of a litany of contemporary massacres, Lee was likely the only
white man ever convicted and found guilty. He was most likely the only white man
executed for similar massacre involvement in the nineteenth century. The fact that any
white person was brought to trial, found guilty, and then executed was a complete
departure from other similar American massacres.

In contrast to most atrocities across the American West, the Mountain
Meadows Massacre was both investigated, prosecuted, and punished. Those prosecution
efforts stretched for nearly forty years after the massacre.57 No convictions of white
men came from any of the other similar nineteenth-century American massacres. (All

56 William Wise, Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Legend and a Monumental Crime
(New York, NY: Crowell, 1976), 243, 263; Will Bagley, Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and
the Massacre at Mountain Meadows (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 287–
306; Sally Denton, American Massacre: The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows, September 1857 (New

57 “Massacre of the Cheyenne Indians” in Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of
War, at the second session 38th Congress, Part 3, Serial Set Vol. No. 1214, Session Vol. No. 4,
38th Congress, 2nd Session, S. Rpt. 142 pt. 3, v. Larry McMurty, O What A Slaughter: Massacres in
Image 3. Depictions of the massacre revealed much about which elements of the Mountain Meadows story an author considered most important. This image was one of the few images that demonstrated the Mormons as a militia in a military formation. The flag appears to be a striped American flag, an element only mentioned in Prosecutor Carey’s opening argument in Lee’s first trial. Ann Eliza (Webb) Young, Wife No. 19; Or, the Story of a Life in Bondage, Being a Complete Exposé of Mormonism, and Revealing the Sorrows, Sacrifices and Sufferings of Women in Polygamy, by Ann Eliza Young, Brigham Young’s Apostate Wife. With Introductory Notes by John B. Gough and Mary A. Livermore (Hartford, CT: Dustin, Gilman & Co., 1875), 249.

Prosecutions in Kansas were also dropped.) After multiple investigations into the Sand Creek Massacre and the resignation of Colonel John Milton Chivington, the military denounced Chivington and his troops, but never acted to further punish those involved. After the Camp Grant Massacre, an Arizona grand jury indicted more than one hundred U.S. Army raiders and then U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant threatened to put the territory under martial law if there was no prosecution. The prosecution defiantly used the trial to enumerate Apache depredations and the jury acquitted all those indicted after nineteen minutes of deliberation. General Nelson Miles held an inquiry after the Wounded Knee Massacre and Colonel James W. Forsyth was dismissed without a formal court martial; however, he was soon


59 Ibid., 116.
reinstated.60 Comparatively, after the Dakota War in Minnesota 392 Dakota Indian raiders were brought to trial. Of those, 323 were convicted and 309 were sentenced to death—every single known Indian participant in the fighting. Against local sentiment and amidst threats of vigilantism, President Abraham Lincoln pardoned all but twenty-nine participants.61 Though a lack of legal action was the prevailing trend for most nineteenth century massacres, those prosecuted white soldiers fared significantly better than Indian combatants. Lee’s whiteness coupled with a conviction was a point of distinction. The questions of race and religion made Mountain Meadows stand as a singular atrocity in the panoply of nineteenth-century American violence.

After finishing his term as a U.S. Army teamster during the Utah occupation, James Lynch headed south to the Arizona territory looking for a new adventure. On his way he met up with Agent Jacob Forney travelling to southern Utah to retrieve the surviving children from the massacre. Rather than continuing to Arizona, Lynch and his companions helped Forney. After collecting the children, Lynch returned to Salt Lake City and there provided a statement of his experience. Two months later, he wrote a second more extreme account elevating his claims against the Mormons. His interaction with Federal Judge John Cradlebaugh possibly led to the initial changes in his account, but the changes continued to grow over time. Lynch’s role in retrieving the massacre survivors “marked some sort of turning point in his life, and thereafter he lost no chance to tell the story and plead their case.”62 His statements would be a source for many massacre accounts.63


61 Reilly, The Frontier Newspapers and the Coverage of the Plains Indian Wars, 11–16.

62 In 1893, at age 72 Lynch married Sarah Dunlap, one of the surviving children. He was 36 years her senior. Lynch would continue to make published statements regarding the massacre for years; his statements expanded with gripping embellishment over time. Lynch would later augment and expand his involvement with the returned survivor children, he dramatically returned them from the hands of the “damned” Mormons. (The children were already gathered and Lynch did not return to Arkansas with the children.) Moreover, tales of Lynch’s exploits later made their way into the accounts of others. Survivor Sallie Baker Mitchell remembered, “The way Captain Lynch and his soldiers found us was by going around among the Mormons in disguise. I got to know him riht [sic] well later on, and he used to slap his leg and laugh like anything, as he told how he said to those Mormons: ‘You let those children go, or I’ll blow you to purgatory.’” Sallie Baker Mitchell, “The Mountain
For Lynch, convicting the perpetrators of the massacre became a matter of American integrity. In his second statement he urgently pled with Americans, “no longer let us boast of our citizenship, freedom, or civilization.” It was the time for action. Following a pattern of hyperbolic language his great surprise was white involvement when “attending circumstances far exceed[ed] anything in cruelty that we have ever heard of or read of being perpetrated by savages.” The hyperbole emphasized that Mountain Meadows was not simply an Indian massacre even with Indian involvement. It was the Mormon involvement that prompted the necessity of swift punishment. In a flourish of millennial hope Lynch saw the possibility of the “dawn” of “a new state of things” where retribution and vengeance would come to the Mormons. Though Lynch’s statements were in the form of affidavits, the increasingly serious tone reflected his desires that his account would be disseminated and used to propel action against the Mormons. It was time to rid the world of “Mormon Avarice, fanaticism & cruelty.”

Similar to many authors here evaluated, Lynch’s religious affiliation is unknown. His angst concerning the Mormons could stem from a theological concern over moral boundary maintenance against a fake religion or it could be a purely political concern warning the American polity against subversive un-Americans. In many cases exact motivations are obscure and potentially complicated. Perhaps for some it was simpler. Captain Samuel Montgomery, an Arkansan serving in the Utah Expedition, forwarded Lynch’s second affidavit to fellow Arkansas native and U.S. Indian Superintendent Alfred Greenwood. Lynch’s affidavit encouraged him; he


hoped its contents and Greenwood’s symbiotic “interest and sympathy” for the murdered Arkansas citizens might make a difference, since, he declared, “We are all Sick of the mormons.”

Americans like Jacob Forney and James Lynch saw Mormons as white, but could not reconcile Mormon actions with their perceived whiteness. Massacre accounts repeatedly note astonishment that whites could be involved in such an event. The assumption that whites could not have killed other whites in civilization became a complex problem for Americans to understand. Savagery was expected from some groups, but Americans had to explain how Mormons, a people who looked white and capable of civilization, had regressed and turned back towards savagery rather than progressing forward with civilization. Within the narrative crafted around the Mountain Meadows Massacre this hyperbole of the greatest atrocity served a specific function—it suggested the possibility that Mormons were not capable of civilization and Americanisation. Notwithstanding appearances, race could be at the root of the atrocity. Perhaps, they were not white. Questions of whiteness and civilization were specific to determining where the Mormons fit in the American polity, if they fit at all.

Mormon Foreignness

In the second half of the nineteenth century, one of the epithets more frequently applied to Mormonism was that it was foreign. The accusation of foreignness was complex casuistry. Using considerable exaggeration, some federal officials would claim Utah was made of “nearly all” foreigners—a claim that did not

65 Ibid.


67 Fluhman, A Peculiar People, 103–126.
take into account any evidentiary support or any actual analysis of ancestry. 68

Intriguingly, mid-nineteenth century Mormons were in fact a more cohesive Anglo-Saxon group than at any later date. In 1870 at the zenith of nineteenth-century Utah immigration, a third of the Utah residents were foreign born—with more than half of that number English immigrants. The great influxes of Celtic immigrants into mid-nineteenth century America brought about a refinement of the term white excluding the Irish, however Anglo-Saxon or English immigrants were consistently considered white and worthy of American incorporation—perhaps, unless they were Mormon. 69

For James Carleton, the Mormon immigrants were “Welsh, English, Norwegians, Swedes, some Germans, and a few French.” 70 Carleton was mostly correct (there were also a significant number of Scottish and Swiss immigrants), yet most of these immigrants were understood to be white by the second half of the nineteenth century. 71 If they were potentially white, for Carleton they were “evidently of the lowest and most ignorant grade of the people in the several countries from whence they have come.” Yet other immigrant and racial groups equally offended Carleton. He took similar issue with the “peopling of the interior of our continent by our pig-tailed friends from the Celestial Empire!” 72 Neither the Mormon Other nor the Chinese Other was suitable for America. Similarly, Idaho Senator and strident anti-Mormon Aaron Cragin would later argue, “The Mormons, composed largely of unnaturalized foreigners, are the sworn and bitter enemies of the United States. They curse the Government and do everything in their power to frustrate its beneficent designs. They publicly defied its laws, and boast that they have

68 In the 1850 census almost half of New York City’s residents (45.7%) were foreign-born and more than half of Chicago’s residents (52%). In the same year there were 18% foreign-born residents in Utah, comparable to Middlesex Co., Massachusetts and Rensselaer Co., New York. http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab21.html

69 Jacobsen, Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race, 41–43.


71 In 1850 the high majority of immigrants were English, Canadian, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish. Interestingly Carleton did not note the dubious whiteness of the Irish immigrants. Richard D. Poll, Utah Historical Encyclopedia (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1994), 272–3.

violated them, and will continue to do so.”

Mormon Otherness would be clearly established, but into which racial category did they fit?

As the Utah Territory federal judges and individuals worked to move forward the investigation for the massacre corresponded with officials in Washington, they consistently attributed the number of foreigners in Utah as partial rationale for the Mormon Problem and in turn the massacre. For Judge Delana Eckles, the Mormons were “ignorant classes” of foreigners “whose want of intellectual culture, made them easy prey to [the] Mormon delusion.”

Todd Kerstetter astutely notes the potential class critique present in similar proclamations. This critique is also demonstrable in the consistent allegations that Mountain Meadows happened because of Mormon lust for wealth. Claims like prosecutor William Carey’s that the emigrant train was “the best equipped and richest train that had ever crossed the Rocky Mountains” implied Mormon greed was behind the massacre. The original source for this description was published in Carleton’s troublesome report. Though this train was likely not the Baker-Fancher wagon train massacred at Mountain Meadows, this single report would be repeated again and again. Foreignness, ignorance, and thievery were understood to go hand in glove.

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73 Cragin, Execution of the Laws in Utah, 18.
74 Eckels, “Delana R. Eckels to Lewis Cass.”
75 Kerstetter, God’s Country, Uncle Sam’s Land, 37. There is not yet an effectual example of class analysis of the Mormon Problem.
78 Carleton, Mountain Meadow Massacre...Special Report of the Mountain Meadow Massacre, by J. H. Carleton, Brevet Major, United States Army, Captain, First Dragoons.
79 Turley, “Problems with Mountain Meadows Massacre Sources.”
In broad hyperbolic strokes Judges Cradlebaugh and Boreman claimed that two-thirds of the Utah inhabitants were foreign. In multiple jury charges they argued that the supremely high influx of immigrants caused them to explain legal processes more cautiously inasmuch as those foreign born knew “almost nothing of American ideas and principles.”80 As he addressed the grand jury that would indict John D. Lee and other massacre participants Boreman posited “American law” should elevate society rather than dragging it down. He laboriously discussed his philosophy of law, “I make these and other remarks that would not be necessary in the States—but are necessary here because some two-thirds of the people of this Territory are of foreign birth or are the children of such, and have never been outside of the Territory.” Boreman then precisely echoed Cradlebaugh as he continued, “consequently [they] know almost nothing of American ideas and principles.”81 Stunningly, both Cradlebaugh and Boreman reinforced Mormon foreignness—Mormon Otherness—in contrast to proper Americans, when addressing grand juries made up of a majority of Mormons.

The racialization of the Mormons became manifest in action as John D. Lee’s first trial began. Judge Boreman and the U.S. Attorneys belaboured the issue of citizenship as they interviewed jurors for the first Mountain Meadows trial. The newly passed Poland Act placed Utah’s judiciary securely under federal control hoping to move forward both polygamy and Mountain Meadows prosecutions. One of the elements of the Poland Act shortened the residency requirement for jurors to six months in the territory, a stipulation that incorporated more miners and other long-term, but non-permanent residents of Utah, often non-Mormons, into the jury pool. At the same time, however the Poland Act also opened the possibility of including more “foreign” Mormons. To that end, the Poland Act added a stipulation that the juror must read and write English. The judge and prosecution took issue with the citizenship of multiple jurors during jury selection. In the course of voir dire two jurors were excluded for illiteracy. Mormons with immigrant parents were often rejected because the court challenged the naturalization of their parents. To demonstrate his citizenship, one potential juror argued that he had voted multiple

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80 Cradlebaugh, “Charge to the Grand Jury.”

times, and though he claimed to have lived in the United States since he was nine years old, he was rejected as a juror. The court argued, “We do not think it is sufficient evidence he is naturalized. A great many vote without their papers.” In another instance, a Mormon juror was rejected when the court judged as hearsay his memory of the naturalization of his father. As the jury selection wrapped up, the prosecution objected to yet another Mormon juror on the grounds that he was not naturalized. This time the potential juror had lived in Utah for fourteen years and testified of the judge who naturalized him. This juror was accepted, though only due to a lack of further challenges for the prosecution.

Terryl Givens argues that an element of “render[ing] the Mormon radically Other was a refusal to consider Mormons ‘white.’” Looking at sensationalist anti-Mormon fiction, Givens argues that, “Mormonism was simply not as accommodating to nativist paranoia as was Catholicism.” However, actual evidence did not seem to limit the utility of the accusations. Despite the lack of direct connection to foreign roots or power with the Mormons, logic did not need to be central to the discourse of civilization: paradoxes were viable within the larger narrative. Here the massacre provides an intriguing intersection of difference. Regardless of the reality that most Mormons were of Anglo-Saxon stock and most Americans considered Anglo-Saxons white, a claim of Mormon foreignness was one of many ways to demonstrate the incompatibility of Mormonism with American citizenship. Paradoxically, the focus on the foreignness of the Mormons would transition during Lee’s trial to centre on original Mormon whiteness and the Mormon rejection of that whiteness.

Whiteness and Empire

On 23 July 1875, U.S. Attorney William Carey opened the much-anticipated case against John D. Lee, the “butcher” of the Mountain Meadows, to a packed courtroom in Beaver, Utah, and to the larger United States via the newspapermen in

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82 Givens, Viper on the Hearth, 146.
83 Givens, Viper on the Hearth, 133.
Beaver was initially a Mormon settlement that had sustained a significant influx of miners in the late 1850s and a military presence as the U.S. Army built Fort Cameron in 1873. The recently relocated federal court tried Lee for murder in concert of action with nine others as participants in the massacre. This “most important criminal case” garnered widespread attention in the press across America, and among competing Utah papers. The press provided significant coverage of the trial and thereby shaped the public perception of the Mountain Meadows prosecution. The court gave the press choice seats near Marshal Maxwell.

The reporters quickly became fully engrossed in the trial at the beginning of the trial publishing trial transcripts (though only through the first three witnesses), additional massacre reports, and salacious additions to the story of the meadows. Philip Klingensmith’s testimony was broadly published. Many reporters also briefly summarized testimonies of other witnesses, few reported on all of the witnesses. Some of the press used the opportunity to once again recount the narrative of the massacre. A “former” wife of John D. Lee was on the witness list, but never summoned. Mrs. Theresa Phelps was married to Lee “five or six years after the massacre.” Clearly, the prosecution cast a wide net for witnesses, often with somewhat skewed perspectives and sensational information. Phelps was one of many who were subpoenaed but apparently not reputable enough to be called to testify. Several papers printed assertions from these “witnesses.” Others reported a


89 “The Beaver Trial,” Ogden Junction, 28 July 1875; Baskin introduced Phelps to Tribune reporter Frederic Lockley, disappointed that he could not use her “interesting story” as testimony. Lockley proceeded to publish her sensational account of the “honors” poured on Lee after the massacre including “being sealed to another wife”—“a dark eyed English
variety of spurious stories.90 Defence attorney William W. Bishop detailed, “The reporters for Associated Press and several specials are here, all busily engaged hunting items and manufacturing news when there is a scarcity of items.”91 The press was the medium through which the trial was initially broadcast across the country. The press ensured that a public with burgeoning enthusiasm for crime reports and legal trials could gorge on “the horrible romance of the Mountain Meadows Massacre…reawakened by the trial of John D. Lee.”92

In an emotionally charged opening argument, William Carey painted a vivid picture of a beleaguered group of “noble” emigrants who had been under a violent siege led by “whites and their Indian allies” for days. Miraculously, “a company [came] marching down under the stars and stripes”—apparently a company of Americans marching to their rescue. This flag “promise[d] protection” not for just anyone, but to those who had a “right to call for its protection.” The American emigrants had that right. For Carey, they “hailed [the flag] with joy because [the flag meant] relief.” It meant “life and liberty and rescue from the terrible savages who” surrounded them.93

Carey continued with the story of John D. Lee, the man who started out from the salvific company with a white flag—the “white flag of peace which is respected everywhere”—in both “civilized and savage nations.”94 For Carey, Lee was not American nor was he civilized; rather he was a Mormon and a traitor. He looked white and he looked American, but he would not provide the “promise[d]
protection.” John D. Lee divulged his true self as he negotiated away the emigrants’ arms and led men, women, and children to a cruel and horrific death.

Lee may have given the impression of being an American with his stars and stripes and his white skin, but for William Carey, Lee’s Mormon-ness stood in direct conflict with widely-held views of Americanness and civilization. Carey initially cued his audience with the story of “whites and their Indians allies.” Whites and Indians in league together signalled something amiss. Civilization and the savage were not allies, they stood in direct opposition to one another. Then came two flags—the American “stars and stripes” and the universal white flag. Flags were a critical sign in the prosecution’s strategy. The flags told Carey’s intended story. For Carey, the image of a deceptive traitor leading innocent “noble” Americans to their death powerfully demonstrated how he wanted the court and the watching country to classify Lee.

Interestingly, throughout the variety of contemporary accounts of the massacre before and during Lee’s trials, only Carey’s account introduced an American flag. The actual presence is not important, Carey’s use of the American stars and stripes spotlights the way that Carey wanted his larger audience to see both Lee and Mormons in general. Lee was not foreign born; he was an American born in Illinois to parents from Virginia and Tennessee. Carey’s argument constructed the Mormon Lee as one who had left Americanness and civilization. Lee looked American—his whiteness was as critical as presenting the American beacon of safety—the flag. For Carey, his countenance was counterfeit. The traitor maliciously presented the flag and then turned to savagely murder American emigrants. Despite his appearance and ethnic heritage, Lee was merely masquerading as an American—he was a Mormon. Carey argued that John D. Lee divulged his true identity as a traitor when he led men, women, and children to a cruel and horrific death. Focusing on the deception of the white Mormons in the “guise of friends”—he implied that the Mormons were more dangerous than those who demonstrated their place outside civilization with obvious signs of malicious intent. In Carey’s narrative, the Americans knew not to trust the Indians, but didn’t think white Mormons could be “planning the destruction of the whole company.” They assumed that “a man that talks as he does, a man that comes with that white flag of

95 Ibid., M287–288.
Far from merely religious outsiders, Carey depicted Mormons as antithetical to “Americanness” and civilization—they were a people who had repudiated their apparent whiteness. Rather than protecting their American brothers, “These white troops fire[d] and every white man [fell].” As the prosecution continued, they argued that the malicious treachery of John D. Lee was not the only problem at issue, it was a cipher for the larger danger of the whole of Mormonism. Prosecuting U.S. Attorney Robert Baskin argued, “When the facts were known by a civilized world—when they heard of the matter[,] they spoke of it as a most wonderful commentary, upon this system [Mormonism] which has led to this most infamous and unchristianlike slaughter.”

In the tale Carey wove, Salt Lake City appeared like an oasis in the desert—the “beautiful city gave them a promise of welcome, of protection.” However, as they travelled through the city and began their trek south, they were treated “worse than they had been treated by the Indians”—the citizens of Utah didn’t have the “common humanity” to feed the weary emigrants. Labelling Salt Lake City—the city of the Mormons—as an oasis tacitly focused on the duplicity of the Mormons. Appearances deceived. The powerful image of a Mormon traitor leading innocent “noble” Americans to their death might be problematic before the Mormon members of the jury, yet it clearly classified Lee and Mormons in general for the attentive American public. Mormonism’s danger was as much in its similarity as it was in its difference. Mormon whiteness did not guarantee civilization; perhaps the potential whiteness of Mormons was even more dangerous than easily identifiable foes.

Like those who initially investigated the massacre, the prosecution employed the vocabulary of the greatest atrocity to highlight the extent of Mormon treachery.

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96 Ibid., M319–23.
97 Ibid., M325–6.
100 Ibid., M272–274, M283–4.
To find applicable examples of horror within “the great crimes of history” the U.S. attorneys in Lee’s first trial straightaway moved beyond American examples in a massacre and war-filled nineteenth century.  

In his opening statement, U.S. Attorney Carey compared Mountain Meadows to the sixteenth century massacre of St. Bartholomew when Roman Catholics slaughtered thousands of Huguenots. Carey argued that the massacre occurred because of “the delusive doctrine that all the residents of France must be Catholic or Protestant.” The implication that Mormons were acting as Catholics was rhetorically powerful. Often Mormons and Catholics were similarly categorized as un-American and foreign powers rife with conspiracy. The two were seen in tandem attacking the foundation of American liberty. Moreover Carey implied that the Mormons would eventually slaughter those who would not convert.

The discourse would continue after Lee’s trials. After his short term as an Assistant U.S. Attorney, Baskin returned to private practice and continued to warn Americans of the dangers of Mormonism and he too turned to European history. At that point he considered the massacre “more atrocious than either the massacre of Glencoe or St. Bartholomew.” At Glencoe, a clan of Scottish highlanders worked to block unification of Scotland and England by refusing allegiance to the king in the late eighteenth century. Though part of a complex narrative, in the essentials the Jacobite McDonald clan offered shelter to Campbell soldiers who then exterminated the McDonalds. Some participants were tried with a charge of “murder under trust.” Scots law considered “murder under trust” more contemptible than straightforward murder. The example highlighted the savage nature of Mormon duplicity.

103 For examples of similar anti-Catholicism see Franchot, Roads to Rome, 102–106; Rebecca Reed, Veil of Fear: Nineteenth-Century Convent Tales (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999), vii–xxix.
105 Baskin, Reminiscences of Early Utah, 88.
Similarly, prolific massacre chronicler J. H. Beadle asserted that though Glencoe had elements worthy of comparison, it “pale[d] in comparison” to Mountain Meadows. The Mormon massacre was “scarcely equalled by aught in the old world.” There was not a real comparison in “the history of our English race.”

James Carleton, had previously argued that reforming Mormons was not possible, he wanted to give Mormons a year to leave the United States and then, “if after that they pollute our soil by their presence make literally Children of the Mist of them.” Carleton’s allusion was also Scottish. He pointed to the actions taken against the clan McGregor beginning in fifteenth century Scotland and was designed to encourage specific action to expel the Mormons. In 1646, Charles II labelled the clan McGregor “a traitorous band contrived in the north” against “God and country” and they were stripped of citizenship and exiled. The children of the mist entered the American consciousness via Sir Walter Scott and other novelists’ works published in the first half of the nineteenth century. Like the Scots who the English termed barbaric, the Mormons were comparatively considered unworthy of citizenship. For Carleton, their citizenship should be stripped and they should be exiled.

Repeatedly the only examples possibly offering similar comparison were found beyond American civilization. In his opening argument, Prosecutor Carey scoured French and Scottish history for initial comparisons, then transitioned to clearly non-white comparisons beyond the reach of civilization. Carey suggested that perhaps the “Black Hole of Calcutta” was a more apt comparison. In the alleged event “146 prisoners were enclosed in a room 23 foot square and before morning

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107 Beadle, Polygamy; Or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism, 180.
109 Privy Council Scotland, His Majesties Proclamation against a Traiterous Band Contrived in the North, Thomason Tracts (Edinburgh, Scotland: Evan Tyler, Printer to the Kings Most Excellent Majestie, 1646).
110 Sir Walter Scott’s 1819 novel The Legend of Montrose references the children of the mist. Sir Walter Scott Legend of Montrose (London: Constable & Co Ltd., 1819). Furthermore the children of the mist were the subject of other sources: an epic poem by Anne Turner The Children of the Mist, The Conqueror, and Other Poems (London: Lutz, 1827) and the play “Montrose; or The Children of the Mist” London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1822.
all but 23 of them were dead.”

John Howell’s late eighteenth century first person survivor account of the incident was so widely published that in the nineteenth century much of the western world understood the reference by simply mentioning “the Black Hole.” Howell’s tale claimed a similar number of dead in the Black Hole to the massacre at Mountain Meadows and most readers understood it as an uncivilized colonial population committing an atrocity on British citizens. Moreover, the false assurance the Indian captain provided in Howell’s account sounded quite similar to Lee’s promise to the emigrants that they would be safe—“He assured me on the word of a soldier, that no harm should come to me.”

Howell’s Black Hole narrative was politically used as a justification of British colonial subjugation of the Indian continent.

Carey was not innovating as he orientalized Mormonism, he was adding to an already prevalent tradition. Similarly, prolific author Frank Triplett argued that, “even to the fanatical emissaries of the Old Man of the Mountain, that chief of assassins and murderers, such wholesale butchery was unknown, and that so hideous a saturnalia of murder could occur within the borders of any country ruled by the Anglo-Norman race, almost surpasses belief.”

The comparison of the Muslim Crusades leader Rashid a-Din Sinan, known to westerners as the Old Man of the Mountain, correspondingly situated Mormonism outside American civilization because of an inability to perform as citizens. For Prosecutor Carey and author Triplett the massacre made Mormons not exactly like the “Hindoos,” but worse

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112 John Zephaniah Holwell, India Tracts by Mr. Holwell and Friends, (London: T. Becket and P. A. de Hondt, 1764), 221.


than the uncivilized “Hindoos.” They further focused Mountain Meadows discourse on the racial composition of Mormons and the prevalent question in the early investigation: were the Mormons white? The official and the popular discourse merged to ask if Mormons could join civilization. Then in turn, what would America do with those considered Others?

Furthermore, using “the symbol of the fall of Calcutta and the beginning of [the British] empire” Carey turned to the question of civilization and the responsibilities of empire building. The expansionist rhetoric most traditionally associated with the United States in the early twentieth century was already in place by the mid-nineteenth century. As the United States spread west, the question of empire was an inherent element of Manifest Destiny. By the last quarter of the century it was accepted that the United States of America would spread from sea to shining sea, but many questions remained unanswered: was the Pacific the limit of American expansion? Would this “empire of liberty” fill the whole of the Americas? How would Americans treat those they met in their attempt to spread civilization? What about the other empires now within America’s expanding borders?

The Mormon Question was also a question of empire. Nathan Oman has cogently connected the marriage debates around Mormon polygamy to British empire builders’ precedent set in India. As Oman argues, the British Raj in India provided an example for Americans seeking a model of how to deal with competing interests in an expanding America. Moreover, 1857 was also the year of the Indian Mutiny, which made the instructive nature of the discourse all the more powerful. Rumours that the British colonialists were attempting to subvert the religion of the Hindus and Muslims erupted violently in India in 1857. The extent of the popular uprising put England’s imperial intentions in doubt. For decades, the memory of the

116 Holwell, India Tracts by Mr. Holwell and Friends.


uprising gave the British momentum to consolidate power in India. These points of comparison central to massacre discourse would demonstrate that the Mormon Problem expanded beyond polygamy, at issue was the progress of American civilization. Would Americans be able to manage the Mormon Empire? Or was the massacre a prediction for future instability and greater insurrection? The Mountain Meadows narrative made the British model of empire more applicable to the U.S. context and advanced the imperative of federal action to quell the Mormons.

Curiously, Howell originally wrote his account of the Black Hole of Calcutta to demonstrate how civilized decisions could save an individual in even the direst of situations. He described how, despite their apparent civility, both Portuguese and British soldiers died in the Black Hole after focusing more on immediate relief rather than deleterious long term effects of those choices. Howell intended his narrative to be one to inspire civilized men to turn from their basest attributes and reach their civilized potential. Only later would the British engage the narrative to warrant imperial expansion. As some Americans questioned the position of Mormons within civilization, they wondered if Mormons had the capacity to rise to civilization in spite of their apparent rejection of it.

For the U.S. Attorneys, this regression ultimately made Mormons worse than any Asiatic or oriental counterparts. Returning to the Black Hole comparison, as Prosecutor Carey continued his argument he decided that it was likely that “the fiend who placed them [in the Black Hole] was not aware that [the] foul air would kill them before morning.” In a fascinating almost compassionate retooling of this highly politicized account, for Carey the Indian captain—though still “a fiend”—was merely guilty of a mistake. He did not realize more than a hundred soldiers would be dead by morning. In contrast, the end of the actions on the massacre field was certain to the white Mormon perpetrators. Therefore the Mormons were more accountable than Asiatics warring with British imperialists. Similarly, anti-Mormon writer Alfred Trumble later ranted to make the same point, "No history of a savage

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120 Holwell, *India Tracts by Mr. Holwell and Friends*; Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire*, 25.
African king, throned on the bodies of his slaughtered victims, is blackened by more shameful crimes than the chronicles of Mormonism, and no crime in Mormon records is more atrocious than” the Mountain Meadows Massacre.\footnote{121} Such behaviour was thought to be natural for a “savage African king,” however the original whiteness of the Mormons demonstrated damnable regression.

These sources consistently focused on the inability of whites, the English race, or Anglo-Saxon (or Anglo-Norman) blood to participate in such an atrocity—unlike their Indian or African American counterparts. Other authors saw civilization as an innate racial trait, the Mormon rejection of civilization through atrocity might exclude them from whiteness, regardless of any Anglo-Saxon heritage.\footnote{122} The Pacific Art Company’s pictorial history of Mountain Meadows argued that it seemed “almost too black a deed to be credited as the work of white men.”\footnote{123} Though whiteness was an unstable social category, the rhetoric was a central element to massacre discussions. At the end of Lee’s first trial Baskin rhetorically asked why the Mormons on the massacre field did not “assert their Anglo-Saxon blood” and refuse to participate in the massacre. He declared, “They disgraced the Anglo-Saxon stock to which they belonged and is a stigma upon it.”\footnote{124} Baskin further argued they gave up their whiteness—when they became Mormons they “became criminals.”\footnote{125} Yet their original whiteness still affected their behaviour—remnants of whiteness remained.

Within a post-Civil War understanding of race, a drop of black blood would classify someone as black. Conversely, without any black blood (or any African


\footnote{123} San Francisco Pacific Art Company, \textit{History of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, or the Butchery in Cold Blood of 134 Men, Women, and Children by Mormons and Indians, September 1857, Also a Full and Complete Account of the Trial, Confession and Execution of John D. Lee, the Leader of the Murderers.} (San Francisco, CA: Spaulding and Barto, Book and Job Printers, 1877), 10.

\footnote{124} Baskin, “Closing Argument,” M3073.

\footnote{125} Ibid.
heritage) someone could still be white. In spite of being culturally constructed with ambiguous borders, race was powerful. Baskin saw killing as an inherent characteristic of the Native American race; though there were a variety of different possibilities for explanations of Native American blood, it was clearly not white. In contrast, Baskin argued the white Mormons had to nerve “themselves up to the task of slaying women and children”—it took effort to go against the innate demands of one’s race. Unable to go against their race, the white Mormons imposed this task on the Indians. At this point in his argument, their whiteness made killing women and children untenable. Though their choice to enter Mormonism may have caused the Mormons to repudiate their race, their racial repudiation could only go so far. Their white blood could potentially rescue them. Unlike their native allies without the capacity to choose, here Baskin argued their white blood offered them agency. The discourse opened the way for Mormons to amend their transgressions and return to civilization. At different times and in different ways, other federal officials would similarly construe the initial Mountain Meadows legal proceedings as a potential avenue for Mormon redemption.

The narratives of the Black Hole of Calcutta and the Order of Assassins were both highly politicized and exaggerated events that were shaped to meet specific ends over centuries. In 1905 J. H. Little published the first critique of Howell’s narrative of the Black Hole of Calcutta—as Little called it, “a case study in the perpetuation of error.” Like the Black Hole of Calcutta and the Order of Assassins, many would attempt to shape the Mountain Meadows narrative to address their own concerns about the Mormons in civilization through popular and official sources. Americans were to spread civilization and help America reach its millennial destiny.

126 Kidd, Forging of Races, 1–18.
127 The killing of women and children would become a predictable point of contention in a variety of paradoxical ways by different individuals.
How would they deal with this minority Other within their borders? Would they subjugate the Mormons like the British did within their empire? For some, the racial dissonance exemplified at the Mountain Meadows put civilization at risk; decisive action was required to either tune the dissonance or eradicate it.

“They Ain’t Whites….They’re Mormons.”

After decades of increasingly severe congressional censures on the LDS Church and widespread prosecution of its people, LDS Church President Wilford Woodruff announced the Mormon public disavowal of polygamy in 1890. After the renunciation, Utah gained statehood in 1896 and some of the rhetoric surrounding polygamy softened. The official legal action for the massacre ended at Utah statehood. In contrast, the racialized Mountain Meadows narrative continued into the twentieth century as a part of the larger discourse of civilization popular sources perpetuated. In Jack London’s 1915 reincarnation novel The Star Rover (The Jacket in the UK), prison officers torture Darryl Standing, an imprisoned university professor, with a straightjacket that could be laced tight enough to induce severe angina. Standing learns that by putting himself into a trance he can escape the effects of the torture. While in his trances, he travels back through the stars to experience past lives. One of these past lives is that of the ten-year-old boy, Jesse Fancher, son of one of the leaders of the emigrant train murdered at Mountain Meadows—a boy quickly maturing to manhood.

Within the narrative, the Mormons and the Indians stand in the way of the emigrants making it to California—“the dream land, the myth land.” The adults that surround Jesse cannot see the truth about the Mormons, however Jesse the child sees past the Mormon deception. Jesse is told to be quiet when he says wants Laban, the epitome of Western manhood, to add Mormon scalps to the Indian scalps he

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133 London, *The Star Rover*. While Alexander Fancher was one of the emigrant train leaders, there was not a Jesse Fancher among the Fanchers in the emigrant train.
keeps on his belt. Jesse wishes he could go “gunning” for the Mormons when he
grows up. His parents only tell him to be quiet.\textsuperscript{134}

A little girl complains to her mother, “They’re white like us….Why don’t they come in to us?” In a straightforward expansion of William Carey’s opening argument in John D. Lee’s first trial, the little girl, like the adults in the narrative, did not understand why whites were there allied with the Indians, rather than helping them. The Americans expected whites to be Americans that would help them in their desperate need. Though wary of “the swoop of [his] mother’s hand” Jesse declares, “They ain’t whites….They’re Mormons.” His father says there must be good Mormons and bad Mormons, but Jesse reminds him, “We haven’t found any good ones so far.” For Jesse, there was only one category of Mormons.\textsuperscript{135} The whiteness of the Mormons only made them more dangerous because the emigrants had an expectation that they would come to their aid.

Notwithstanding their appearance of whiteness, the Mormons plotted against the emigrants. The Mormons made the emigrants wait until they were so desperate they would agree to give up under a flag of surrender. Only then did the adults begin to see the possibility of Mormon duplicity, the mother asked, “But what if they intend treachery?”—the Mormons have pushed them to the brink of destruction so that their options are either to starve to death or accept the possibility of a treacherous Mormon offer.

Jesse’s scalp wearing hero, Laban (pointedly the name of one of the major antagonists in the Book of Mormon narrative), repents of his antagonism towards the Indians declaring that “scalp wearin’ is a vain and heathen thing” when he knows his life is short. He prepares himself to meet his maker. Laban dreams of “Californy” where “everything grows large” only to meet his death by the Mormon militia firing squad.\textsuperscript{136} The Mormons murdered Laban, the embodiment of American manhood, and their annihilation extended from there. All became black to Standing’s vision as

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 129–130.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 135.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 152.
the boy Jesse died following two little girls running from the “white” Mormons and their Indian allies.

*The Star Rover* is a classic Jack London story. London was explicit in his obsession with American manhood and white civilization in both his fictional characters and his journalism. London often set up his manly characters in opposition to women, to men of colour, to foreign men. *The Star Rover* follows the same pattern: the manhood of the central character is established in opposition to other inferiors. Often manhood is established through battle or the ability to take a beating. In *The Star Rover*’s Mountain Meadows chapter Jack, the young boy, is transitioning to manhood. He interacts with his parents who are too trusting and Laban, the heroic and honestly faulted example of manhood ready to die in battle. Jack is unencumbered by the diplomacy of his parents and can see the Mormons for who they are. He admires the valiant Laban as he plunges into battle and prepares for a manly death. But Jack is most explicitly juxtaposed against the “damned Mormons.” Young and perceptive Jack offered the promise of America.

In London’s narrative, the Indian savages were initially seen as a stumbling block as civilization moved west to a California paradise representing a millennial hope. (Ironic, considering Standing is imprisoned in San Quentin Prison in California.) By the end of the chapter the adults, in the narrative and in London’s audience, learn the truth that the boy, Jack, already knew—the Mormons were the real threat. They looked white, but they were a threat to civilization. For London, whiteness alone was not enough. Manhood and independence additionally bolstered civilization. The Mormons had convinced America they were American enough to gain Utah statehood, but if Americans were to follow the Mormon lead Mormons would strip their manhood and they would be denied millennial civilization. Americans had given Mormons multiple opportunities to reform themselves and be redeemed in the sight of American civilization, but Mormons did not accept what was offered them.

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One of the fifty books a prolific London wrote in the last sixteen years of his life, *The Star Rover* was certainly not London’s most influential book—it sold just over thirty thousand copies the first year. However, it was popular enough that in 1923 it was made into a silent film. Its popularity continued to increase over time with a London biographer calling it a “cult classic.”\(^{140}\) Even after the official entrance of Utah and the Mormons into the Union, London and other novelists would continue to see the fictional potential of the Meadows and further contribute to the larger narrative of Mormon transgression. As in *Star Rover*, the question of whiteness was only one of the ways in which Mormons breached the boundaries of civilization. Mormons offended in multifarious ways.

More than a half a century earlier, in his influential treatise *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill noted the existence of a “*civilize*” against the Mormons.\(^{141}\) Though Mill wrote after the massacre, it was not yet a consistent element of the popular narrative that would be built regarding the massacre’s place in the Mormon Question as it was when London wrote. Mill specifically referred to the American legislative and popular press war on Mormon polygamy. Nevertheless the Mormon question as a whole could easily be recast as a *civilize*. The manner in which both the official and popular sources shaped the Mountain Meadows narrative demonstrated concerns about American civilization on many fronts, not just marriage or dubious whiteness. The racial question became only one of many Mormon transgressions against civilization. The ensuing chapters will further investigate the work of certain Americans to define and limit civilization by examining savagery, manhood, and theocracy as exemplified in the Mountain Meadows discourse.

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\(^{141}\) John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1859), 166.
Chapter 2

“Murder an’ Massacretion”: Mormon Savagery

In the 1878 United States Supreme Court Mormon polygamy test case
Reynolds v. United States, U.S. Attorney General Charles Devens finished his closing argument asserting that, if polygamy continued, the U.S. territories would soon be a place for such “gruesome murder” and brutal savagery as the Mountain Meadows Massacre.¹ Devens argued for a new definition of religion and freedom of religion; Americans could believe what they wanted to believe, but the government was responsible for defining appropriate action.² As Republicans had argued in 1856, he also saw polygamy as one of the twin relics of barbarism that needed to be eradicated. Ultimately, some considered a violent civil war necessary to eradicate the other relic of barbarism, slavery, yet Mormon polygamy remained. It was evidence of the Mormon return to barbarism, a stumbling block to the United States’ ability to flourish in civilization and polygamy could be the gateway to further regression—Mormon savagery.

Devens argued that polygamy opened the way to a potential host of “other crime[s]”—including murder. Using the example of British imperialism, Devens argued that, “East-Indian thugs would be able to commit murder with impunity” if polygamy was not stopped in the territories—savagery would be condoned under the guise of religion. For Devens, the Mountain Meadows Massacre was unequivocal evidence of the degrading and violent potential of Mormonism and the larger fear of unlimited religious freedom. Devens required change in Mormonism in order to

¹ “Is Polygamy a Crime? Arguments in the United States Supreme Court in the Case of a Convicted Mormon,” New York Times, 15 Nov. 1878. Devens was also Attorney General at the time of Lee’s trials and a central advisor for the U.S. Attorneys in Utah.

meet the demands of American civilization.\(^1\) Attorney General Devens’ claims reflected the U.S. Attorneys’ arguments at John D. Lee’s first trial for murder at Mountain Meadows just three years earlier.

Already a significant concern of many Americans, savagery became a salient element as the story of the meadows expanded. This chapter will evaluate the role of Mountain Meadows in a popular understanding of Mormon savagery in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Within Mountain Meadows Massacre discourse, Mormons were understood to reject civilization when they chose to become Mormon. After examining how the narrative of Mormon savagery was utilized in divergent ways in John D. Lee’s first trial, this chapter will inspect the pre-massacre roots of the perception assessing themes of Mormons leaving civilization, Mormon and Indian unity, Mormons playing Indian, and ubiquitous Mormon violence. Moreover it will address the ways in which this discourse changed over time.

Mormons were more accountable for their actions than their simple Indian cohorts who did not know any better. Mormon agency to revert towards savagery and repudiate civilization was more egregious and more dangerous for the deception. For the prosecution and many Americans, Mountain Meadows Massacre evidenced the Mormon savagery and was one element that provided a rationale with which to deny Mormons the American label and curtail American citizenship. During John D. Lee’s first trial for the Mountain Meadows Massacre the prosecution utilized the discourse of savagery in its attempt to indict Mormonism in general and Brigham Young in particular, rather than a direct attempt to convict massacre leader Lee, the professed subject of the trial.

The prosecution opened and closed with this strategy: Mormons were imposter Americans, they were traitors. U.S. Attorney Carey asked, “You can not believe that civilized men, white men, men who were born amongst many of our own tribes and kindred, American Citizens, could volunteer to go forward” and

Image 1. Often political cartoons demonstrate the place of Mountain Meadows in depictions of the Mormon Problem. In “The Cave of Despair” the Utah skull’s gaping mouth is ready to swallow a variety of women and children “sealed” into polygamous relationships through its gate into hell. Men with rifles menacingly watch the entrance clearly placed in Utah’s mountain desert. Mountain Meadow stands as a warning signpost along the way.

commit such a “sickening crime.”4 To emphasize the treachery Carey continued, “Neither were they enemies, they were not men of a foreign nation who were at war with this people. They were men of their own race—of their own lineage.”5 Within Carey’s structure, fratricide should not happen in a civilized society, yet the Mormons had done just that—they killed their own when they killed American citizens. Despite their appearance as white Americans, these Mormons had rejected civilization. The Indians were a “little better than the Mormons.” Later Baskin would argue that Mormons were incapable of killing children, yet here Carey argued that the Indians, rather than the Mormons, at least “had superstition enough—enough Christianity in their bosoms to preserve the children.” The Arkansas emigrants should have been able to assume that other Americans would be civilized and would have saved them all, they should have been able to presume that Lee “had been reared under the benign influences of the holy religion of Jesus Christ, and therefore under its benign influence he could not possess, as the savage possessed the treachery and disregard for human life.” White Christian America had evolved past the ability to possess such “treachery.” Alas, the emigrants “were mistaken.”6

Defining “American citizenship” as an ideological position rather than a geographical term was a central project in the new republic. On his own initiative and with the support of George Washington, Noah Webster began the project of defining a proper American citizen in opposition to British subjects to a king. A Federalist, Webster was fixated on creating a new language for Americans and in the process defining what and who could classify as an American for the new nation. In his Grammatical Institute reader and later through his masterpiece—the 1828 Webster’s Dictionary—he worked to unify the country and create true Americans through his process of definition and categorization. America was to be the scene of

a great millennial battle and Webster felt he held a critical role in America’s creation.⁷

Webster and many of his contemporaries saw humanity involved in a great millennial contest progressing towards civilization. The discourse of white civilization pervaded nineteenth-century America. Ardent Christian millennialism and Manifest Destiny coalesced with Social Darwinism in the latter part of the nineteenth century to provide “scientific” evidence enabling the discourse of civilization to continue to permeate American society powerfully. Races were thought to evolve from savagery to barbarism and then on to civilization.⁸ For civilization to triumph, the nation had to select those characteristics that would lead to civilization, whilst the savage elements impeding civilization died out.

In his dictionary, Webster defined civilization and savagery on a binary in opposition to one another:

**CIVILIZATION, n.** The act of civilizing, or the state of being civilized; the state of being refined in manners, from the grossness of savage life, and improved in arts and learning.

**SAVAGE, n.** A human being in his native state of rudeness, one who is untaught, uncivilized, or without cultivation of mind or manners….

**SAVAGISM, n.** The state of rude uncivilized men, the state of men in their native wildness and rudeness.

Despite Webster’s succinct definition, the groups Americans might classify as savage have never been static. The label has always been historically constructed and used in a wide variety of situations to denote difference.

In nineteenth-century America, the term savage was frequently associated with Indians and with people of African descent—people of colour. Though classifications of colour often provided the basis for labels of savagery, it was never

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the only starting point for savagery. The category has frequently been applied across a wide spectrum of groups: religious opponents, ethnic, racial, and geographic groups. With the swell of Irish immigration beginning in the 1840s, the Celtic ancestry of the Irish was differentiated from the truly white Anglo-Saxons. For the greater part of the nineteenth century the Irish were also labelled savage and “their behaviour [compared] with that of the ‘Indian savages.’”

Geographic closeness with the natives for some Irish prompted tales of Irish and Indian unity. The savage rioting Irish in New York were thought to stand in opposition to the civilized Anglo-Saxon Americans throughout the 1860s and 1870s. Through sensationalized tales of violence Americans understood the insufficiently white Irish to be evidencing their lack of whiteness and their lack of civilization.

The label savage is never a precise descriptor; yet it is always defined in opposition. During the Protestant Reformation opposing reformers labelled radical reformers, such as Thomas Müntzer, savages. In the process to define Protestantism, those who were thought to contravene acceptable boundaries of change were labelled savage. In the nascent American republic charges of savagery went hand in hand with contended American citizenship. The Mormons were never a completely cohesive ethnic group, but the perception of a collective violation of acceptable boundaries also brought the label of savage. Whatever the source, savagery was a stumbling block to the forward progress of civilization and needed to be overcome if America was to reach its millennial goal.

Leaving Civilization

For Captain Samuel Montgomery, a participant in President Buchanan’s failed Utah Expedition to quell the Mormons in rebellion, the failure to convict the perpetrators of the massacre was a matter of American integrity. He pleaded to U.S.

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11 Sigrun Haude, In the Shadow of “Savage Wolves”: Anabaptist Munster and the German Reformation During the 1530’s (Boston, MA: Humanities Press International, 2000).
Indian Superintendent, Alfred Greenwood, “No longer let us boast of our citizenship freedom or civilization.” It was the time for action. Following the pattern of superlative language his great surprise was white involvement when “attending circumstances far exceed[ed] anything in cruelty that we have ever heard of or read of being perpetrated by savages.” The hyperbole emphasized that Mountain Meadows was not simply an Indian massacre despite Indian involvement. It was the Mormon involvement that prompted the necessity of swift punishment. In a flourish of millennial hope Montgomery saw the possibility of the “dawning” of “a new state of things” where retribution and vengeance would come to the Mormons. He believed it was time to rid the world of “Mormon Avarice, fanaticism & cruelty.”

For some, the Mormon breach of the limits of civilization propelled the desire to punish Mormon perpetrators, Mormon leaders, and often Mormonism as a whole so white civilization could move forward. Amongst those working to prosecute the massacre a narrative of place furthered the explanation how such atrocity could happen on “American soil.” Place was a central issue. Federally appointed Utah Territorial Judge Delana Eckels explained his understanding of civilization to U. S. Attorney General Lewis Cass and its role in the Mormon Problem:

Man, as we find him in the most favored communities, when removed beyond the currents of civilization, fast recedes towards barbarism. Here [in Utah] the people are nearly destitute of the civilizing effects of commerce, christianity and government...Civilization necessarily must languish. My observances are, that [in Utah] it is rapidly on the decline.

Rather than the classic narrative trope of white settlers bringing light and civilization to the dark frontier, Mormons chose to leave the light of Christian civilization and

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13 Jacob Forney, “Jacob Forney to Albert S. Johnston,” 1 May 1859, File 27.U.1859, Utah Correspondence, Adjutant General’s Office, U.S. Department of War Records, RG 393, Microfilm, NARA. See also MSS SDoc 42, 18–20; SDoc 42, 8–9.


enter the savage darkness. Image 2, the popular painting “American Progress” by John Nast famously depicted ideas of civilization and Manifest Destiny bringing light to a dark continent. The white woman dressed in white brings light to the frontier as she floats above it. Native Americans are found in the dark edges fleeing from the light as the white settlers moved west. Though Mormons could have been understood to be in the wagons moving west with the light of civilization, within the Mountain Meadows discourse Mormons fled from the light to hide in the darkness. Without the civilizing light of others Mormons turned to savagery—Utah was a place losing its civilization. This choice to leave civilization behind necessarily had consequences.


Popular sources supported the Judge Eckels view as they detailed the Mormon menace to the American public. In *The Atlantic Monthly* Fitz-Hugh Ludlow maintained that in contrast to the ironically peaceful islands that shielded the atrocities of foreign savages, the “bleak and rugged face” of the Utah landscape appropriately and “poetically...indicate[d] the abode of savages and ogres.”

Rewriting Mormon history, in Reverend Alfred Taylor’s 1881 cursory chronology of the Mormons, American citizens did not push the Mormons from civilization. The Mormons purposefully chose to leave civilization—"in Illinois they had been surrounded by civilization and decency," but they left. Only away from civilization could such savagery like the massacre reign.

Savagery in the Court

This discourse of civilization and savagery lays a critical framework within which the legal arguments made at John D. Lee’s first trial can be interpreted. Not a single witness used the term savage in relation to natives or Mormons. Yet, the attorneys’ arguments demonstrate a consistent focus on savagery. Popular images of Native Americans grew “increasingly ambivalent” in the latter part of the nineteenth century, though negative constructions of simple Indian savagery remained. Native Americans play a fundamental role in the historiography of nineteenth-century America, but our understanding of their role in the historical narrative has shifted greatly in the last several decades. Historiographically, much has changed since Indians were essentially enemy stumbling blocks for Frederick Jackson Turner.

Turner was a part of the American society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that was submerged in the discourse of civilization and Manifest Destiny. Early nineteenth-century Americans saw “the Indian, in his savage nature [standing]...

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as a challenge to order and reason and civilization."\(^{21}\) This polarized narrative of savagery and civilization was a powerful nineteenth-century trope, yet it was always muddled with counter-narratives.

In the nineteenth century Americans defined themselves in opposition to the natives, but paradoxically looked to the natives for an aboriginal return to their roots. By the 1830s Americans finished Indian “removal” in the east, but Indians were a volatile presence on the western frontier throughout the nineteenth century. White appropriation of aboriginal genesis became a growing positive source for self-definition meanwhile Indians retained their savage “otherness.”\(^{22}\) A pervasive perception of Mormons who allied themselves with Indians and played Indian in Mountain Meadows discourse combines with the “vexed” whiteness of Mormons to further complicate the transitioning image of Native Americans. John D. Lee’s first trial demonstrated the complexity of contemporary views of Native Americans to build a perception of Mormon savagery. The prosecution and the defence offer competing visions of savagery—the defence initially calling on this earlier narrative of Indian savagery—albeit fractured—and the prosecution demonstrating an ambivalence towards Indian savagery, replacing Indian savagery with the truly savage Mormons. John D. Lee, the Mormons, Mormon leaders, and Native Americans were all argued to be savage at different points in John D. Lee’s first trial.

The Indian presence at the massacre was never questioned in contemporary accounts though the numbers of Indians present varied greatly—from fifty to hundreds of Indians.\(^{23}\) Utah Territorial Judge John Cradlebaugh threatened that he


\(^{23}\) For an evaluation of Indian participation see: Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley, and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 265–270. Beyond written sources, two competing strains of Paiute oral history exist. One claims no participation in the massacre (perhaps in response to unjustly shouldering the burden of the massacre for in many sources for more than a century); the other strain recognizes Paiute participation.
would indict Indians for their participation during his 1859 judicial efforts—acting more as a prosecutor than judge, but this never materialized. Several Indians were interviewed at different times, and a subpoena was issued for one Indian, Piede Captain Kanarra, to appear at Lee’s first trial. There is no record of the subpoena ever being served on Kanarra, nor was he called to testify.24 The investigations and prosecution almost exclusively focused on the Mormon perpetrators.

As prosecuting U.S. Attorney Carey set up his strategy in his opening argument against John D. Lee, the alliance of Mormons and Indians indicated to his larger audience that there was impropriety afoot. For Carey, the frontier location was right. The Mountain Meadows in Utah Territory was a liminal space out of the grasp of civilization and malfeasance occurred beyond civilization’s limits. John D. Lee could boast of his crime in Southern Utah because the “eyes of civilization” did not reach there, but when he travelled to Salt Lake City the boasting had to stop. Carey insisted that, “it was getting a little too near the place where it would be proclaimed to the world that a white man…was engaged in that massacre.”25 The questionable whiteness of the Mormons was crucial as was the place. Movement from a small rural area to a city was not necessarily important. More than Mormons resided in Salt Lake City—the Gentile (non-Mormon) population of Salt Lake made it the doorway to the civilized world. The civilized world could not let such a crime stand.

Second District Territorial Judge Jacob Boreman instructed the jury that the Mountain Meadows Massacre was “a crime of appalling magnitude, planned and carried out with a demon-like ferocity, unparalleled in modern days, or among civilized people.”26 Prosecuting attorney Baskin echoed Boreman’s categorization; he deemed it “a crime against humanity, a degree of crime deeper in its dye than history records.” Mormons “disgrace[d]…civilization.” Nothing “since [had] darkened the


annals of the 19th century.” 27 The judge and the prosecution continued the earlier rhetoric of an “unparalleled” crime. 28 Lee—and all Mormons by implication—held the “treachery and disregard for human life” of a non-Christian savage. As a Mormon, Lee allied himself with Indians, and was in fact “worse than the savages,” in his closing argument Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Baskin argued that in contrast to Christianity, Lee’s “religion was to kill.” Mormonism “betray[ed] and then...kill[ed] young women and children.” “Therefore” Lee acted as a traitor and “armed himself with a flag of truce.” People across the earth understood a flag of truce—a world-wide symbol of “security” for every “savage and every civilized nation.” 29 Both the civilized and the savage conformed to the conventions the white flag demonstrated, but not the Mormon.

Replete with a late nineteenth-century ambivalence toward the Indian, Baskin argued, “the Indians might have been civilised, but the white man over them was not.”

27 Baskin, “Closing Argument,” M2694, M2672.

28 Carey, “Closing Argument,” M2047, MSS JDL T1.

29 Baskin, “Closing Argument,” M2673.
There was “no greater savage...in that band” than John D. Lee, the leader. Baskin pointed out that, “While he (Lee) wears the skin of a white man he bears a heart blacker and more degraded—more contemptible than an Indian.”\(^{30}\) The Mormon rejection of civilization, despite prior participation, made them worse than the Native Americans Baskin thought to be innately savage. In his later *Reminiscences*, Baskin continued this theme, proclaiming “the Indians [were] not more merciless than the white skinned Mormons present.”\(^{31}\) Baskin argues that the emigrants never would have trusted the white flag of surrender from Indians—“the Indians could not succeed at the flag of truce.” The flag had “a white man’s guarantee upon its face” and with that the emigrants believed they could “succeed.” Nevertheless Lee followed his black heart rather than his white civilized flag, “relying upon that with a lying tongue worse than [an] indian’s tongue in his mouth.”\(^{32}\)

Baskin drew out Carey’s earlier implication, Lee was not an exception—the Mormons as a whole “were lower than the Indians.”\(^{33}\) Americans needed an explanation for how whites could perpetrate such a horrific savage event; the prosecution argued that Mormonism enabled their participation. As they entered into Mormonism Lee and other Mormons denounced their whiteness and the possibility of true Americanness. They were not individually bad, but a product of the “foreign” religious system of Mormonism. Baskin asked, “Where else in the civilized world can it be constant with truth that a crime could be perpetrated in a race amongst a community of people who wore white skins?”\(^{34}\) Mormonism reversed the effect of civilization. Mormons had “shunned the light of civilization” and their religion evolved them into “mere barbarians.”\(^{35}\) It “converted Christians

\(^{30}\) Ibid., M3430, M3533, M2858.


\(^{32}\) Baskin, “Closing Argument,” M3122.

\(^{33}\) Carey, “Closing Argument,” M2974.

\(^{34}\) Baskin, “Closing Argument,” M2963.

into fiends. It…made them wild; [and] made them dumb beasts.”

Mormons had exited Christian civilization and retreated to savagery when they chose Mormonism.

The narrative of Mormon savagery is a salient thread woven into the prosecution’s arguments in John D. Lee’s first trial argued before a mostly Mormon jury. Baskin asserted that he feared a faithful Mormon would not find John D. Lee guilty regardless of the testimony, and declared he did not expect a guilty verdict. Nevertheless, he pleaded with the jurors to remain true to their judicial oaths, reminding them they would “answer in the great day of judgment . . . before the final judge.” The possibility of real Christian belief seemed their only hope for change. Their white privilege gave them the opportunity to throw off shackles of Mormonism and return to civilization, if they desired. Despite the possibility of offending a majority of their jury with an argument of Mormon savagery amongst other potentially offensive arguments, Baskin proceeded with the argument divulging his focus laid beyond his immediate audience. The narrative bolstered Baskin’s larger goal of further indicting the Mormons before an extensive American audience with “incontrovertible” evidence.

The cohesive and consistent message of the prosecution stood in stark contrast to the panoply of theories the defence presented, yet the defence offered a narrative of savagery that could be found palatable to the Mormon members of the jury. The defence began in the same place as the prosecution. Defence attorney Wells Spicer correspondingly opened his case arguing that the level of savagery exhibited at Mountain Meadows was never “excelled in horribleness, in fiendishness.” The defence also wove a narrative of savagery versus civilization containing some of the same elements as the prosecution’s narrative with slight adjustments. Wells Spicer belaboured the great drama and “horrid treachery, in all its ghastliness” and in similar fashion questioned how anyone might, believe that civilized men, white men, men who were born amongst many of our own

37 Ibid., M3011.
38 Ibid., M3153–58.
tribes and kindred, American citizens, could volunteer to go forward and tear
the infant from its mother’s breast and stab them both to death; could
murder in cold blood and without warning 50 or more of their brethren of
their own tribes, and kindred and people and annihilate them; that they could
so coldly and cruelly murder so many women and children—60 in number,
and all for no cause whatever.  

Again, the basic argument was civilized whites simply could not perpetrate such
savagery.

At this point the defence narrative diverged from the prosecution and the
defence argued civilized white American citizens could not do such a thing; Mormons
or not—it must have been the Indians. For this line of defence the best point of
comparison was the “Massacre of the Deerfield of Wyoming,” an Indian massacre,
though Mountain Meadows was still worse. The defence continued John D. Lee’s
earliest claims that Mountain Meadows was “nothing more nor less than an Indian
massacre.” Spicer went to great lengths to describe the Mormons living in fear of
attacks in the Utah Territory and building “walled cities” to protect themselves from
the “savage” Indians.  

He conceded the presence of white men at the massacre but
“twenty or thirty white men”—“a handful, at the mercy of the savages…most of
them had wives and families at home unprotected.”

This initial defence narrative shifted after a recess (and a lively discussion
amongst the defence attorneys) to raise the possibility of white Indians. Spicer then
claimed that if you examine,

all the massacre[s] that have ever happened or been perpetrated by savage
Indians [in the history of America], and you will always find that white men
were there. Singular as it may be, we find that they may fall to the lowest
depths of crime and hellish deeds. And we find that not alone the untutored

40 Ibid., M1249.
41 Ibid., M1304.
42 Ibid., M1302.
43 F[rederick] L[ockley], “Judge Spicer’s Address,” Salt Lake Daily Tribune, 30 July 1875.
Savage, the Barbarian, or the cannibal were there, but we find the civilized white man.\footnote{Spicer, “Opening Argument,” M1318.}

He continued, the white men there were “Indians”—“white men with hearts as black and corrupt as ever worn by an Indian”—the same language as prosecution attorney Baskin would later use to describe John D. Lee.\footnote{Ibid., M1238; Baskin, “Closing Argument,” M2858.} These arguments denied both the agency and intellectual capacity of Native Americans.

Newspaper reports throughout the nineteenth century noted the existence of “white Indians.” Americans saw these “white Indians” as an object of curiosity and bewilderment; they saw them as choosing savageness rather than attempting to recover a lost aboriginal past as they played Indian. They were “the worst persons in Indian raids” because they “add[ed] the skill of one race to the savageness of the other….one white Indian [was] worse than ten red ones.”\footnote{“Reminiscences of an Old Traveler,” The Congregationalist, (Boston, MA) Friday, 28 Sept. 1866, 156:39 col. A; “Local Intelligence,” The Weekly Arizona Miner (Prescott, AZ), Saturday, 25 Dec. 1869, 50: col A; “Savage, the White Indian Chief,” Greenville Mountaineer (Greenville, SC), Thursday, 19 May 1853, 52: col. E; “A White Indian,” The Cleveland Herald (Cleveland, OH), Tuesday 8 Feb. 1853, 33: col. D; “The White Indian,” Columbia Telescope (Columbia, SC), Tuesday 14 May 1833, 20: col B; “Notes and Comments,” Delaware Patriot & American Watchman (Wilmington, DE), Tuesday 28 Oct. 1828, 81: col C through 14 Nov. 1828, 86: col A.}

In the 1850s there were numerous reports of “white Indians” attacking emigrants on the northern trail to California and Oregon.\footnote{“Over the Plains,” Daily Alta California, 8 July 1857; the San Andreas Independent, [n.d.], as cited in “Further from the Plains,” San Joaquin Republican (Stockton, CA), 8 Nov. 1857.} These white men were said to “urg[e] Indians to commit depredations on emigration.”\footnote{“Later from Carson Valley—Arrival of Emigrants at Placerville—Affairs on the Plains,” San Joaquin Republican (Stockton, CA), 18 Aug. 1857; William H. Cureton, “Trekking to California” Typescript, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, entry 23 Aug.; “Immigrants,” Sacramento Daily Bee, 6 Oct. 1857.} Brigham Young warned the people in Salt Lake City of “numerous and well organized band of white highwaymen, painted and disguised as Indians, infest several points on the road, who drive off stock by wholesale, and...
recent murders are rumored from that quarter." A flurry of reports came in documenting whites attacking emigrant trains in conjunction with the Indians.

Despite the defence team infighting, the defence converged in their closing arguments on this last strain of Spicer’s opening argument—there were savage white men at the massacre, but John D. Lee was not among them. They focused on two prosecution witnesses and massacre participants—early confessor Philip Klingensmith and Joel White. They were the white savages on the massacre field, though the defence arguments did not address the source of their savagery. Like the prosecution, white savages were responsible for the massacre. Neither the prosecution nor the defence originated the narratives of savagery utilized in Lee’s first trial; the attorneys harnessed the ubiquitous discourse of civilization and an already present rhetoric of Mormon savagery to their own ends.

Mormon Indian-uity

The narrative of Mormon savagery did not develop with Lee’s first trial or the outrages at Mountain Meadows; it was present at the beginning of Mormonism. A perceived Mormon alliance with the Indians was a significant element of the rhetoric of Mormon savagery. Published in 1830, the Book of Mormon narrative linked the Mormons to Native Americans in a peculiar theological understanding of the natives. Mormons understood the Lamanites (the major antagonists, then protagonists, in the Book of Mormon narrative) as modern day Native Americans. Though initially cursed, they would be blessed in the latter days. The Book of


52 “Mormon and Indian-Uity,” Daily Citizen & News, 4 May 1858.
Mormon taught “the red man…of his elevated origin.” Moreover, Mormon missionaries proselytized American Indians the same year Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon and organized his church. Terryl Givens points to Mormon relations with Indians as one of the early and consistent sources of the Mormon conflict with America. Americans perceived Mormons as attempting to join forces with Indians and “playing Indian”—disguising themselves as Indians or taking on Indian characteristics.

Volatile Jackson County, Missouri, was the site of the first collective Mormon expulsion in 1833. Jackson County citizen Samuel Lucas argued that part of the rationale for the Mormons’ forced expulsion was, “their threatened association with the neighbouring tribes of Indians.” In 1836 with most of the Mormons in Kirtland, Ohio, the anonymous Habitant Montium reported in the New York Spectator that the effect of the “Holy Ghost” on Mormons induced a variety of “fanatical” markers

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54 Givens, Viper on the Hearth, 56.
55 Mac, “Mormonism in Illinois,” 221.
of playing Indian including “exhibiting various feats of Indian warfare, such as knocking down, scalping, ripping open, and tearing out the bowels.” The “Holy Ghost” also ignited “fits of speaking Indian dialects.”

Later after the Mormons left Nauvoo, Illinois, there were rampant “rumors of Mormon machinations” to band together with the Indians and annihilate white Americans on the frontier. Warren Foote detailed his contemporary encounter with a Nebraska woman and her perceptions of this dangerous alliance:

The inhabitants are very much scared. They are afraid that the “Mormons” will soon be upon them and slay men, women, and children. I called into a house to see if I could sell any thing. The man was not at home. As I turned to go out the woman said “You are a Mormon I suppose it is a fair question.” Yes Madam I replied. She said, “There are a great many Indians up there where you are camped.” I replied that I had not seen any. Said she, “You have not seen any! Why we hear that you are building forts and your women are marrying with the Indians, and that you are combining together and are coming down here to kill us all off.”….She then said, “There are a great many women here that are almost scared to death, they are just ready to run.” Well, Said I, if they are not killed until the “Mormons” kill them they will live a long time.

Warren Foote expected that “long time” to last forever; regrettably a decade later the perception became a reality.

In 1852, The American Whig published a monthly serial account of Mormonism. The series was published under the name “R.W. Mac.” A historian of The American Whig described Mac as “a rabid anti-Mormon,” yet the article was not controversial enough for the audience to interrogate the actual author.

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57 Givens, Viper on the Hearth, 56.


account was to demonstrate the “most dangerous and disorganizing social doctrines” of Mormonism for The Whig’s readership. Mormon and Indian alliances were evidence of the danger. The serial recited tales of the chaos in Nauvoo after Joseph Smith’s murder in 1844. The Mormons “blustered in the streets, and shouted with the energy and savage fury of their red brethren, whose example they professed to emulate.”

The Mormons possessed a “blind and revengeful fury characteristic of the North American savage.” This savage wrath “humiliat[ed]….the refined feelings of a civilized gentleman.” The serial expanded the rhetoric of alliance once the Mormons left civilization and headed westward. The Whig detailed a laundry list of Indian tribes including “all the wild tribes of the deep valleys and lofty crags of the Rocky Mountains”—all Mormon confederates. Mormonism taught the natives “were to hear the voice of the Prophet, submit to his teachings, and to give their untamed barbarian energies, and employ the tactics of their destructive warfare to the establishment of the Mormon supremacy.”

Though the actual author was unclear, the message was clear: civilization was a safe place of order; if Mormons were left unbridled, chaos would reign and civilization would be rejected. The infamous 11 September 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre gave credence to the well-established fears, rumours, and innuendo of decades.

The relationship between Mormons and Indians was always more complex than the perception. After the massacre, the earliest official reports were of an Indian massacre. In an attempt to conceal Mormon involvement, massacre participant John D. Lee blamed the depredation on the Indians. The LDS Church appointed Lee to aid the Paiute Indians with farming as part of a Latter-day Saints effort to both Christianize and agriculturalize bands of Indians in Utah. Meanwhile Utah’s territorial governor and superintendent of Indian affairs, Brigham Young hoped to secure strategic alliances with the Indians, though such alliances were always tenuous. A few weeks after the massacre, Lee officially reported the massacre.

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60 Mac, “Mormonism in Illinois,” 511–36. Interestingly, both Mormons and anti-Mormons were called savage. Apparently, Mormonism took civilization from an individual. Leaving Mormonism and then fighting against the Mormons did not simply remove you from the savagery for Mac.

61 Ibid., 523.

62 Ibid., 221. In a distinct series, “Joseph Smith: The Yankee Mahomet,” Mac demonstrated other deficiencies of the Mormon prophet and Mormonism in general.
to Young. He described that the emigrants “poisoned Beef & gave it to the Indians & several of them died. They poisoned the springs of water several of the saints died the Indians became inraged at their Conduct & they surrounded them on a prairie . . . the Indians fought them 5 days until they killed all their men . . . they then rushed into their Carrell & Cut the throats of their women & Children except some 8 or 10 Children which they brought & sold to the whites.” Young had recently staved off a possible Indian war in northern Utah when Mormons stepped between emigrants and Indians and Young initially saw the massacre as another failure of bellicose federal Indian policies. The day after Lee gave an account to Young, federal Indian agent George Armstrong also sent an official report to Young. In his letter, Armstrong reported a retributive Indian massacre at Mountain Meadows. He similarly told a tale of the misdeeds of white emigrants provoking the Indians. Federal appointees soon replaced Young and he no longer had any official jurisdiction over the case. The following month another Indian agent, Garland Hurt, also reported the massacre; he acknowledged Indian participation, yet he placed primary responsibility for the massacre on the Mormons in his official report to the new federal Indian Agent, Jacob Forney. By November reports of the massacre would reach across the country. Though the initial official reports were of an Indian

63 Wilford Woodruff, “Journal,” 29 Sept. 1857, CHL. Lee also sent an official report in November. John D. Lee, “John D. Lee to Brigham Young,” 20 Nov. 1857, General Incoming Correspondence, Brigham Young Office Files, CHL. For W. W. Bishop’s alternate version see Bishop, ed. Mormonism Unveiled; or, the Life and Confessions of Late Bishop, John D. Lee; (written by Himself) Embracing a History of Mormonism from Its Origin down to the Present Time, with an Exposition of the Secret History, Signs, Symbols and Crimes of the Mormon Church. Also the True History of the Horrible Butchery Known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre. (St. Louis, MO: Bryan, Brand & Co., 1877), 252–53.

64 Walker, Turley, and Leonard, Massacre at Mountain Meadows, 88–100; Brigham Young, “Brigham Young to James W. Denver,” 6 Jan. 1858, 692, Governor’s Letterbook, 1853–1858, 691–94, Governor’s Office Files, Brigham Young Office Files, CHL.


66 Garland Hurt, “Garland Hurt to Jacob Forney”, 4 Dec. 1857, The Utah Expedition: Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting Reports from the Secretaries of State, of War, of the Interior, and of the Attorney General, Relative to the Military Expedition Ordered into the Territory of Utah, SDoc. No. 35-71, 199–203 and SDoc 42, 92–98. The year is incorrectly given as 1859 in Senate Document 42.

67 For a few examples see: “Horrible Massacre of Emigrants by Indians.,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 12 Nov. 1857; “Horrible Massacre of Emigrants—Over 100 Persons Killed,” The
massacre, a more complete description began to emerge. News of Mormon involvement came in the subsequent weeks.\(^{68}\)

Though early news reports were limited, very quickly the alliance of Mormons and Indians at the massacre was suggested. Though some Mormons recounted the story of an Indian massacre, in the case of many San Francisco papers Mormon culpability was assumed before it could be verified.\(^{69}\) The centre of significant anti-Mormon sentiment, San Francisco was already awash in a newspaper war between pro- and anti-Mormon newspapers.\(^{70}\) In an early report of the massacre the \textit{Daily Alta California} asked, “who can be so blind as not to see that the hands of Mormons are stained with this blood?”\(^{71}\) The \textit{San Francisco Herald} immediately identified the massacre as a precursor to the expected battle between “ten thousand fighting [Mormon] men...in close alliance with at least fifty thousand hostile Indians.”\(^{72}\) The crafted narrative of a Mormon and Indian alliance led Americans expect violence.

As the news reports spread in the weeks and months after the massacre, some individuals called for government intervention. The massacre directly affected William C. Mitchell—he lost two sons and many other family members who were members of the emigrant train. Writing to his Arkansas congressional representative he was anxious for action against the Mormons. He noted, “I see from the California paper . . . that there have been a great many meetings asking the President to

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\textit{69 Immediately after the massacre} John D. Lee began to tell a story of an Indian massacre with the Mormon militia coming out as an act of mercy to end the suffering of the emigrants. Many Mormons, who assumed it impossible that Mormons could be involved in such an event, correspondingly continued the narrative of an Indian massacre.


chastise the guilty.” Mitchell doubted the efficiency of the army, “From all accounts the President [James Buchanan] has not made a call sufficient to subdue them; the four regiments together with what regulars can be spared is too small a force to whip the Mormons and Indians, for rest assured that all the wild tribes will fight for Brigham Young. I am anxious to be in the crowd—I feel that I must have satisfaction for the inhuman manner in which they have slain my children.”

Like many Americans, Mitchell had heard rumors of a Mormon and Indian alliance for years. In contrast to those who saw Buchanan calling out U.S. troops to quell the Mormon Rebellion in Utah as folly, as Mitchell grieved the loss of family it was not enough.

Questions from the press of what would be done about the Mormon massacre continued in numerous articles across the country in the following years to no discernable result. The following February, the Arkansas press echoed Mitchell’s vengeful language, “What will the Government do with these Mormons and Indians? Will it not send out enough men to hang all the scoundrels and thieves at once, and give them the same play they gave our women and children?”

The next year, a number of Arkansans publicly declared, “the Mormons are instigating the Indians to hostilities against our citizens, and are and have been as a community, systematically engaged in the infamous work of robbing and murdering peaceful wayfarers and emigrants and resisting the authority and laws of the United States—and in short of rebellion and treason against the general government.” The massacre was not considered a singular instance of Mormon and native unity, but an example of the continued practice demonstrating the real danger of Mormonism. The Arkansas resolution called on the government to “immediately adopt decisive measures for subduing the spirit of insubordination and treason” of the Mormons.

Mitchell and his fellow Arkansans did not have an opportunity for revenge, however Mitchell’s


74 “Extract from a Letter to the Editor,” Little Rock State Gazette and Democrat, 13 Feb. 1858. Some federal officials gave lip service to prosecuting the Native Americans involved in the massacre, however no substantive action would be taken against any individual Indians, the focus was consistently on Mormon participants, leaders, and the Mormon people as a whole.

75 “Public Meeting of the People of Carroll County,” Arkansas State Gazette, 27 May 1858. Interestingly, during the Civil War Arkansans were also constructed as savages, or at least semi-savages. See William L. Shea “A Semi-Savage State: The Image of Arkansas in the Civil War,” The Arkansas Historical Quarterly 48: 4 (Winter 1989): 309–328.
efforts were central to recover the seventeen surviving children.\textsuperscript{76} Almost two years after writing to Washington with requests for government help to retrieve the children, Mitchell was on his way to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Territory “with a couple of two-horse wagons and a nurse” to accompany the children on the final leg of their journey back to Arkansas, where they were reunited with their relatives in 1859.\textsuperscript{77}

The surviving children were returned, but the larger calls for military action against the Mormons and the Indians were left unheeded. The polarized discourse would continue and expand from western papers—some historically anti-Mormon—across the country after the Mountain Meadows Massacre. A Massachusetts paper reported in May 1858 that, “A large body of [well-armed] Indians of various hostile tribes” were reportedly gathering in Washington on the Red River under the direction of “the Great Chief of the West”—Brigham Young. The “Mormon Indian-unity” apparently plotted to “exterminate the white settlers on the frontiers.”\textsuperscript{78} The 1863 Bear River Massacre also produced reports of Mormon and Indian alliances.\textsuperscript{79} In 1875, just after John D. Lee’s first trial ended with a hung jury, the anti-Mormon Corrine Reporter worked on popular fears and claimed that a thousand Indians were conferring with a Mormon bishop and plotting to “clean out” the gentile mining town of Corrine, Utah, “a la mountain meadows.”\textsuperscript{80} The rhetoric led the American public to await the next Mormon massacre.


\textsuperscript{78} “Mormon and Indian-unity,” Daily Citizen & News (Lowell, MA), 4 May 1858.

\textsuperscript{79} Brigham Madsen, The Shoshoni Frontier, and the Bear River Massacre (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1985).

\textsuperscript{80} “A Mormon Plot to Clean Out the Town of Corrine, Utah a la Mountain Meadows,” The Daily Inter-Ocean (Chicago, IL), 19 Aug. 1875.
This narrative was similarly reflected in official reports. The Secretary of War’s 1859 annual report stated, “Mormons are never molested by the Indians.”[^81] If Mormons controlled the lesser-evolved Indians, then Mormons never had to worry about hostile Indians themselves. On 19 March 1860, the Senate resolved to gather all of the information regarding the massacre. The President published the response in Senate Executive Document 42 on 4 May 1860. Appropriate to the resolution, the President entitled the 139-page document “The Mountain Meadows Massacre.” It details multiple affidavits and correspondence regarding the massacre. Yet, it also includes dozens of accounts of additional reported Indian “depredations” on any trail to California between 1855 and 1860. It reinforced the popular perception of a consistent alliance between Mormons and Indians.

Often marriage or baptism reportedly reinforced those alliances. In an 1877 *Scribner’s Monthly* article editor John Beadle alerted Americans of Mormons sent to Northern Idaho and “specially instructed to marry Indian women as extensively as

possible, and to form close alliances with the savages." Rather than being perceived as the Mormons' own efforts to civilize the natives, marriages and baptism further cemented the perception of Mormons and Indians united in savagery. An anti-Mormon pioneer folk song “advised a Mormon to go back to Utah because he married a squaw.” Rhyming squaw and Utah certainly factored into the choice, but the song implied that neither the Mormon nor the Indian “were the right sort of person.” Though Mormons were baptising and marrying some natives, the perception grew out of step with the reality. The Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean reported that Mormons baptized armies of Indians. Newspaper reports embellished singular events with speculation to establish an unqualified Mormon and Indian alliance.

The rumours painted the Mormon and Indian relationship in broad strokes: complete alliance and complete unity. The reality was much more fraught. Brigham Young believed that it was more effective to feed Indians (or teach them to farm) than shoot them. In his battles with the federal government during the Utah War, he hoped for a strong alliance with the natives, but the Indian leaders preferred to let the Americans and the Mormons fight it out while they waited to see who would win. At that point, Young decided to no longer stand between American emigrants and Native Americans not wanting to risk Mormon lives for Americans if the federal government was sending troops to quell the Mormons in rebellion. The reality was too complex to fit the clearly polarized discourse.


84 The Daily Inter-Ocean (Chicago, IL), 20 June 1874, page 8, col. 2.


86 It is not the goal of this article to deal with sorting through every element of the real and the imagined relationship between Mormon and Indians; for an analysis of the historiography of Mormon and Indian relations see Sondra Jones, “Saints or Sinners? The Evolving Perceptions of Mormon-Indian Relations in Utah Historiography,” Utah Historical Quarterly (72: Winter 2004): 19–46. Jared Farmer’s On Zion’s Mount eloquently demonstrates how a sense of place helps us to better understand the relationship between Mormons and Indians in the place called Utah. Jared Farmer, On Zion’s Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American
Playing Indian

The perception of the alliance between Mormons and American Indians had several facets. Mormons playing Indian—dressing the part, wielding their tools, and performing violent acts—was one significant aspect of the perception. “Playing Indian” has been a consistent American pastime.87 Whites painted as Indians in the Boston Tea Party were able to use their “fury” to move toward civilization through revolution. Theodore Roosevelt took up the accoutrements of a savage to kill on the plains of Africa to establish his manhood.88 Seaton’s Woodcraft Indians taught young American boys to play Indian inducing their evolution to become men.89 Playing Indian Buffalo Bill disguised himself as an Indian to rescue his sister from savages in his Wild West Show.90 Playing an Indian—whether actual, fictional, or ideological—could be a way to grasp aboriginal strength of the noble American savage. Performances that encouraged revolution, manifesting manhood, or developing manliness pushed civilization forward, as well as demarcating its limits.

The boundaries of civilization could be established in a variety of ways. Entertainment met the public’s yearning for the salacious as it circumscribed acceptable behaviour through performance. U.S. Army soldiers stationed at Fort Bridger, Wyoming purportedly wrote a ballad as they waited through the winter to enter Utah. The song propagated the story of Mountain Meadows and Mormon sin. One verse began,

On a crisp October Morning
At the Mountain Meadows green
By the light of bright campfires

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89 Deloria, Playing Indian, 107–110.

90 Melvin Bashore, “‘The Bloodiest Drama Ever Perpetuated on American Soil’: Staging the Mountain Meadows Massacre for Entertainment,” Utah Historical Quarterly 80, no. 3 (2012): 258–271.
Lee’s Mormon bullets screamed.
At a word from Lee, the pistols blazed,
The woman and children came.
They shot them down in Indian style.
O Utah, where’s your shame?\(^91\)

The actions of Lee were not just the actions of an individual with a gun, Lee was a product of Mormonism. He shot “Mormon bullets” suggesting a pattern of Mormon behaviour—a past history of similar violent actions. Lee killed the emigrants “in Indian style,” in this instance perhaps the tool was not considered specifically Indian, but the savagery employed was. All Mormons—at least all the Mormons in Utah, should have been ashamed, yet they were not. The emotive ballad cried out a breach of civilized boundaries for which the Mormons (and as a following verse would add) and Brigham Young would have to be held accountable.

Other performative genres, such as anti-Mormon melodramas and Wild West Shows would similarly employ emotive or sensational narratives to specific ends. Indians were a staple of Wild West Shows, Buffalo Bill Cody engaged a large number of “Indians” to perform his story of the West. Opening in 1878, his play May Cody, or Lost and Won salvaged a flailing market for his Wild West shows, though in this show Cody dressed as an Indian to rescue his sister not from Indians, but from the savage Mormons. Advertisements prominently featured the Mountain Meadows Massacre and Brigham Young. The show opened with a two-week run in New York City and then successfully brought in crowds to crisscross the United States for another twenty-nine months exciting audiences—including one night in Denver, Colorado where the massacre victims resurrected as malfunctioning fireworks landed on their corpses—“An immoderate amount of profanity bubbled from resurrected lips.”\(^92\)

A wide variety of others also worked Mountain Meadows into their own


western stage shows, but Cody's was most successful. In *Performing American Identity in Anti-Mormon Melodrama* Megan Sanborn Jones argues that wholly economic analyses of western melodrama ignore the political and social critiques the melodramas provide. Lucre could easily be a significant motivator for many authors who use the Mountain Meadows narrative, but to focus on the material aspects of the promulgation of the narrative does not exclude other potential motivations. It merely complicates it.

Cody playing Indian reinforced the perception of an alliance between the Mormons and the Native Americans as well as negating the ability of the Mormons to play Indian acceptably. Cody's appropriation of Indian attire brought about civilization as he saved his sister from the Mormons, the Mormons attacked civilization as they played Indian. Buffalo Bill could play Indian to bring his sister back to civilization, but Mormons playing Indian was evidence of their escape from civilization and their return to savagery. In 1857 Mormons had employed some of the same actions as Buffalo Bill's melodramatic representation, yet Mormons acting like Indians and killing other Americans was not an acceptable form of Indian play. Mormons had transgressed the limits of civilized acceptability. Several sources expanded on the idea of Mormons painted Indians, some sources expanded the narrative to deny the presence of American Indians.

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Image 5. Rather than a depiction of an Indian massacre, in this version of the massacre all the Mormons were painted as Indians—there were no real Native Americans present. Hans Peter Freece, *The Letters of an Apostate Mormon to His Son. Illustrated by Verona P. Turini.* ([New York, NY]: [Wolfer Press], 1908), 27.

A self-identified “apostate Mormon” Hans Freece published a number of anti-Mormons books endeavouring “to spread truth about the Mormon peril” after the Senate seated Mormon apostle Reed Smoot in 1907. Framed as a series of letters written to his son, one of his letters details the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Image 5 illustrates men with dark skins, headdresses, buckskin trousers, shooting at the helpless emigrants. Using guns rather than tomahawks might suggest that these Indians were only playing despite their dress and appearance, the text assures the reader that these were not Indians—in Freece’s tale only Mormons were present at the massacre.96

Before the Mountain Meadows Massacre, other whites had similarly been accused of such transgressions across the boundaries of acceptable civilized

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behaviour as they were labelled white Indians. However the nature of the reports of white Indians changed significantly after the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Just weeks after the massacre the San Joaquin Republican reported under a headline “Mormons in the Capacity of Savages”:

The well known fanatical enmity of the Mormons to the citizens as well as the Government of the United States, long since justified the suspicion that the Indians might be charged with depredations that were really committed by white men of the Mormon faith.  

By the end of the article the editors maintained “we are fully convinced that the Mormon people, and they alone, are responsible for all the murders and robberies that have been committed upon the immigrants….we are safe in the dogmatical assertion that the Mormons, and not the Indians, have robbed and killed the people who have been robbed and killed on their way to California.” Rather than white Indians of dubious origin, they were now “white men of the Mormon faith.” Rather than a single massacre, Mormons were now responsible for all violence on the trail west. Reports of Mormons committing “wanton and atrocious ‘Indian’ depredations” on California and Oregon trails continued to proliferate in western papers.

Personal and public accounts told of Mormons “in the guise of Indians…painted and costumed” for the attack. Rather than merely the rhetoric of western antagonisms, the escalated trope became widely disseminated and repeated over time. A few, years after the massacre, widely published writer and editor Fitz Hugh Ludlow reported in the popular nationwide serial The Atlantic Monthly,

Whenever a fatly provided wagon-train is to be attacked, a fine herd of emigrants beeves stampeded, the mail to be stopped, or the Gentiles in any way harassed, these [Mormon] desperadoes stain their skin, exchange their clothes for a breechclout, and rally a horde of the savages, whose favor they

98 Ibid.
have always propitiated, for the ambush and massacre, which in all but the
element of brute force is their work in plan, leadership, and execution.¹⁰¹

After the one certain Mormon Massacre, hints of white Indians evolved into a
perception of consistent conduct. This continued in an 1881 issue of Harper’s Weekly.
C. C. Goodwin argued that while the Mormons were building up Utah Territory
they “shrunk from no crime, recoiled at no falsehood, have murdered and robbed
Americans in secret, and laid the crime to savages, and still, while despoiling
Americans, have shed crocodile tears over their own extreme sufferings.”¹⁰² Once
the Mountain Meadows Massacre offered definitive evidence of Mormon savagery,
Mormon “desperados” consistently shed their civilized dress, clothed in savage attire,
instigated Indians, and then used them as tools. The stories of Mormon attacks
replaced those of “white Indians” after the massacre. Mormons were now
responsible for all “marauding, fanaticism, and murder.”¹⁰³

“Shock[ing] the Savages”¹⁰⁴

In his closing argument of John D. Lee’s first trial, prosecutor Carey argued
that Mormons were more savage than the perpetrators of other comparable
massacres because the Mormons employed natives to do their dirty work.¹⁰⁵ Carey
assumed Mormons could manipulate the Indians because of their superior
intellectual capacity thus negating Native Americans’ agency. For Carey, this action at
the meadows made the Mormons both more accountable and more savage than the
Indians. Carey was building on a notion begun in the popular reports of the
massacre—Mormons were now hyper-savage.

1881.
Even after Indian “containment” and virtual extinction, “earlier imaginings of ‘the Indian’ as a primitive but formidable adversary who stood in the way of Manifest Destiny remained largely undisturbed” in popular culture.\textsuperscript{106} Reliance on the sensational reports filed by newspaper editors meant many Americans generally accepted outrageous tales of nefarious acts of Indians on the frontier and assumed that savage Indians almost constantly and predictably committed “depredations.” Over time, the Mormon role in depredations similarly became a given. Moreover, the narrative of whites playing Indian transformed into a perception of hypersavagery after the massacre. For some authors, white persons choosing to involve themselves with natives in the massacre demonstrated that they were actually worse than the savages. \textit{The Chicago Daily Tribune} told of “atrocities too horrible to be related, and which seemed to shock the savages themselves.”\textsuperscript{107} After his personal 1859 investigation of the Mountain Meadows Massacre Army Lieutenant James Lynch claimed to have uncovered “attending circumstances far exceeding anything in cruelty that we have ever heard of or read of being perpetrated even by savages.”\textsuperscript{108}

The \textit{Virginia Enterprise} in Virginia City, Nevada Territory was a volatile anti-Mormon press. In the weeks following John D. Lee’s second trial and in the wake of the contemporary Battle of Little Bighorn, the paper demonstrated the growing compassion for the native peoples fighting to protect their families. They meanwhile expanded the argument of what they considered more serious Mormon savagery asking:

Why are we fierce against the poor benighted savages; why are we merciful even in thought, to the soulless dictator who, upon superstition, fraud and murder, has built an alien empire in the midst of our Republic? Sitting Bull is a very bad Indian; but that old Sitting Bull who holds his seat by Salt Lake, and

\textsuperscript{106} Clark and Nagel, “‘White Men, Red Masks’: Appropriation of ‘Indian’ Manhood in Imagined Wests.”


in blasphemy calls himself "the Lord’s anointed," is worse than any savage of the plains.\textsuperscript{109}

For the \textit{Enterprise} the problem was not a Mormon alliance with the Indians, but the Mormons—particularly their chief Brigham Young. Lee might have been “a despicable murderer but after all the chiegest felon is the one who is both President and Apostle to the Mormons.”\textsuperscript{110} Young’s sin was both political and religious. Acting as a “soulless dictator” was bad, but coupling that with the blasphemy of calling himself a prophet was more egregious.

Pawnee Bill (Major Gordon W. Lillie) led another Wild West Show that repeatedly used the Mountain Meadows narrative around the turn of the twentieth century. Pawnee Bill and his company successfully crossed the country re-enacting the massacre.\textsuperscript{111} Turn of the nineteenth-century Pawnee Bill biographer, J. H. De Wolff used the biography as an opportunity to write a chapter on the massacre. De Wolff maintained that Lillie focused on Mountain Meadows because of its "crimson blot upon the bright pages of American history." De Wolff also asserted the exceptionality of the massacre claiming, "Nothing in the pages of war surpass[ed the massacre] in savagery, cruelty, and sanguinary character.” It was without comparison, “There was no real motive for it, outside of ruthless bigotry; no benefit to be derived from it other than that which accrues to him who murders his friend or innocent neighbor through jealousy.” To De Wolff it seemed impossible that such a horrific occurrence could have happened so recently. The Mormons turned the frontier to “the legends of the Rhine and episodes of the epochs rendered terrible by the cruelties and ravages of the Goths, Huns, Vandals, and later of the Mohammedans.” His analysis concluded declaring Mormon hyper-savagery, “these

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{109} “Press Opinions,” \textit{Salt Lake Tribune}, 28 Sept. 1876. Emphasis original.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
'Latter-Day Saints' were worse than mountain tigers and more bloodthirsty than the hideous redskins of the warpath.”

The more pervasive the discourse, the more readily it was accepted and the less critically examined. In a genre similar to Indian captivity narratives, in a post-massacre Mormon captivity serial tale—“Saved from the Mormons”—a young girl tells of her escape from the Mormons into the wilderness. She “prefer[ed] the tender mercies of any savages [she] might encounter, or the terrors of wild beasts, rather than risk the danger of being dragged back to the life of infamy to which [she] had been sold by [her] father.” The Indian savages were preferable to the Mormon savages who sold their young into polygamic slavery.

The author of a number of sensationalized histories, Frank Triplett’s books offered the aura of authenticity through eyewitness accounts and affidavits. He likewise pulled from other sources to craft a scandalous tale. In one of his expansions of the massacre narrative he described how the Mormons, with the oath of their counterfeit religion, played Indian by stealing the accoutrements of the savages:

One girl fell on her knees, the blood pouring from a wound in her shoulder, and begged for life, saying that she would forever serve the man, at whose feet she knelt, if he would save her life. With a horrible oath, he snatched a tomahawk from the hands of a more merciful savage, and sank it into her skull.

A native would have mercifully saved the girl despite his innate savagery, yet the merciless Mormon appropriated the savage tool to slaughter the girl. Though

112 J. H. De Wolff, Pawnee Bill (Major Gordon W. Lillie), His Experience and Adventures on the Western Plains; Or, From the Saddle of a “Cowboy and Ranger” to the Chair of a “Bank President.” ([Pawnee, OK?): Pawnee Bill’s Historic Wild West Co., 1902), 95–81.


114 William A. Settle, Jesse James Was His Name: Or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 192–3. Trippelet also focused his literary skill on Jesse James, Grover Cleveland, and great American crimes. Though his crime books have multiple printings into the twentieth century, the Jesse James book has been reprinted as recently as 2000.
Triplett argued that “sanction by the whole Mormon people” made all Mormons accountable. Triplett also focused on the accountability of John D. Lee particularly. In his narrative a merciful Indian chief captured two fifteen-year-old girls “wish[ing] to save their lives, but Lee ordered him to shoot one of them, while he himself dashed the other one to the ground and cut her throat, the blood pouring in a torrent over him and dyeing his clothes with the horrid hue of murder.” In multiple graphic examples within Triplett’s account, the savages were more merciful than the Mormon Lee.  

As James Lynch argued, the actions of Mormons were worse than the Indians because they should “know better.” Though they appeared white, these people had degraded themselves through Mormonism. It was not only suitable for some whites to play Indian in a positive return to their aboriginal roots, however Mormons killing other whites through savagery was inappropriate American play. Violence might be a necessary casualty of the forward movement of civilization, but only some kinds of violence were acceptable. Within the Mountain Meadows narrative, whites killing other whites demonstrated a severe transgression. Comparisons to the violence of the Civil War were not present in the Mountain Meadows discourse. A prior American construction of Mormons as savages evolved to Mormon hyper-savagery after the massacre. As New England’s Bay State Monthly opined, the Mormons’ actions at Mountain Meadows “surpasse[d] in atrocity any act of the savage tribes by whom they are surrounded.” The sin of Mountain Meadows “stained indelibly the Mormon church.”

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116 James Lynch affidavit, 1859, Cumming Correspondence, Duke University, Special Collections, Durham, North Carolina.

The Eyes of Civilization

The U.S. Attorneys incorporated elements of this popular discourse surrounding Mountain Meadows as they framed their arguments in John D. Lee’s first trial. Such a tactic demonstrated a greater concern for their nationwide audience via the newspapermen in attendance rather than their Mormon majority jury. Prosecutors declared Lee’s trial would finally bring the savagery of the Mormon Church to “the eyes of the whole civilized world” and they worked to do their part building on already prevalent perceptions of Mormons for their larger American audience. The prosecution did not create an original narrative in constructing this element of its argument against the Mormons. Employing the popular discourse already in place they expanded the rhetoric of a Mormon and Indian alliance and Mormons playing Indian which the prosecution then transformed into a perception of Mormon hyper-savagery. The prosecution’s narrative of Mormon savagery rallied public sentiment against the Mormons as it reified the lack of Mormon fitness for citizenship.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Baskin argued that John D. Lee’s trial was to Mormonism what Dred Scott was to the institution of slavery. He asserted that “the whole system of negro slavery was involved…in the person of Dred Scott.” In the same manner John D. Lee’s trial put the Mormon Church on trial, Baskin argued, “there [was] no use to disguise the fact.” Baskin maintained the Mountain Meadows Massacre was a “most wonderful commentary” on the institution of Mormonism which affirmed the suspicions of the “civilized world” about Mormonism. Ten days into the trial the stridently anti-Mormon San Francisco Post recommended extreme measures: “We should deal with those Mormon savages as we would the Indians, their allies and tools in the work of butchery. No Mormon should be left in the United States.” Within the rhetoric of acceptable violence to expand civilization, such action could be condoned. The prosecution’s goals were

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118 Carey, “Closing Argument,” 2072.

119 Baskin, “Closing Argument,” 2842, 2848.

120 Ibid., 2858.

121 As quoted in “Crime of the Priesthood,” Salt Lake Tribune, 31 July 1875.
not that extreme, but the Dred Scott decision finding that a territory should remain
a territory until it is demonstrated that the territory is “a civilized community,
capable of self-government” was central to their aims. The evidence of savagery
and the absence of civilization in Utah could be a significant step to deny any
possibility of full Mormon citizenship as it had been for American Indians.
Though Lee’s first trial would end in a hung jury and no one would yet be punished for the
Mountain Meadows Massacre, the prosecution effectively utilized a powerful
discourse that worked to further separate Mormonism from Americanism.
Meanwhile, the U.S. Attorneys successfully provided a foundation for spinning a
popular narrative of the meadows and the Mormons hoping for action against them.

Not all anti-Morman authors approved of the reliance on the sensational to
ensure action against the Mormons. As a strident objector to Mormon polygamy,
Salt Lake City Episcopal Reverend Ballard S. Dunn ardently believed that Mormons
had contravened the marital boundaries of civilization and he worked to battle
against that Mormon sin. He grew frustrated as he saw the narrative around
Mountain Meadows spin out of control describing Utah as a shadowy place of
ubiquitous violence after “the execution of John D. Lee, one of the fiends of the
Mountain Meadows massacre.” Though Lee was clearly a fiend and the massacre a
horror that would stay with the Mormons, he maintained that, “wild, sensational,
and for the most part baseless rumours, intended to affect not only the Mormon
leaders, but the whole population, have been telegraphed throughout the country,
with the view of arousing public sentiment, in the hope that it will take shape in the
form of summary proceedings of the Mormons.” Recognizing the rumours and
insinuations as such put Dunn in the minority. For Dunn, the growth of the Mountain
Meadows narrative distracted from the real problem.

Delivered in the House of Representatives, Apr. 4, 1860 ([Washington, DC]: Printed by Lemuel
Towers, 1860).

123 Dred Scott v. John F.A. Sanford (U.S. Supreme Court 1857).

124 See The Mormon Monster for one of the many examples of anti-Mormon work
contributing to the expanding narrative of Mountain Meadows. The copy of The Mormon
Monster in the British Library includes an approbation and recommendation by six of Dunn’s
fellow protestant ministers in Sale Lake City. Edgar Estes Folk, The Mormon Monster or The
Story of Mormonism Embracing the History of Mormonism as a Religious System Mormonism as a

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Mormon sin of polygamy was injurious enough to reform Mormon marriage. The wild and sensational focus on rumours would not ultimately be effective against the Mormons because they were "wicked and false"—the end did not justify the means and false means would injure the ultimate goal for Dunn. He argued that Mormons were not "pre-eminently a criminal people." The Mormons were "less stained with blood than any community of equal size south of Missouri, and west of the Mississippi River." By his assessment, if one was to "take a population numbering 150,000 from any portion of Texas, and it will surpass [Utah] in violent deaths, for the last fifteen years, five to one. California can equal Texas; while Nevada will outstrip Utah in violent deaths and shocking crimes during that time, seven to one. The small city of Pioche, just over the line in Nevada, has slain more men during the last six years than the whole population of Utah have slain." A recent study of the comparative level of violence in Utah corroborates Dunn’s own contemporary analysis. This stands in direct opposition to the greater popular Mountain Meadows discourse in the nineteenth century.

Principled Ballard was no less zealous in his anti-Mormonism than other anti-Mormon authors; he merely differed in strategy. Most saw sensationalism as a tool to engender passion and highlight the Mormon rejection of civilization. Savagery was one of several highly sensationalized themes to bring about larger goals. Thomas B. and Fanny Stenhouse were perhaps the most successful in a series of verbose nineteenth-century former Mormons. Calling herself an "open enemy" of the Mormon hierarchy, Fanny Stenhouse predictably included a chapter on the Mountain

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Social System Mormonism as a Political System with a Full Discussion of the Subject of Polygamy (Chicago, IL: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1900).

Footnotes:

125 Dunn wanted a constitutional amendment to the free exercise clause of the First Amendment specifically adding "but Congress shall have power by appropriate legislation to prohibit in any community, the practice of polygamy, polyandry, promiscuity, and every form of crime attempted in the name of religion." Rev. Ballard S. Dunn, How to Solve the Mormon Problem. Three Letters (New York, NY: American News Company, Agents, 1877).


127 Scott K. Thomas, "Violence Across the Land: Vigilantism and Extralegal Violence Across Utah" (Brigham Young University, 2010).
Meadows Massacre in her 1874 *Tell It All* exposé of Mormon polygamy. In the 1874 edition the title page touted an introduction by Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe had to share space on the title page with promises of massacre details in every addition after the first. Further demonstrating the popularity of the Mountain Meadows tale, Stenhouse’s narrative of the massacre expanded from one chapter in the 1874 edition to three chapters in the 1878 edition and all later editions.

With her determination to “tell it all,” at the end of her work Fanny Stenhouse gushes, “The author rejoices that it has been her good fortune to contribute so much toward the final consummation of even-handed justice in the punishment of the guilty, and the lasting removal of a great social stain from the face of a civilized land whose future can only be unclouded by works of righteousness in the administration of local as well as national authority.” Mrs. Stenhouse saw her work as an effort to correct the social ill of Mormonism—polygamy; for many like Mrs. Stenhouse it was their opportunity and religious duty to contribute to the general downfall of Mormonism. Mrs. Stenhouse’s volume would go through no less than three-dozen editions (the latest in 2003) with multiple publishers and at least one Spanish edition. Moreover, Mrs. Stenhouse would continue anti-Mormon lectures for the rest of her life. The profitability of the project did not discount her evangelical zeal with which it was pursued. Her account of Mountain Meadows liberally reproduced materiel from her husband, Thomas B. Stenhouse’s own anti-Mormon effort—*Rocky Mountain Saints*. Mr. Stenhouse did not see polygamy as the central heresy of Mormonism; he tried to use the Mountain Meadows narrative as one of many evidences of the failure of Brigham Young to entice his followers to join with the Godbeites—an 1870s Mormon schism. Some authors were not explicit with their goals, the intended goal could be as individual as the author and their specific context.

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129 Fanny Stenhouse, *Tell It All* (1877), 626.

Fanny Stenhouse was dedicated to demonstrating the treachery from which
she had escaped for the larger American public—particularly anti-polygamy
advocates. As she wove her narrative, she clearly demonstrated the deceptive nature
of the Mormons. The Arkansas emigrants took for granted that the “savage
Indians…were their only enemies.” They might have thought the Mormons were
odd, yet the reality seemed impossible—“Coldly, strangely as they had been treated
at the Mormon settlements, they never for a moment supposed that white men
could be in league against them or could meditate their destruction.” They could not
guess that some of those that they saw as Indians “were only painted devils, mocks
of humanity, wretches who under the mask of a red-skin’s color were eager to
perpetrate the foulest of offences—scoundrels a thousand times demanded in the
opinion of men and by the decree of God.” Though Mormons might have looked like
other Americans and might have looked civilized, they were imposters. Their alliance
with Indians and the negative appropriation of Indian characteristics could not be
American. Though important, the savage identity of the Mormons was only a part of
the greater Mormon Problem; it was one element of many that placed the Mormons
in opposition to nineteenth-century ideals. In detailing the deception of Mormon
savagery Stenhouse ensured that others would not similarly fall to the Mormon trap.\textsuperscript{131} Even with consistent expansions on the Mountain Meadows narrative in
subsequent editions (and her titular claim to tell it all), Stenhouse avowed, “This is
the story—most imperfectly told.” She “dare[d] not sketch its foulest details”—the
complete story was left to the sensationalized imaginings of the reading American
public.

\textsuperscript{131} Stenhouse, \textit{Tell It All} (1874), 331–2.
Chapter 3

“Be Men”:
Relinquished Mormon Manhood

When Utah Territory Second District Judge Jacob S. Boreman addressed the Grand Jury empaneled in September 1874, he placed an onerous task on the Mormons of the jury. He maintained that “the stain of...innocent blood” rested on the people of the Territory for the Mountain Meadows Massacre and it was the duty of the grand jury to expiate that sin through legal action against the perpetrators. It was now their responsibility. Were they to shirk, the result would be punitive for all Mormons. If they were to choose not to bring down indictments for the massacre, it would give Congress no other option but to make “the laws in Utah still more rigid” than they already were. “The black and bloody deed” had to be investigated and prosecuted were the Mormons to demonstrate that Utah was not a hostile and disloyal U.S. Territory.¹

Federal appointee Second District Judge Boreman held a great many opinions of the Mormons—a biographer called the Methodist a “theological crusader.” He saw manifold failings in Territorial Utah, but one of the ways that Mormons had failed was as American men. Mormon men might be placed on either end of a spectrum of manhood. They could be cowardly—lacking manliness, or hyper-manly—guilty of an over abundance of manhood.² Either possibility transgressed the Boreman’s ideals of manhood. For Boreman, polygamy was certainly evidence of Mormon “outrages.” Women, under polygamy, were “more oppressed, more degraded, more unhappy, than anywhere else in the whole United States.” Moreover, it affected the whole family—“the moral sensibilities of the men are becoming

¹ Jacob S. Boreman, “Charge to the Grand Jury,” Beaver Enterprise, 9 Sept. 1874.
² Manhood is the precise term. The term masculinity was not appropriated until the very end of the nineteenth century with distinct connotations of physicality.
blunted and brutalized, and their children are losing their finer feelings and having their natures ruined for nobler and higher aspirations.”

The massacre at Mountain Meadows was unassailable proof of what further Mormon failure could destroy. For Boreman, the American legal system had the capability to counter the Mormon outrages, but the onus of responsibility was on the Mormons themselves—in this instance those called to the grand jury. He declared,

> If you quail before any outside influence; if you are too cowardly to be men and before God to do your duty, others will be found who will do their duty, without regard to what other men may say or do. That brand of infamy cannot be allowed to remain longer upon this Territory. Show to the world then that you have the manhood and are brave enough to investigate this and every other crime and bring to trial at the bar of justice every villain in the land.⁴

For Boreman and many Americans, American men were autonomous, brave, steadfast, and shielded their families from danger of all kinds.⁵ This ideal of autonomy was consistently juxtaposed between legal strictures and absolute freedom.⁶ Mormons might argue that federal involvement in Utah was limiting their autonomy, but clearly federal appointee Boreman saw the need to curb Mormon autonomy and use their willingness to enter the legal process to determine their fitness for citizenship.

Establishing and maintaining the rule of law was an expectation for all territories vying for statehood—particularly in light of the perception of a lawless West.⁷ The rule of law enabled territories to harness the wilderness and promote

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civilization. Tension between vigilantism and the rule of law was consistent as territories became states. Utah first applied for statehood in 1849 and would request statehood eight more times before its inclusion in the United States in 1896—twice before the massacre. Federal appointees came in 1857. Some appointees quickly ran away crying foul on the Mormons claiming they chased them out of the territory; other more pragmatic appointees attempted to work with the Mormons. From the 1860s to the 1880s Utah came under increasingly strict congressional restraints aimed at Mormon theocracy and polygamy. Some historians argue that the West was a critical actor in the process of Reconstruction; moreover focusing on polygamy Sarah Gordon more specifically argues that Utah particularly became the site of a second Reconstruction as the federal government attempted to legally bend Mormons into submission and remake Utah’s citizens.

If Utah were to become a state, it needed to demonstrate it was not only “a civilized community” but also “capable of self-government.” For Boreman, the onus of this responsibility was not his as a federal judge, but belonged to the citizens of the Utah territory. Boreman submitted that doing “their duty” bravely—simultaneously before God and the American legal system—Mormon men had the opportunity to demonstrate their manhood. For Boreman and many others in the latter part of the nineteenth-century manhood was a requisite condition for civilization. By prosecuting the massacre and Boreman’s list of other Mormon transgressions, Utahans could demonstrate their fitness for citizenship. Boreman

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8 Utah waited 47 years and 11 months for statehood. Only New Mexico’s wait was longer at 61 years and 7 months, both included considerable debate over the potential for citizenship of the territory’s inhabitants.


11 Dred Scott v. John F.A. Sanford (U.S. Supreme Court 1857).
continued, “Hoping and trusting that you will as freemen, show your individual
independence and fearlessly and fully discharge the duties d[e]volving upon you.”12

The grand jury heeded his warning and nine individuals were indicted for murder at
Mountain Meadows on 24 September 1874. Official Indictments demonstrated
substantive progress in the work to prosecute the massacre. Moreover, prosecuting
the massacre could demonstrate Mormon preparedness for statehood and help
them to avoid further congressional constraints. Using the law to restore civilization
to those who had transgressed the boundaries of civilization could signal Utah
preparedness to the rest of the country while simultaneously bolstering federal
authority within Utah. If not, Judge Boreman would argue it was because of a lack of
whiteness—the Mormons were mostly foreigners anyway.13

Judge Boreman was not alone in his concerns about Mormon men. In the
latter half of the nineteenth century, race and manhood were intricately connected
within the discourse of civilization. Manhood was explicitly racial during this period.
Civilization was white.14 Mormons might look white, but they remained in a “vexed”
position. If Mormons were white, their whiteness meant the capacity for civilization
in spite of prior regression and offered the “promise of moral rehabilitation.”15 If
they were not white, then civilization saw little hope of regeneration. As Durwood
Ball argues in his study of public executions in the West, within this understanding
even hardened criminals could be renewed because “they still belonged to the white
race, and their racial superiority opened many doors to moral regeneration.”16 With
vexed whiteness, Mormon men had to establish themselves as manly American men.
Polygamy created a dubious narrative of hyper-manliness that both repelled and
attracted men. Mountain Meadows proffered compelling evidence that Mormon men


13 Jacob S. Boreman, “Charge to the Grand Jury,” Beaver Enterprise, Dec. 2, 1874; Leonard J.
Arrington, “Crusade Against Theocracy: The Reminiscences of Judge Jacob Smith Boreman

14 Gail Bederman, Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United
States, 1880-1917 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1–44 and Reginald

15 Ball, Durwood, “Cool to the End: Public Hangings and Western Manhood,” 102.

16 Ibid.
were unfit as American citizens because they had relinquished their manhood. The legal process offered Mormons that avenue for reform. It was not clear if Mormons would accept it, but the law provided them that opportunity.

Though manhood was a central concern within the American discourse of civilization and Manifest Destiny at mid-century, there was not a single hegemonic standard of manhood in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The hegemony of a majority determines what qualities comprise manhood and honourable behaviour at a specific time and within a specific context. Similar to racial standards, manhood and its boundaries are historically constructed. Just a few months before the massacre, “the grey-eyed man of destiny” William Walker surrendered to the Commander of the United States Navy after another failed filibuster attempt at spreading the American empire into Central America. Notwithstanding his ultimate surrender, in the 1850s Walker was the preeminent exemplar of what Amy Greenberg has dubbed martial manhood—fearless, strong, arrogant, and independent. In 1855 Walker gained his fame as he and his band of filibusters overthrew the Nicaraguan government and he became President of Nicaragua for a time. Those who rejected the moral grounds of manhood, like Walker drank excessively, believed in dominance, strength, aggression, and violence. Violence could be manly and honourable in the right circumstances.

Moreover, martial manhood was not the only manly ideal. Amy Greenberg argues for a bifurcated ideal of manhood during the last half of the nineteenth century. At the opposite end of the spectrum from Walker’s martial manhood stood restrained manhood. The ideal of restrained manhood focused on family, Protestantism, business, work, and success. It focused on moral manhood; such men were upright, brave, and reliable. Ted Ownby argues that in the South two ideals of manhood and honour clashed as men participated in aggressive recreational activities and then often went to church on Sunday. As Mark Carnes argues, in other locations around the country thousands of men joined fraternal organizations and reclaimed their lost sense of manhood through ritual. In the liminal space of the West, multiple

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cultures of manhood were evident throughout the nineteenth century. American men understood manliness in different ways often dependent on place.\(^{18}\)

Though there was a wide range of ideals in nineteenth century America and some Mormon qualities or actions might appear similar to those within the spectrum, Mormons were consistently understood to fail to fit as either martial or restrained manhood or a host of other manly ideals. Many theorists have focused on the creation of a hegemonic ideal of manhood in response to change and crisis, Toby Ditz maintains that gender norms can be created not merely as a result of crisis, but also as method to exert power over Others. Nineteenth and early twentieth century manly ideals may have come as a result to changing structures of society, but they were also an effective way that Americans could limit Mormon power.\(^{19}\)

While historians and gender theorists of the twentieth and twenty-first century have worked to establish and then nuance a nineteenth century understanding of manhood, most Americans did not seek real comprehension of Mormons. Their categorizations of Mormons were in broad black and white strokes that left little room for fine brushwork, and they consistently drew Mormons outside the boundaries of hegemonic manhood. Anthony Rotundo argues that the early 19\(^{th}\) century saw a focus on the community transition to a focus on the individual.\(^{20}\) The radical communitarian structure of the Mormons opposed this individualized focus and the popular perceptions of Mormons rarely saw Mormons as individuals. In spite of the disparate ideals, men along the spectrum saw the protection of women and children as central to their responsibilities as men. Restrained men defended their families in their homes; martial men used similar justification to protect—or


personally “annex”—women in Latin America and the Philippines (often from the “effeminate” men of their own race).\textsuperscript{21} One of the major concerns anti-polygamy advocates espoused was the position of women—Mormon women were in slavery.\textsuperscript{22} Protestant reformers consistently argued that through polygamy Mormon men degraded women and womanhood and failed to protect women and children. For many Americans, a few broad strokes adequately illustrated Mormon men by centring on the Mormon failure to meet the hegemonic ideals of male independence and female dependence.

This chapter will evaluate the role of manhood in the popular massacre narrative and the legal prosecution. Manhood could be circumscribed in multifarious ways, but within the Mountain Meadows discourse the themes of dishonourable violence, failure to protect women and children, a Mormon lack of “individual independence,” and cowardice demonstrated serious failings within the American standard of manhood in the latter half of the nineteenth century and on into the early twentieth century. Mormon men were consistently described in opposition to honourable or brave American men. These failings defined a repudiation of Mormon manhood; the legal action for the massacre would highlight these failings. Yet, at the same time, for some the prosecution of the massacre was understood to have potential redemptive power—confession playing an essential role. Massacre participants, including John D. Lee, were offered the path to legal redemption as they were asked to show their independence as men through confession on multiple occasions. The restorative power could be effectual if Mormon agents chose to change.

\textsuperscript{21} Greenberg, Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire.

Trying Manhood Before the Bar

The first two witnesses for the prosecution in John D. Lee’s first trial had both passed through the Mountain Meadows in the weeks after the massacre. They could testify to the crime—corpus delecti, but not to the particular actions of any specific individual. Both testified to seeing bodies, almost exclusively those of women and children. With prosecutorial direction, they honed in on visceral descriptions of the wounded bodies of the massacred women and children.\textsuperscript{23} As he returned from California, Robert Keyes testified he saw two piles of bodies of “women and children [who] were thrown together promiscuously, crosswise and every other way.”\textsuperscript{24} Ashael Bennett corroborated, “I saw a pretty horrible sight to me, I saw the skeletons of women and children, small children, and long tresses of beautiful hair laid there, colored with dried on blood, pieces of calico.”\textsuperscript{25} Mormon participants claimed to have buried the victims; if they did bury their victims, they did not remain that way for long.\textsuperscript{26} The apparent lack of burial offended Christian sensibilities, but Prosecutor William Carey’s larger task was to evoke rage and posit the possibility that jurors and the rest of the country would feel compelled to stand up to such cowardly and unmanly acts.

Keyes testified that all the bodies that he saw were in a state of decomposition dug up and torn apart by wolves, with the exception of one female body. He claimed that when he crossed through the Meadows approximately two weeks after the massacre he saw, “one female that lay upon the south west side of the pile…that did not seem as though it had been mutilated at all. She looked almost as though she had gone to sleep.” The wolves had left her alone. Apparently he examined her perfectly composed body and when the prosecution queried if she was wounded, the witness replied that, “there seemed to be a bullet hole on the left

\textsuperscript{23}All original versions of Carey’s opening argument only mention the women and children specifically. ”Men” was later added to one of the transcripts. William Carey, “Opening Argument,” July 22, 1875, M302, MSS JDL T1.

\textsuperscript{24}Robert Keyes, “Testimony,” 23 July 1875, M335, MSS JDL T1.

\textsuperscript{25}Ashael Bennett, “Testimony,” 23 July 1875, M346, MSS JDL T1.

Another court reporter noted that the witness placed his hand on his heart to demonstrate the location of the bullet wound—a sensational novelist could not have done better: shooting at her heart the Mormons killed the example of female perfection. She laid unsullied as evidence of their unmanly acts.

Before witness testimony began Prosecutor Carey laid out expectations from these first two witnesses in his opening argument. He detailed the offensive manner in which the women were left “bereft of every shred of clothing. The savages had not even left enough to cover the naked remains of the women.” Much in the same way as sensationalized tales of polygamy, Carey used the descriptions of the dead naked women to encourage an emotional response and simultaneously titillate his mixed courtroom audience—the full courtroom included “many ladies … present.”

This heightened as he detailed the unexplainable presence of the one perfect woman:

Among them too for by some unaccountable reason that no man can tell, there lay one beautiful woman, as our witness will swear, on whose countenance was a placid smile of peace, as though she was lying asleep. No Wolfe had marred her flesh, no vulture had pecked out her eyes, but she lay there a monument alone; all the rest had been mutilated but that woman alone. And that woman in her perfect state of preservation.

Her body was a monument preserved to document the savage and unmanly actions of the Mormons. Even the ravenous animals did not disturb the monument. The killing of other men might not elicit such an emotional response, but the harm done to women and children was an emotional touch point.

In his opening argument Carey built the anticipation of an appropriate emotional response chronicling Keyes’s reaction to his experience at the meadows, “The terrible sight was too much for him to bear and he hastened away from the field of death with that horrible sight, that horrible view, impressed upon his mind.

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27 Keyes, “Testimony,” M343.


and there it will remain until his eyes are closed in death.”  

Carey desired that his audience, near and far, maintained that “horrible sight” long enough to move them to action. The lack of protection to women and children, the lack of Christian burial, and lack of respect, all documented an absence of Mormon manhood. Crucial as the care and protection for women and children were to the case against Mormon polygamy, this was an implicit central element of the discourse developed around the massacre which the prosecution utilized—real American men protected women and children. Rather than acting as American men, Mormon men had relinquished their manhood and destroyed women and children.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Baskin, like Judge Boreman, accepted an American standard of Protestant Christianity that the Mormons could not meet. He argued, “The law of Christianity demanded—these should have lain down their lives rather than to have stained their hands in the blood of innocent women and children.”  

In his closing argument for John D. Lee’s first trial, U.S. Assistant Attorney Robert Baskin made the connection to manhood explicit. He stringently argued, “If there had been men at that field of blood with the true American stock in their veins they would have sacrificed their own lives rather than imbrue their hands with the blood of little children.”  

The Mormon participants in the massacre could not be true American men and still participate in the killing of women and children. Moreover Baskin argued that it was not simply massacre participation that categorized them outside American manhood. For Baskin, any Mormon man who participated in Mormon temple rituals had already given up his manhood. He asserted, they were members of an organization which the sequel [sic] shows robbed them of their manhood. The moment they went through the Endowment

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30 Ibid., M305.

31 Robert N. Baskin, “Closing Argument,” August 5, 1875, M3079, MSS JDL T1.

32 Ibid., M2830.

House there they laid down their manhood, and they hadn’t enough of the man left even to protest against that most hellish operation. Baskin argued that in temple rites Mormon men gave up their manhood as they pledged allegiance to another man—a man they called a prophet. They relinquished their own God given right to individuality and their ability to be proper American citizens. Baskin’s mention of temple rites was both salacious and conspiratorial. As David Brion Davis argues “secrecy cloaked…[with] unconditional loyalty to an autonomous body”, here epitomized by the Mormon temple rite, was central to the claim of Mormon conspiracy against the United States.

Though there was no single hegemonic ideal of American manhood during the nineteenth century, independence and individuality were characteristic of manliness across the spectrum and a point of tension between absolute freedom and protection from the state. Both Boreman and Baskin subscribed to individuality as a necessary characteristic of manhood and in extension citizenship. For Baskin, this was lost almost entirely when men participated in Mormon temple rites. He argued, “the Mormon community down there were nothing but dumb cattle”—to a mostly Mormon jury from Southern Utah. Baskin was clearly more concerned with his wider audience and, he continued, the Mormon participants in the massacre “had so given up their individuality had so given up their manhood to this infamous system that was inaugurated to which they were subjected when ordered they dared not ask a question. They did not ask a question from beginning to end with all the others even upon field when men talked together.” The Gentile presence was almost entirely absent from Southern Utah in 1857 and for Baskin this allowed unfettered Mormon dominance and acquiescence. The conversion of those Mormons on the field was so complete that no one dared rebel from their orders.

34 Baskin, “Closing Argument,” M2830. One of the Mormon temple rituals is called the endowment; Mormons performed this rite in a building specifically for this ritual—the Endowment House—before the completion of the temple in Salt Lake City.


37 Baskin, “Closing Argument,” M2844.
During Baskin’s closing argument, Mountain Meadows was the most drastic symptom of a greater problem endemic to Mormonism. As Mormons “[gave] up their individuality to their leaders” and “laid down that manhood,” Baskin argued they lost any sense of self or independence. They “allowed themselves to be made vassals [or] slaves.” Slavery ruled Utah—and Utah slavery was worse than Southern slavery. For Baskin, women under polygamy were not the only ones in slavery; Mormon men who had once been autonomous had given away their individual power. Because of this slavery he did not expect that any faithful Mormons would find Lee guilty. More than that, he believed the Mormon temple rites to be completely incompatible with American citizenship and manhood. It is supremely difficult to envision how any Mormon members of the jury could find this argument compelling even if they thought Lee guilty. Baskin railed against the most sacred of Latter-day Saint rituals in their most holy place, calling the Mormon temple an “iniquitous institution” and a “grease vat.” Baskin potentially could have believed that his explicit condemnation would move the Mormons to legal action against Lee to demonstrate that the Mormon temple rites were not incompatible with citizenship and American manhood. However, it is more likely these inflammatory arguments lend credence to the idea that Baskin’s goal was not to convict Lee.

As they neared the losing arguments Baskin’s ally and Salt Lake Tribune reporter Frederic Lockley wrote, “It is not likely we shall get a verdict. There are two or three men on the jury whose obligations to the Church will prevent them finding a verdict according to the evidence, and the most we can hope for is a divided jury. Strange to say we are all hoping this will be the result, as the attention of the whole country is directed to this trial, and if the jury fail to convict it will under the insufficiency of the Poland Bill so manifest, that Congress cannot fail to

38 Ibid., M2998.
39 Ibid., M2989–90.
40 Ibid. The term grease vat is only found in the Rogerson transcript, not in the Rogerson shorthand.
41 Frederic Lockley, “Frederic Lockley to Elizabeth Lockley,” 31 July 1875, Frederic Lockley Collection, Huntington Library.
give us additional legislation at the next session.”

Baskin’s actions at the trial reinforced this claim. Baskin deliberately calculated he could use the platform of Lee’s trial to bolster the popular fury against the Mormons and eventually bring further congressional strictures on Mormon citizenship. As Baskin prophesied and hoped for, the mostly Mormon jury did not find Lee guilty. Lee’s first trial ended in a hung jury. Regardless of Baskin’s hopes and Judge Boreman’s threats, Congress did not act immediately. These official efforts would both frame and augment the popular discourse that already swirled around the massacre.

Dishonourable Violence

Surprisingly, the murder of a Mormon apostle in Arkansas became one of the most frequent components of Mountain Meadows Massacre discourse notwithstanding never being mentioned during either of John D. Lee’s trials or entering the official investigation as a salient facet. In May 1857, southerner Hector McLean killed LDS Apostle Parley P. Pratt in Arkansas Territory. Four months later a group of Arkansas emigrants were massacred in Southern Utah at the Mountain Meadows. Though the official investigation and prosecution did not see a link between Pratt’s death and the massacre at Mountain Meadows, it played a critical role in the narrative of failed Mormon manhood perpetuated by the massacre narrative. Moreover, it was only a segment of a larger narrative of dishonourable

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42 Ibid.


Mormon violence that swelled after the massacre with a sustained focus on the protection (or lack thereof) of women and children.

Pratt had married McLean’s estranged wife in Utah a year before his death in Arkansas. Eleanor McLean first met the Mormons in 1854 when she lived in San Francisco with her husband, Hector. Eleanor’s conversion to Mormonism exacerbated an already strained marital relationship. Shortly after her baptism, Hector threatened Eleanor with commitment and sent their children away to her parents in New Orleans—she saw it all as an effort to punish her. McLean left Eleanor and she moved to Utah. There she married Pratt as a plural wife (he likely knew that she was not legally divorced from McLean). Three years later, Eleanor successfully reclaimed her children in New Orleans and began to head for Utah when Hector began to pursue her. Pratt endeavoured to meet up with Eleanor to accompany her and the children back to Utah when they were arrested on a spurious charge of stealing the children’s clothing. When brought before the bar, the judge found the arrest was without cause and Pratt was released after he spent a night in jail for protection from McLean. The judge warned Pratt to be careful, but McLean chased him down, shot him, and stabbed him to death. Though local officials held an inquest, no one claimed to have seen McLean kill Pratt and the jury ruled that an unknown assailant murdered Pratt. The murder did not go to trial. News

Indians, Sept. 1857, Also a Full and Complete Account of the Trial, Confession and Execution of
John D. Lee, the Leader of the Murderers (San Francisco, CA: Spaulding and Barto, Book and
Job Printers, 1877), 2; “Horrible Massacre of Arkansas and Missouri Emigrants,” New York
Times, 17 Nov. 1857; “Horrible Massacre of Emigrants!! Over 100 Persons Murdered!!” Los
Angeles Daily Star, 10 Oct. 1857; “Joe Smith, The False Prophet of the Nineteenth Century,”
n.d., CHL; “Killing of Immigrants—Mormons Falsely Accused—Further Endurance No Longer a
Jacob Piatt Dunn, Massacres of the Mountains; a History of the Indian Wars of the Far West
(New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1886), 290; L. A. Bundy, Mormonism Exposed; a Faithful
Expose of the Secrets and Evils of the Mormon Country, by One Who Possessed the Sixteenth Part
of a Husband (New York, NY: Ornun & Co., 1872); “Mountain Meadows Secrets,” Pioche
Daily Record, 20 Aug. 1875; Gulian Lansing Morrill, On the Warpath (Minneapolis, MN: 1918),
225; T. B. H. Stenhouse, The Rocky Mountain Saints: A Full and Complete History of the
Mormons, from the First Vision of Joseph Smith to the Last Courtship of Brigham Young (New
12 Oct. 1857; Cradlebaugh, Utah and the Mormons, 122; Richard Burton, City of the Saints
reports across the country reprinted local reports that saw McLean as the victim of Pratt.  

With Pratt as a well-known loquacious public defender of polygamy “with his pen and from the platform,” the Pratt and McLean saga provided considerable fodder to demonstrate the consequence of Mormons flaunting the American boundaries of marriage prior to the murder. This exemplified “The Sad Story of Mormonism.” A military magazine noted, "The Mormons have a different way of putting the matter: they say he converted Mrs. McClean to the Mormon Church; but in all civilized communities, the crime was one of seduction." After Pratt’s murder, the tone of newspaper articles became more virulent. Arkansas’s Fort Smith Herald taunted implying the counterfeit nature of Mormonism, “One Mormon Less! Nine More Widows!! Alas for the Mormon Prophet!!! If thou hast power to raise the dead, Parley, raise thyself!!" In his own published version of the murder, McLean boldly declared, “I killed him. I am not able to say how you will view the act but I look upon it as the best act of my life. And the people of West Arkansas agree with me.” It seemed that more than just Arkansas agreed with McLean. Most Americans would consider him completely justified in his murder of the “hoary headed seducer”—McLean had done the honourable thing. In the nineteenth-century culture of honour, as Angus McLaren argues “a murderer had few better defences than to claim that his victim was…the seducer of his wife.”

When a company made mostly of Arkansas emigrants was slaughtered in a Utah Mountain Meadow valley four months later, the initial newspaper reports in southern California of the massacre made no connection to Pratt’s death. But as soon as the news of the massacre reached San Francisco, local anti-Mormon


46 Fanny Stenhouse, Tell It All (1874), 325.


48 “Tragic End of a Mormon Partriach,” Farmer’s Cabinet, 4 June 1857.


newspapers labelled the massacre as an act of retribution for the murder of the “Sainted Parley.”"51 Pratt’s murder had been a hot topic in the San Francisco papers for months.52 The idea of the massacre as retribution for Pratt’s death spread outward from San Francisco. The New York Times soon reported, “There is too much reason to believe that the unfortunate emigrant company were massacred by Mormon direction, in revenge for the killing of Elder Parley Pratt.”53 For some it was only one in a broad array of theories attempting to explain the massacre.54 For others it became the central rationale behind the massacre.55 In positioning Pratt’s murder against the Mountain Meadows Massacre, Mormon antagonists found a useful aggregate narrative that would grow over time.

Demonstrating the power of the popular accounts to control the narrative of the Meadows, by the 1870s, Pratt’s murder had become a consistent trope in the narrative of the massacre found in sensationalized newspaper reports and books—all presented as factual accounts.56 Exposé writers such as Fanny Stenhouse, argued that “a most unsaintly reason” caused the Mormon animus towards the Arkansans—Pratt’s murder.57 The factual details shifted wildly between accounts: sometimes they were in the mountains, sometimes in the plains, sometimes McLean had a derringer, and sometimes he had a Colt. Hector McLean was called by a variety of different names, but the central narrative was the same: “a furious husband in Arkansas had killed Elder Pratt of the Mormon church who has stolen his wife, taken her to Utah


55 Stenhouse, Tell It All (1874), 325.


57 Stenhouse, Tell It All, (1874), 325.
and Mormonized her.”\(^{58}\) In defence of his wife and his children, McLean killed Pratt. The popular narrative denied Eleanor agency as it vaunted Hector’s chosen violence. The *Arkansas Intelligencer* detailed “the unfortunate condition in which Mormon villainy and fanaticism” placed McLean. In the popular narrative, he had no other honourable choice. Most communities and even legal experts would condone “a husband with a wayward mate” moving to extra-legal violence, though “unpleasant.”\(^{59}\)

Though it was unlikely the reader needed a reminder of the un-American Mormon polygamists, McLean’s example first reminded the American audience just how completely Mormons disregarded the American convention of marriage. Pratt, the “amorous Apostle,” had “run away with another man’s wife.”\(^{60}\) Pratt’s transgression was seduction by a religious imposter and such action required a response. McLean was defending family and his American manhood. McLean’s alcoholism, threats, and violence against his wife did not have a place within the simplified story. McLean’s murder of Pratt served a consistent rhetorical function within the Mountain Meadows discourse: the dishonourable violence of the Mormons in the massacre was even further emphasized when juxtaposed against McLean’s honourable violence caused by Mormon action.

Megan Sanborn Jones establishes the “necessity of honourable violence” as a consistent element of anti-Mormon melodramas in the nineteenth century.\(^{61}\) McLean’s murder of Pratt fits this narrative of justified vigilante violence within civilization. Such violence was necessary at times to mollify a threat, particularly one as dangerous as the “Mormon Menace.” McLean was an example of honourable violence portrayed in vivid hues. In one account, the American man McLean (though here called Smith) astride a "fine horse" chased after the clearly weak Mormon Pratt

\(^{58}\) Morrill, *On the Warpath*, 225.


\(^{60}\) Stenhouse, *Tell It All*, (1874), 325.

"on a little black mule." McLean’s horse and stature demonstrated his superiority. Pratt’s mule could also be a satirical reference to reinforce Pratt’s contested religiosity—an imposter riding a mule in the same manner Jesus entered Jerusalem.

As in the following version, McLean’s weapons were often an element of focus amongst dramatic (though problematic) details:

The mountains closed upon the defile, and the avenging husband closed upon the spiritual usurper of his marital rights. The five shooter of Colt rang on the morning air, one barrel after another, until the two pistols he carried were exhausted. The Apostle zigzagged down the narrow road, until a derringer’s only and last ball cut his mule’s cropper and entered his own back. Then the California[n]’s knife for a moment in the air and it sank deeply in Pratt’s back. Thrice it was lifted, and sped before the Apostle tottered, and the Californian rode on avenged.

The judge who first locked up Pratt for his protection and then allowed Pratt his freedom in another attempt to protect him, offered Pratt a knife and a pistol for his protection. According to the sheriff, Pratt refused the weapon saying he relied on God to protect him. Though attacking an unarmed man without warning could be seen as an unmanly or cowardly attack, an assailant murdering an unarmed man from behind was never the chosen narrative. (Pratt in reality was shot from point blank range in his collarbone after being stabbed near his heart.)

For many of the Mountain Meadows authors the link from Pratt’s murder in Arkansas to the Utah massacre of Arkansans was implicit. To insulate against the possibility of readers missing the connection, many authors made the link explicit. Some argued that the emigrants were “from McLean’s neighbourhood”—though McLean did not live in Arkansas. For the reporter C. F. McGlashan “at least one


63 New York Sun correspondent as reprinted in Ibid.

64 Givens and Grow, Parley P. Pratt, 382–84.

65 C. P. Lyford, The Mormon Problem. An Appeal to the American People. With an Appendix, Containing Four Original Stories of Mormon Life, Founded upon Fact, and a Graphic and Thrilling Account of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. By Rev. C. P. Lyford, Minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and for Four Years a Missionary in Utah... (New York, NY: Hunt & Eaton, 1886), 275; McGlashan, From the Desk of Truckee’s C.F. McGlashan, 133.
man [in the emigrant train] was believed to have been interested in the killing of Apostle Parley P. Pratt.” To ensure his reader did not miss his line of causality, he rhetorically asked, “Do you see the connection?” Other accounts used explicit personal vendettas to clarify the connection. A military magazine described, “Mrs. McClean [sic], still full of hatred for all that came from the State where Pratt was killed.” In their account, Eleanor “stated that among this company were several who had helped kill the apostle.” In this description, Eleanor made her announcement amidst the excitement in Utah as Mormons anticipated the arrival of the federal troops President Buchanan sent to quell the Mormon Rebellion. The tension of the time propelled her desires forward with the greatest possible force—“she could have chosen no fitter time or manner for wreaking vengeance on them.” As a direct result of her announcement the Arkansas emigrants were slaughtered. Another newspaper account went so far as to place John D. Lee at Pratt’s murder. From a feigned first-person vantage point the writer described the aftermath of Pratt’s murder:

No one remained of the Pratt cortege except Mrs. Smith and a dark haired, stout young man, whom I remember as Lee. He seemed to adore the Apostle, and predicted vengeance for the act when he should report to Brigham Young. In a few days they departed upon their lonely journey across the plains, and I returned to the States. In the fall I heard of the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

Lee was at times described as stout though not particularly young for the frontier in 1857—he was 45—and nor was he physically anywhere near Arkansas in 1857. Nevertheless constructing an explicit connection used the Pratt/McLean saga to its fullest possibility. This story implicated Brigham Young in the massacre and

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66 McGlashan, From the Desk of Truckee’s C.F. McGlashan, 133–134.

67 Hamilton, “History of the Mormon Rebellion of 1856–57,” 447. More recently Will Bagley similarly saw Eleanor at the origin of the massacre. She arrived in Salt Lake in the first wagons that arrived after sighting the U.S. Army marching to Utah on the plains. For Bagley, the news of the army and Parley’s widow were enough to cause the massacre. Will Bagley, Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 7–9.

moreover gave John D. Lee a personal vendetta and fabricated direct causality behind the massacre.

In one particularly startling “factual” newspaper account, after McLean stabbed Pratt in the back he "then cut his [Pratt’s] heart out, saying that only with the heart blood’s [sic] of the destroyer could there be compensation."69 This shocking action demonstrated McLean’s complete triumph over his foe. The desecration of Pratt’s body was purposeful humiliation and demonstrated McLean’s victory over the heart of the seducer. McLean could be said to be playing Indian with the same perceived motivations as Indians scalping their victims. Both McLean’s violence and his playing Indian were interpreted as manly and an appropriate response. Even potentially savage violence could be considered manly as long as it spread civilization. Tales of desecration of Pratt’s body seemed to require a Mormon response—“When the Mormons learned of the manner in which Pratt had been disposed of, they swore vengeance on Arkansas, and there is no doubt that the leaders were apprised of the fact that there was to be an emigrant train to go overland toward California and that they waylaid and butchered those composing it.”70

For others, the refusal of Arkansas authorities to punish the perpetrator before the law solidified the connection of Pratt’s death to the massacre. Judge John Cradlebaugh used the Pratt murder and the inaction of the Arkansas courts to his own end. In 1863, he capitalized on the murder as he repeated one of his frequent claims that Brigham Young went about “destroying and nullifying the Federal Courts in Utah.”71 He claimed that the inaction of the Arkansas courts in charging Pratt’s killer caused the massacre and used the story to label Young a hypocrite. Even if the readers did not think the connection was strong, Fanny Stenhouse provided additional rationale. She argued the Mormons were “reasoning without reason.” It no longer had to be a rational response. The intractable Mormons,

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69 “Cause of Mountain Meadow Massacre,” Monroe City Democrat, 7 May 1903, 325–6.
70 Ibid.
71 Cradlebaugh, Utah and the Mormons, 122.
argued that McLean was the enemy of every Mormon, and every Mormon was the enemy of McLean;—McLean was protected in Arkansas therefore every man from Arkansas was an enemy of the Mormons;—an enemy ought to be cut off—therefore it was the duty of every Mormon to "cut off"—if he could—every Arkansas man.\textsuperscript{72}

Once the connection between Pratt's murder and the massacre was accepted, the narrative emphasized the lack of Mormon manhood and their dishonourable violence.

Descriptions of Eleanor McLean Pratt stood as an example of what happened under Mormonism. She was the woman deceived. "She was a woman of fine personal appearance. Her high, fair forehead, oval features, queenly deportment, and dignified behaviour in giving her testimony were overpowering."\textsuperscript{73} Eleanor was queenly and dignified and the Mormon delusion had deceived her. Mormonism made Eleanor desert her family.\textsuperscript{74} Protecting his family, McLean had done just as other real American men would do. Just as her real husband McLean had defended her against the "Hoary headed seducer," so it was the responsibility of American men to defend American women and children.

The Responsibilities of Manhood

Mormons had created their own discourse of civilization and within their discourse they were the protectors of virtue and civilization. Mormon deserter Fanny Stenhouse saw the Mormons as ultimate hypocrites for they were "sensitive themselves to the highest degree concerning their wives and daughters, [however] they considered McLean a sinner for doing just exactly what any Saint would have certainly done."\textsuperscript{75} Though Mormon men would claim to uphold the honour of their wives and daughters, they utterly failed one of their most significant responsibilities as men when they failed to protect women and children during the Mountain

\textsuperscript{72} Stenhouse, \textit{Tell It All}, (1874), 326.

\textsuperscript{73} "Mountain Meadows Secrets," \textit{Pioche Daily Record}, 20 Aug. 1875.

\textsuperscript{74} Lyford, \textit{The Mormon Problem}, 275.

\textsuperscript{75} Stenhouse, \textit{Tell It All} (1874), 325.
Meadows massacre. The narrative of Mormon failure to protect women and children would continue to expand.

In 1899 former Utah resident and attorney Abram Gash published *The False Star*, a novel that found its heart in Mountain Meadows and the prosecution for the massacre. The story ends with Utah statehood which “the Saints had bent every energy to bring about this condition.” Mormons desired statehood so badly because they believed that if they “had the State government in their control, they would be free to act in all matters as they desired” without encumbrance.\(^7\) The highly moralistic tale focuses on overt themes of danger: polygamy, hyper-manhood, crime, despotic theocracy, and violence—all themes he still saw as ubiquitous amongst the Mormons. The concerns mirrored the earlier Mountain Meadows narrative tropes, yet Gash wrote after Utah statehood. Mormonism had passed several milestones on its way to Americanization, yet Gash still did not think Mormons capable or worthy of American citizenship. Gash wrote that he was compelled to write *The False Star* because he believed the LDS Church was dictating the political decisions in Utah.\(^7\) For Gash, the country had already gone too far in accommodating the Mormons and Gash wrote to help them recognize the need to disenfranchise the Mormons. As others had before him, he used the Mountain Meadows narrative to call the country to action. Since the Mormons had failed at their opportunity for citizenship, it now needed to be taken away. They fell flat in their attempt to be converted to the American political way.

In his novel, not until chapter thirty-five do Federal officials begin to investigate the Mormons. Their focus was the “chief crime” of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Mormon bishop and massacre participant Philip Klingensmith testified before a grand jury and tells of the little girl depicted in the frontispiece of the book for the first time. On the massacre field when the Mormons raised a white

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\(^7\) The specific event to which Gash referred was the resignation of LDS apostle Moses Thatcher from the Quorum of the Twelve apostles after clashing with other members of his quorum as they tried to delineate the relationship between LDS Church and politics in mostly Mormon Utah. See Bowman, *The Mormon People*, 156–58; Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 7–18.
flag to parley with the emigrants, one emigrant held up a “little baby girl, dressed in white” as their white flag. The “particularly beautiful” girl was three and a half years old and Klingensmith testified that he “pled so hard for her…that she was given to me.” She was saved from the massacre, but had not been returned with the other children. She was held back for nefarious polygamic intentions. The reader there learns that “the good Mr. and Mrs. Allison,” who did not know whence the girl came, had adopted the girl in the white dress from Klingensmith.

A few chapters later a recalcitrant Lola Allison shuns a polygamous union with an old, manipulating, lustful, and power-hungry bishop (current owner of the piano belonging to Lola’s murdered mother) as again the federal government begins to prosecute Mormon crimes. The following chapter twisted to John D. Lee’s trial for the massacre. In the description of the events leading up to the massacre again the narrative returns to the little girl and more specifically details the event pictured at the beginning of the book.

The emigrants then held up a little girl dressed in pure white, as an emblem of peace to answer the signal. This child was the pride of her parents, her grandparents, and was a general favorite of the whole company. When her father held her aloft, he bore the sweetest emblem that was ever used a signal of peace—a signal to the blackest-hearted fiends that ever disgraced the civilized world.”

Like the Pratt murder Lola Allison’s purity—the pride of the civilized world—was highlighted when juxtaposed against “the blackest-hearted fiends.” Lola Allison was emblematic of why civilization needed to be guarded and circumscribed. Notwithstanding growing up with Mormonism surrounding her, she would not be duped into believing this counterfeit notion of civilization.

All of the women and all but seventeen of the children were killed in the massacre. The flurry of narratives of the massacre produced in the decades that followed focused on women and children; women and children often played central

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79 Ibid., 392.
roles in the narrative. In one account, "Not one escaped, and even among the children, two of them, having said something that indicated knowledge of the affair, were afterwards strangled to death."\(^80\) Not present at the massacre, Samuel Jukes was indicted as a participant most likely because of rumours that he took care of two children after the massacre and one of those children disappeared.\(^81\) Another account was an attempt to again highlight polygamy; in this massacre story "none but the female children of tender years were allowed to live."\(^82\) Even though published after the Mormon disavowal of polygamy, in Langdon’s narrative Mormons would only save children who might grow to become polygamous wives. In the massacre


\(^{81}\) The implication was that the child had been murdered—but more likely she was simply moved to another home. Richard E. Turley Jr and Ronald W. Walker, eds., Mountain Meadows Massacre: The Andrew Jenson and David H Morris Collections (Provo, UT: BYU Studies/Brigham Young University Press, 2009), 45, 49.

\(^{82}\) H. Andre Langdon, An Authentic History of the Mormons ([Chicago: IL]: [M. Stein], 1913), 17.
plan, Mormon militia members were to kill the men and intended that the Indians kill the women and the children. In both Mormon and American sensibilities one could not just kill women and children. In one account these responsibilities were switched—“Indians killed the men, while the Mormons butchered the women and children in the most brutal manner imaginable”—crafting a perception of an even further heightened brutality on the part of the Mormons.  

Lola Allison’s character played a role not unlike the figure of female purity in John Nast’s popular painting “American Progress.” (See chapter 2.) In the painting a figure of female purity represents civilization and Manifest Destiny. The white woman dressed in white brings light to the dark frontier as she floats above it. Unlike the woman, Lola was not about to lose her dress.  


civilization was gendered. Feminizing notions of civilization hid the darker and violent aspects of civilizing the frontier and furthermore reminded American men of their responsibility to protect women and children from the uncivilized aspects of the frontier. Images 3 and 4 are samples of several similar images of two girls during the massacre—a frequent focus in many Mountain Meadows stories. The story of the two girls depicted in multiple images originated in J. H. Carleton’s report, they had “run some ways off before they were killed.”85 An Indian boy told Carleton of two girls that the Indian boy and his friend had attempted to help, but two other Indians pushed the boys away and shot the girls.86 As the narrative of the massacre mushroomed, the two girls became a consistent component of the story. The elements were different, but the function of the two girls in the narrative was essentially the same. Usually it was not Indians killing the two girls, but savage Mormons attacking the girls. Aligning with the original account sometimes they were running away or trying to hide from those attacking them. Often the two girls were dressed in white dresses and sent to the spring to get water before the initial attack.87 In at least two fictional narratives they were actually two boys dressed in white dresses, trying to fool those who surrounded them.88 Often the girls were shot at they tried to fetch water to save their families from dying of thirst—not surprisingly the boys made it amidst gunfire.89 Often the images depicted them as little girls, though after Lee’s first trial sometimes they were teenagers—an element


87 Morrill, On the Warpath, 226.


that came directly from trial testimony. In Lee’s first trial a witness testified that he saw an Indian chief chase down two girls who hid in a thicket, though he did not know what happened to the girls. In Lee’s second trial a different witness expanded on the story of the two girls and testified that Lee told him he and the Indian chief each killed one of the girls. This would become the basis of additional elaboration. The images of the girls similarly promote this gendered ideal of civilization attacked by the unmanly Mormons. In nineteenth-century American civilization, men defended women and children rather than perpetrating injustice upon them. Concerns over the protection of women and children focused on the same contentious issues as did polygamy. Within this powerful rhetoric there was a significant difference between killing men and killing women and children.

As these accounts expanded often the victims were raped before they were murdered. These tales expand certain Americans’ “sexual fantasy of polygamy.” English Explorer Sir Richard Burton found Mormons more truly Victorian than the Victorians, yet Americans would not appropriate such analyses into their discourse. Americans simultaneously abhorred polygamy and fantasized about it through sensationalised novels and melodramatic plays. These narratives followed the presumptive structure that polygamy led directly to rape and murder. The almost omnipresent chapter on the massacre in polygamy exposés and anti-Mormon melodrama built on this assumption and developed it. One account told of Lee united with an Indian chief in combat against the emigrants. They raped the two girls—in this story aged fourteen and fifteen—and then brutally cut their throats. The graphic narrative detailed the work of the savages.

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92 Jacob Hamblin, “Testimony,” 16 July 1876, 3428–3451, MSS JDL T1.

93 Jones, Performing American Identity, 48.

94 Burton, City of the Saints, 427–441.
their pure bosoms could not quiver 'neath the plunge of the cold steel blade, nor their white throats crimson before the keen knife's edge until they had suffered the torments of a thousand deaths at the hands of their brutal captors.  

The lurid imagery was powerful. Rape was considered worse than mere murder and destroying the purity of women a greater affront to civilization.

Another instance purporting to be a first-hand account of the Mormons outdoing “the Indians in their lust,” detailed multiple rapes of five girls by a group of Mormons before they "shot them through the head." William Stewart, one of the nine indicted for the massacre, was also specifically singled out for raping young girls before murdering them. Mormon Stake President Isaac Haight—indicted massacre planner—was similarly included in the graphic tales of sexual violation and viciousness. However, Haight was not present at the massacre. The primary focus of these tales was not fitting the accusation into a coherent explanation, but expanding the larger discourse of Mormon transgressions with feigned markers of factual accounts. Many Americans accepted the tales uncritically because they fit into their narrative of Mormon lust and violence already present.

These explicit tales go hand in hand with a historical precedent of Indian captivity narratives. Stewart, Haight, and George Adair—another indicted participant—were all additionally included in different narratives bashing the heads of babies or young children on rocks or with clubs. The accusation that an aggressor

95 San Francisco Pacific Art Company, History of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, 6.


98 A stake is a geographical designation within the LDS Church, comparable to a diocese.


100 San Francisco Pacific Art Company, History of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, 6; Beadle, Polygamy; Or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism, 183; McGlashan, From the Desk of Truckee’s C.F. McGlashan.
“dashed out” infants’ brains is a common trope in stories of massacres and other depredations, such accusations helped inflame readers against perpetrators in similar fashion. The accusations played an effective role in harnessing emotion and anger towards the perpetrators of the massacre and Mormons in general. Beyond that motivating anger, they contributed to the already present narrative of Mormon failure to protect women and children.

Bravery and Cowardice

As Parley Pratt’s death provided a gauge of honourable violence by which to measure the Mormons, within the popular story of the massacre itself the failings of Mormon men were juxtaposed with the exemplary manhood seen in the brave Arkansan “defenders of their families.” In Ann Eliza Young’s polygamy exposé some of the emigrant women and children were "killed by their husbands, father, or brothers" rather than being subjected to “the fiendish brutalities which [some] suffered before they were allowed to die.” Owing to the onerous bravery of these emigrant men to kill their female relations, these women and children were “happy souls who thus escaped the most cruel torture.” Here again, violence could be a honourable and necessary element of manhood particularly to safeguard female virtue.


102 H. Andre Langdon, An Authentic History of the Mormons ([Chicago: IL]: [M. Stein], 1913), 17.

103 Ann Eliza (Webb) Young, Wife No. 19; Or, the Story of a Life in Bondage, Being a Complete Exposé of Mormonism, and Revealing the Sorrows, Sacrifices and Sufferings of Women in Polygamy, by Ann Eliza Young, Brigham Young’s Apostate Wife. With Introductory Notes by John B. Gough and Mary A. Livermore. (Hartford, CT: Dustin, Gilman & Co., 1875), 247.
Frank Tripplett maintains that, “even John D. Lee…was forced to pay tribute” to the bravery of the Arkansans as “they moved under a perfect storm of bullets as coolly as if they were about ordinary household work.”\(^{104}\) The brave men and boys of the Arkansas emigrants stood in stark contrast to the Mormon “skulking cowards.”\(^{105}\) Treachery on the battlefield was not something new, but for Trippett Mormons deceiving the emigrants into giving up their arms and decoying them out of their stronghold in the wagon corral was considered the most egregious part of the battle. Trippett was certain that the Mormons would win in a fair fight because of “their overwhelming numbers.” But rather than fighting a “manly battle,” the Mormons used cowardly and unprincipled deception. Trippett argued that Americans should not be surprised for “this vile perfidy” was “constant…with the teachings of these infamous fanatics, and the nature of the miserable wretches that could be beguiled by the lustful promises of so infernal a religion.”\(^{106}\) Similarly, Methodist Reverend C. P. Lyford warned that the Mormon’s “most heartless, cold-blooded deed” was demonstrative of the dangerous nature of the Mormon Problem. The examples of the absence of manhood were abundant—Lee “pretended to hold a council” with the Indians in his feigned bid to rescue the emigrants. Lyford asked what kind of man would stoop to hiding himself in a chicken coop? Only a “dastardly coward” like John D. Lee would “hide in a chicken-coop when the officers came to arrest him!”\(^{107}\) For Lyford, Lee was never the only target, his religion made him that way and this would always be the outcome for people who trusted the Mormons:

The cowardly assassins….feigned friendship and sympathy, and induced these brave men to lay aside every weapon, and then shot them down like dogs!

The venerable, gray-haired clergyman, the sturdy farmers, the stalwart young

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\(^{104}\) Langdon, *An Authentic History of the Mormons*, 17.


\(^{107}\) Lyford, *The Mormon Problem*, 304.
men and the beardless youth, all were cut down, one by one, and above their
dead bodies waved the stars and stripes!\footnote{108}
While Lyford honed in on the “cowardly assassins” involved in the massacre his
didacticism was to warn of the danger for all. Mormons were pretend friends and
pretend Americans, their pretence of friendship could be deadly to more than just
those who unfortunately found themselves at the meadows.

The thread of Arkansan bravery was continued with the story of John Calvin
Sorrow, a seven year-old massacre survivor. John Calvin was one of two boys Indian
Agent Jacob Forney brought to Washington, D.C. in 1859 in the hope that they
were old enough to provide valuable testimony against the Mormons. When neither
the federal judges nor the probate judges in Utah convened a court to hear the boys’
testimony, Forney asked for permission to take them to the nation’s capitol.\footnote{109}
Though the boys met with the Attorney General and others, no record remains of
the meeting and the boys were soon returned to extended family in Arkansas. Judge
John Cradlebaugh later related how John Calvin wanted to shoot John D. Lee himself
because “I saw him shoot my mother.”\footnote{110} In 1870, Mormon antagonist and Idaho
Senator Aaron Cragin asked members of the U.S. Senate, “Who in the Senate will
say that this boy, now growing to manhood, would not be justified in the sight of
God in carrying out that thought?” In Cragin’s story the boy was more of a man than
the “cowardly, blood stained villains” who killed his family. Parroting the claims of
many federal appointees that the Mormons were a law unto themselves, Cragin used
the suggestion of vigilante action to propel Congress to further action against the
Mormons. Extra legal action would at least stop the assassins, as “many of them have
added new guilt to their souls by committing more murders since that terrible
day.”\footnote{111} Presumably as an effective motivation to action against the Mormons, Senator

\footnote{108}{Ibid., 306.}

\footnote{109}{Jacob Forney, “Jacob Forney to James W. Denver,” March 18, 1859, Messages of the
President, Numbers 10 and 42, pp. 157–59, 36th Congress, Papers Pertaining to the
Territory of Utah, 1849–1870, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, NARA. See also SDoc 42,
pp. 52–53.}

\footnote{110}{Cradlebaugh, \textit{Utah and the Mormons}, 122.}

\footnote{111}{Aaron H. Cragin, \textit{Execution of Laws in Utah. Speech of Hon. Aaron H. Cragin, of New
Hampshire, Delivered in the Senate of the United States, May 18, 1870} (Washington, DC: F. & J.
Rives & Geo. A. Bailey, Reporters and printers of the debates of Congress, 1870), 17.
Cragin offered Congress the option of proceeding with the rule of law and specific government action or allowing the victims of the Mormons turn to extra legal means.

The Mountain Meadows discourse could be moulded to a variety of different ends whilst some like Senator Cragin were calling for vigilantism, others wove elements into the narrative to demonstrate Mormonism was on the wane. After the publication of massacre details through trial testimony, in one intriguing trope of the massacre discourse a dichotomy was created between old Mormons and young Mormons. One story told of a young girl who clung to Lee’s son for protection and Lee killed the girl as she clung to his son.\footnote{Lyford, \textit{The Mormon Problem}, 308.} Though Lee had no son participating in the massacre, the assumption here was that Lee’s son was not as brutal as his father. No longer seen as an indiscriminate group, many sources began to see possible hope of rebellion and rejection of Mormonism, or at least a rejection of the most radical elements of Mormonism, amongst young Mormons. Ann Eliza Young, a former Mormon and former wife of Brigham Young, maintained that Mormons were not merely an indiscriminate mass. She offered the possibility of distinguishing amongst individual Mormons. She asserted, "To the honor of many of the men be it said,—the younger ones, especially,—they refused to join in this horrible work, and some of them made efforts to protect these helpless women from their fiend-like tormentors."\footnote{Young, \textit{Wife No. 19}, 248.} In her narrative, Mormon sons worked to protect women—while their fathers would not.\footnote{Ibid.} The longer one was in Mormonism, the more indoctrinated became the person and the possibility of change diminished. The construction of the narrative bolsters reports that Mormonism would soon be eradicated.\footnote{“Biographical.: BRIGHAM YOUNG.,” \textit{Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture}, 8 Sept. 1877; “Brigham Young and His Work.,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, Aug. 31, 1877; “Death of Brigham Young,” \textit{Maine Farmer}, 8 Sept. 1877.}

Offering additional support to reports of Mormonism’s demise, around the time of Lee’s execution another angle of the reports of old Mormons battling with
young Mormons surfaced. In one version militia member and Lee first trial witness Jim Pearce was shot by his own father for either not wanting to participate in the killing or, as with Lee’s son, for specifically protecting a young girl.\textsuperscript{116} Pearce was likely picked because he tried to focus his trial testimony on his youth and inexperience. He claimed to be fourteen at the time of the massacre in trial testimony, though he was actually eighteen.\textsuperscript{117} One account declared,

Some of the younger men refused to join in the dreadful work. Jim Pearce was shot by his own father for protecting a girl who was crouching at his feet! The bullet cut a deep gash in his face, and the furrowed scar is there today.\textsuperscript{118}

The language is very similar—it likely drew on Ann Eliza Young’s account and was then enhanced. Sources would often embellish the narrative with elements that they want to feature. These accounts follow the pattern of specific details built on apparent first-person testimony, including markers that would suggest a primary source, and then augment the narrative with lurid details in a very functional manner. None of these details came specifically from John D. Lee’s trials. Within the discourse of civilization, those characteristics that would not aid America on its way to its ultimate destiny would be deselected in a kind of reverse natural selection. Younger Mormons rejecting Mormonism would further along its demise. As John Beadle argued, this was all part of the social evolution, ”The original fanaticism wears itself out...Old Mormons die; young ones grow up infidels, and the system moderates to a mild Protestantism.”\textsuperscript{119} Civilization could correct the damage the Mormons had done.


\textsuperscript{117} James Pearce, “Testimony,” 27 July 1875, MSS JDL T1.

\textsuperscript{118} Lyford, \textit{The Mormon Problem}, 307–308.

Confession and Redemption

On the morning of 23 March 1877, John D. Lee sat on the edge of what would soon become his own coffin looking out at the Mountain Meadows valley that was the site of the massacre twenty years earlier. A court reporter recorded Lee’s last words, “I feel resigned to my fate. I feel as calm as a summer morn. I have done nothing adversely wrong. My conscience is clear before God and man. I am ready to meet my Redeemer and those who have gone before me behind the veil.”

Through the rite of execution, the American system of law now had the ability to rehabilitate the portion of civilization Lee’s actions damaged. Lee’s last words and execution ended more than twenty years of legal investigation of Lee’s involvement in the massacre at Mountain Meadows. Though significant, it was only a part of the public examination and analysis of the Mormon John D. Lee and his potential rehabilitation as an American man. Moreover, it became emblematic of the redemptive possibility for all Mormons. Americans questioned whether Mormons in general could be rehabilitated to meet the standards of civilization or was extermination the only action that could quell the Mormons—did the ulcer need to be removed? Would Lee’s death be emblematic of Mormonism’s ability to uphold the rule of law and take part in civilization? While his execution would be an important and widely analyzed moment for Lee, this was never his only opportunity at redemption. Prior to Lee’s conviction, confession was repeatedly offered as an avenue to absolve Lee of his sins.

In the seventeenth century, ministers detailed the potentially redemptive path of one condemned to die through popular execution sermons. Daniel Cohen argues that the decline in execution sermons was a part of a larger decline in ministerial sovereignty or the softening of the style of Protestantism; as the power of the clergy diminished and was transferred to the bar. Confession and execution continued to play a clear role in how a nineteenth-century public wanted murderers to rehabilitate themselves, regain their manhood, and meet the demands of eternal

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120 Josiah Rogerson, “Speech of John D. Lee at Mountain Meadows,” 23 Mar. 1877, Collected Material concerning the Mountain Meadows Massacre, CHL.

justice, though at this point the legal system offered the redemptive path. Confession provided an opportunity to become right before God and Christian society. Lee’s redemption did not just involve himself—it was never just about him. As with much of the Mountain Meadows prosecution, it was never just about the individual perpetrators. Lee and other massacre participants were offered an opportunity to expand the responsibility beyond the local leaders already indicted.

When W. W. Bishop arrived in Beaver, Utah in July 1875 ready to defend his client, John D. Lee, he “found the prosecution apparently anxious for John D. Lee to turn State’s evidence, in order to clear up the mystery so long obscuring the facts in the case.”122 As agents of the law, the U.S. Attorneys offered Lee the possibility of redemption through confession. Bishop did not think Lee could obtain a fair trial and he and other members of Lee’s defence encouraged him to confess. Acting on his defence counsel’s advice, Lee agreed to “turn state’s evidence and become a witness for the prosecution.” Lee “prepared a full and detailed account of the case, giving every fact connected with, preceding or following the massacre at Mountain Meadows,” according to Bishop.123 The U.S. Attorneys believed that confession would allow them to prosecute the Mormon leaders they thought directly responsible. Evidence against fellow arrestee William H. Dame would be helpful, but the prosecution clearly desired evidence that would implicate the Mormon Prophet, Brigham Young. For the Mountain Meadows prosecution to redeem Mormonism as a whole it had to reach the genesis of Mormon offense.

After receiving Lee’s statement U.S. Attorney William Carey rejected it, “claiming that Lee had ‘not told it all.’” While the complete version of the confession is not extant, Bishop asserted that the prosecution refused to accept the statement because “John D. Lee shows, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that Brigham Young is innocent and knew nothing of the transaction until many days after the massacre occurred.”124 For Mountain Meadows to be the downfall of Mormonism, Brigham Young had to be directly involved. According to summaries of Lee’s confession, Lee

assigned local leaders Isaac Haight and John Higbee with responsibility for the massacre. The Salt Lake Daily Tribune reported that prosecutors also rejected the document because it “tells nothing to implicate [William H.] Dame, who is in custody,” and in whose trial it would have been used. Rather than beginning the prosecution against Dame, the prosecution immediately began Lee’s trial with his confession in hand. Lee had failed at his first opportunity for rehabilitation but would now be subject to the full extent of the law. Early confessor Philip Klingensmith was ultimately protected for his witness testimony, but only after some severe handwringing as he waited to see if the prosecution would offer him immunity. Lee’s first trial proceeded without any direct testimony of Lee murdering anyone and though the prosecution entered a second indictment that included conspiracy, the trial still ended in a hung jury. After two days of deliberating, the jury was split. Assumptions of Lee’s guilt—in spite of the lack of witness testimony—fuelled accusations of Mormons colluding to free Lee.

A year and a new U.S. Attorney later, John D. Lee found himself again before the bar. Under the prosecutorial leadership of a pragmatic Sumner Howard the second trial could not have proceeded more differently. Howard left the larger issues of the Mormon Question alone and focused on prosecuting Lee. Mormon leaders trusted his goals and offered assistance in procuring witnesses. Then, in a surprising move after the prosecution finished with their witnesses, Lee's attorneys rested without calling a single witness of their own. (Defence attorney Bishop later defended this move claiming his confidence that any one of a number of technicalities would be enough to release Lee.) After closing arguments and a day and a half

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127 The composition of the jury was consistently debated. Some argued that it was split among Mormons and non-Mormons, another that two Mormons voted to convict, the Salt Lake Tribune originally reported that one non-Mormon voted for Lee’s acquittal. In the following days they corrected their report saying that the gentile had either been paid or baptised by the Mormons. The Deseret News chided other papers for assuming that the Mormons all voted to acquit. There was no published consensus. “The Verdict,” Salt Lake Daily Tribune, Aug. 8, 1875; “The Lee Jury Classified,” Eureka Daily Sentinel, Aug. 11, 1875; “John T. Caine to Joseph F. Smith,” Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star, Aug. 30, 1875; “The Lee Trial,” Deseret Evening News, Aug. 9, 1875; “City Jottings,” Salt Lake Daily Tribune, Aug. 10, 1875; “City Jottings,” Salt Lake Daily Tribune, Aug. 11, 1875.
deliberation, the jury returned their verdict. Lee’s verdict was not just a local affair, people from around the United States waited for Lee’s reaction. In the West, the defendant’s reaction to the verdict and the sentence were critical to the public acceptance of the public reformation of the individual. The possibility that Lee could be rehabilitated offered the promise that all Mormons could be redeemed and choose to return to civilization.

For most convicted murders in the nineteenth-century American West, the delivery of the verdict of guilty and the sentencing provided an opportunity for the American public to evaluate the individual who transgressed the legal boundaries American civilization set. Durwood Ball argues the convict’s reaction to the law could demonstrate the capacity for manhood and the possibility of forgiveness. Whites had the capacity for rehabilitation. However race problematized the potential for one convicted to meet the public standards of manhood; Lee’s Mormonism was just as problematic. Lee’s vexed whiteness and his “foreign” (at least non-Protestant) religion complicated whether or not Lee could meet his Maker like a man. Could he demonstrate his manhood and repent? Would he choose to reform?

Lee’s performance at the verdict and sentencing was quickly prepared for public display and digestion. An exposé could have been counted to Lee’s manly credit and the public saga of redemption, as could the story of Lee taking the collective blame for the actions of others. It was not clear how the public would assess Lee. Though Lee met some of the expectations of the popular redemption play, his acceptance was not automatic. San Francisco’s Daily Morning Call reported that, “Lee’s face betrayed no sign of emotion.” The Call later expanded its description: “He never flinched, he never moved a muscle, but sitting erect and immovable as a marble statue, eyed the jurymen like a hawk.” Lee demonstrated manliness as he looked the members of the accusatory jury in the eye. In general, a cool response to a guilty verdict would be considered manly. Cool has a


129 “Mountain Meadows. An Interview with John D. Lee, the Condemned Murderer,” Daily Morning Call, 10 Mar. 1877.
considerable history in the English language. Since the eighteenth century cool had been used as a gendered descriptor, considered a manly attribute that one not be “affected by passion or emotion, dispassionate; controlled, deliberate, not hasty; calm, composed.” Lee responded to his sentencing steady and “erect” to answer “in a clear, firm voice” that could easily be described as cool.

Though Lee’s coolness seemed to reach an expectation of Christian manhood, some sources countered Lee’s manly response in public with rumours of extreme behaviours in private. The antagonistic Salt Lake Tribune’s columnist concurred that “not a feature of the old culprit’s [Lee’s] face moved,” however, “he was soon afterwards heard to boast of his complacency in listening to the words which stamped him a murderer and recommended him to the hangman.” Contrary to manly levelheadedness, boasting communicated Lee’s lack of manhood. The Mormon press similarly saw an unmanly and unrepentant convict. Though he did not initially show it, they reported the verdict upset him and his behaviour became erratic—“at times he warmly threatens to expose the whole story of the killing at the Meadows and how it was brought about, and again he is sullen and uncommunicative. He is mad and sad by turns.” Lee responded similarly to the sentencing ten days later. He immediately coolly “asked to be executed by being shot.” No boasting was present in public, but it did not appear to help the public opinion of Lee.

After the Utah Territory Supreme Court rejected his appeal, Lee expressed to U.S. Attorney Howard that he was once again willing to confess—“to write a statement of the Mountain Meadows massacre and other Church crimes.” Howard reminded Lee that earlier prosecutors had rejected his statement “because they did

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131 “Mountain Meadows. An Interview with John D. Lee, the Condemned Murderer,” Daily Morning Call, 10 Mar. 1877.


not believe he told the truth.” Lee replied, “that he did not do before his first trial as he would have done if he had supposed the Church was going to sacrifice him and send perjured witnesses to swear his life away.”\textsuperscript{135} In the performance of confession, this could be a positive opportunity for Lee to unburden all he knew before the state and the agents of the law continued to offer Lee opportunities to demonstrate his manhood. Once again newspaper editors were excited at the prospect that Lee would finally tell the full story. On 22 February the \textit{Sacramento Record-Union} reported:

\begin{quote}
It was thought up to this time that he would die game without divulging anything, but he is fast concluding that the Mormon priesthood has deserted him, and to-day he delivered a written, verified statement to District Attorney Howard, detailing with much minuteness the story of the massacre.\textsuperscript{136}
\end{quote}

They presumed that Lee would still “be far short of the whole truth”—they thought it a possibility but did not believe Lee would indict Young.\textsuperscript{137} They believed that Young was the origin of the massacre and would not accept a lesser form of the truth.

Two days later, 24 February, the Virginia City \textit{Enterprise} also reported that Lee was finally “divulging, with minuteness, the dreadful story of the Mountain Meadows Massacre.” Though the use of “minuteness” highlights prolific nineteenth-century newspaper appropriation of articles of interest from other newspapers often without citation, the \textit{Enterprise} constructed its own analysis. For the \textit{Enterprise}, the timing of Lee’s confession was essential. Now Lee truly stood before God without hope of an earthly suspension to his crimes. They argued that he was now ready to “implicate many pillars of the Mormon Church, including, perhaps, Brigham Young himself.” Lee still had the opportunity to accept the restitution civilization offered and could help Christian civilization as it searched for justice. They argued that in spite of the “nearly twenty years since the massacre…there is a strong probability

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textit{Sacramento Daily Record-Union}, 22 Feb. 1875.
\item \textit{Ibid}.
\end{footnotes}
that others besides Lee will be exposed and brought to deserved punishment."\footnote{138}

Similarly, for the San Francisco \textit{Daily Call}, the Mormon betrayal of Lee was indicative of the breadth of the confession they wanted and expected:

Remanded to jail to await the day of his execution, Lee began in earnest the work of writing a true history of the massacre. He is willing to die, but unwilling to be sacrificed for the sake of shielding those who are guiltier far than he, and who have been foremost among his betrayers. Mormonism no longer seals his lips. His Church has convicted him, and he feels it to be his duty to his family to convict the Church. Deserted, forsaken, awaiting death, he cannot longer cling to the religion which abandons him so utterly.\footnote{139}

Western papers continued to speculate what Lee would do in his now desperate situation.

Lee handed his newly written statement to Howard in late February 1877. As prosecutors had done with Lee’s earlier statement, Howard also rejected this one, telling him that “every man implicated . . . was either dead or had absconded, or that better proof existed against them than . . . [Lee] could furnish.”\footnote{140} Moreover, Lee refused facts that had been established in the trials against him—“He contradicts many unimpeachable witnesses, and denies facts that are clearly established by positive and circumstantial evidence.”\footnote{141} For those who read Prosecutor Howard’s words and agreed, Lee was not acting as a penitent headed for a reckoning before God and Christian society. He was not playing the role that the public demanded.

Notwithstanding John D. Lee’s efforts, the following month he would be executed. At the Meadows on 23 March Lee was given his final opportunity to admit his guilt and perform as popular sentiment expected. To follow the pattern of manly deaths, he would have to admit his guilt, accept the verdict, and forgive those who killed him. Lee’s death was a spectacle laden with meaning. The officers of the law planned to execute Lee at the place of his crime. They had offered Lee multiple

\footnote{138} Virginia City Enterprise, 24 Feb. 1875.
\footnote{139} “John D. Lee’s Confession of the Mountain Meadows Massacre,” \textit{San Francisco Daily Call}, 23 Mar. 1877.
\footnote{141} Ibid.
opportunities to “tell it all” and they still did not believe that he had advanced the whole truth. Though lynch mobs often brought their victims to the place of their offense, there was no understood precedent within the rule of law to bring crime and punishment together. The papers speculated at the rationale—perhaps the field of the massacre would finally elicit complete remorse.¹⁴²

Fearing familial retaliation, the army accompanied Lee to the meadows.¹⁴³ The legal officers and the law’s chosen representative for God, a Methodist minister, arrived not long after Lee. Most western executions were still public events,¹⁴⁴ however in this instance the public was not invited; this execution did not involve the general fanfare and carnival atmosphere of public executions. In spite of the absence of an expansive public audience, the execution remained a performative event for the seventy-five men present and the whole country through newspaper reports, pamphlets, books, and images. Similar to lynching much of the spectacle of the event was transmitted in the sharing of the event, particularly in lurid photographs and detailed descriptions when the public could not attend. Circulating the images and particulars of the execution, “expand[ed] the act of witnessing” and the idea that justice had been met.¹⁴⁵

As the executioners prepared for Lee, two photographers correspondingly readied themselves to photograph his last minutes. James Fenemore, a local photographer, iconically photographed Lee sitting on the edge of his coffin at the place of his crime and also photographed Lee in his coffin minutes after his execution. Several of the photographs would be made into engravings and published in a Frank Leslie’s Illustrated special supplement issue for Lee’s execution. At least two of Fennemore’s photographs were made into stereographic prints to be disseminated alongside lynching images and postcards of scenic vacation spots. Both

¹⁴⁴ Banner, The Death Penalty, 146–164.
Image 7. James Fennemore captured this iconic image of John D. Lee sitting on the edge of his coffin at the place of his crime just before his death. The image would be circulated with detailed accounts of Lee’s execution throughout the country. Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Image 8. Another Fennemore photograph taken minutes after Lee’s execution provided evidence of his death for the waiting public. Charles W. Carter glass negative collection, circa 1860–1900, CHL.

Image 9. One of the stereographic cards made of Lee’s execution day. Here the government officials charged with the task of executing Lee are photographed. Library of Congress.
photographers sold photographs of Lee’s execution to newspapers across the country and furthermore advertised to interested individuals desiring their own “good picture” of Lee. Images 7 through 9 demonstrate examples of some of the images captured at the meadows and consumed by an eager public.

Josiah Rogerson, a court reporter, took shorthand of Lee’s last words, climbed a telegraph pole, set up a temporary telegraph office, and sent Lee’s final statement around the world instantaneously. Coastal newspapers in the east and west were “red-hot over the massacre” as was the Virginia City, Nevada Enterprise. In addition, competing Utah papers selling thousands of extra copies of particular issues, particularly those reporting Lee’s execution. Reporters would add supplemental descriptions of Lee’s last minutes. The Salt Lake Tribune detailed Lee’s path, “While walking to his coffin, he seemed to grow weaker, and as he approached it, he leaned heavily on the arm of Rev. Mr. Stokes. He pulled off his overcoat, and sat on the lid of the coffin, facing the wagons where the executioners were stationed.” The minister was there to help Lee in his path of potential reconciliation. It is unknown who requested Stokes—the Methodist—but if federal authorities were hoping for a full confession implicating Mormon leaders they would consider a Mormon leader a hindrance to that end. Newspapers consistently mentioned Stokes’ non-Mormon ministerial affiliation. A Mormon leader would block the retributive and Christian redemptive narrative from playing out in front of civilization—a heretical religion responsible for the crime could not act as the representative for God and civilization.


147 Rogerson, “Speech of John D. Lee at Mountain Meadows,” CHL.

Image 10. James Fennemore’s striking image of Lee in his coffin, minutes after his execution, was also made into an engraving and widely disseminated. Though the public was not present for Lee’s final minutes, the popular press ensured that they could share in the experience. “Justice at Last,” New York Public Library, 14 April 1877.

Image 11. Trying to bring the reader to the moment, this action engraving shows Lee falling back on his coffin as the barrels of the five executioner shotguns remain still in the distance. Stenhouse, *Tell It All* (1878), 631.
The papers reported Lee's cool demeanour. As Marshal Nelson read the sentence of death, Lee listened “in a rather abstracted way, looking first in one direction and then in another…. After Marshal Nelson read the court order, he asked Lee if he had anything to say before the execution was carried into effect.” The representation of the state and God ushered Lee to execution. Lee's final statement was clearly religious in tone, he stated that he was “not an infidel” and had “not denied God or his mercy,” but was “a strong believer in these things.” He continued, “I declare my innocence of ever doing anything designedly wrong in this affair” and that the evidence against him was “false as the Hinges of Hell.” Lee refused to reject Mormonism announcing that he “believe[d] in the gospel that was taught in its purity and introduced by Joseph Smith in former days.” Regardless of Lee's professed faith in Mormonism and his personal relationship with Brigham Young, Lee clearly denounced Young saying that Young “was leading the people astray” and blamed Young for his execution. But when given the opportunity to blame the massacre on Young, Lee refused.

Executions were set up to encourage the murderer to play the part of the sinner ready to admit guilt and forgive those participating in his death; ultimately Lee did not play the part as desired. The narrative allowed Americans to redeem their civilization through the legal process. Though Lee met some of the touch points of a civilized and manly execution, it was not enough. His last words were clearly religious in tone, he remained cool and calm in demeanour, and declared the betrayal he felt from Brigham Young, all of which could work in the expected narrative. Yet, when offered the opportunity to be accountable for his actions or at last finally divulge the supposed higher authoritative source of his orders, Lee died without meeting the demands of American civilization. Lee went to his death proclaiming that he was killed in a “cowardly way” and offered his own counter-narrative of manhood. The vast attention of the popular press to Lee's execution gave the American public repeated opportunities to evaluate Lee's final performance.

In Lee’s last act the verdict was split. Some believed his words that he was a scapegoat for the Mormon Church—that he was “sacrificed to satisfy the feelings the vindictive feelings of some others.” Others saw a defiant and unrepentant Lee—the “hardened criminal as he was, said, with a felon’s death staring him in the face, that he was as well satisfied with the prospects of his fate as he had been in twenty years.” Ultimately, Lee’s death satiated very few individuals. Though a mostly Mormon grand jury had originally indicted Lee, and a wholly Mormon jury had finally convicted him, it was not enough to rid Mormons of the Mountain Meadows stain. After the hype surrounding Lee’s execution died down, many saw an opportunity for those most responsible to be then brought to justice—particularly Brigham Young. (It was likely that this was U.S. Attorney Sumner Howard’s plan.) Americans had given Mormons multiple occasions to reform themselves and be redeemed, but Lee and the Mormons in general did not fully accept what was offered them. The agents of the law would hold on to the possibility of further Mountain Meadows legal action for almost another twenty years as it maintained the search of Mormon reform.

The law offered a means to restore the damage done to American civilization by Mormons in the Mountain Meadows Massacre. As it was, the official efforts were left unfinished. Mormons had finally indicted participants in the massacre, but the value of conviction of a single individual was quickly dismissed. Lee failed to meet the American standard of manhood by incriminating Mormon leaders and the U.S. Attorneys did not have evidence to persist their legal attempts at broader Mormon accountability. As such, stories highlighting the absence of Mormon manhood would continue. Notwithstanding the lack of a single standard of hegemonic manhood, the popular press would consistently sustain a narrative of the Mormon repudiation of manhood highlighting dishonourable violence, failure to protect women and children, and lack of independence. Though the Mormon actions could appear to fit within different rubrics of American manhood, Mormons were consistently placed outside the hegemonic ideals of manhood. The search of Mormon punishment would continue.

150 Western Standard, 6 Nov. 1857.

151 Langdon, An Authentic History of the Mormons, 18.
Chapter 4

“The Tyrant of the Mormon Church”: Despotic Theocracy

Brigham Young died in August 1877. As they published news of his death, the Baptist *Chicago Standard* declared that Young had “never been less than the tyrant of the Mormon church.” The commentary then directly turned to the massacre, “If there does not cleave his soul today the deadly crime of wholesale murder in the massacre of Mountain Meadow, there will forever, probably, cleave to his name the guilt of that awful slaughter, in the conviction of the American people.” Unsure that God would hold Young accountable for the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the article editorialized that the American people would continue to hold him responsible—“probably” forever—and regretted that Americans had missed an opportunity to convict him before the “bar of human justice.” Rather than merely supplanting ministerial power with that of the law, this editor apparently had more faith in the American justice system than God’s justice. The editor seemed to hold hope that the American legal system could have fixed Young’s damage if given the opportunity—if only Young had gone before the bar for the massacre “and the involved iniquities that defame his memory and disgrace his name.”

Other American news editors convinced of Young’s guilt might more likely assume God was on their side in their search for justice, but would similarly lament their inability to convict Young before the bar. Though the *Chicago Standard* editor did not specify

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whom he might include in his category of “Americans” that would hold Young responsible for the massacre forever, the editor of the Cherokee Advocate apparently felt it an important message to republish the claim for both his English speaking and Cherokee speaking audiences in Oklahoma. Many American news editors would similarly address Young’s accountability in the massacre in the days following his death.

By the time of Young’s death many Americans clearly placed accountability for Mountain Meadows on the Mormon prophet. However, this was a fairly new connection. Affixing responsibility for the massacre on Young had not been automatic when the massacre occurred in 1857; it had taken two decades for the blame to be securely fastened on Young in the popular mind. The Mountain Meadows indictments brought down by the Grand Jury in September 1874 did not include Brigham Young’s name, nor was Young the defendant in the trial that began in July 1875. Yet, Brigham Young was central to John D. Lee’s first trial. U.S. Attorneys William Carey and Robert Baskin consistently took opportunities to explore any possible Young connection to the massacre. As the trial began, the prosecution’s efforts were tempered and controlled, but by Baskin’s fierce closing argument it was an all out assault on Brigham Young and his Mormon hierarchy with only a secondary focus on Lee as one of Young’s local leaders. Despite lack of evidence of Young’s complicity provided in the trials, the prosecution operated under an assumption of his guilt in ordering the massacre, from which a popular assumption of his guilt stemmed. That public assessment of Young’s connection to the massacre—even less hindered in the popular press by reliance on verifiable information—would only grow after Lee’s trials and execution. The Chicago Standard proved to be somewhat prophetic—after John D. Lee, Brigham Young received the lion’s share of popular scrutiny regarding the Mountain Meadows Massacre in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and has continued to be a primary target of

popular condemnation on into the present day. As a result, recent Young biographer John Turner accurately calls the massacre a “dark stain…left on Young’s reputation” and Turner justifiably depicts the massacre as a smear on the portrait of Young.  

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Turner’s biography did not specifically address the public perception of Young, yet the public perception of Young made the stain indelible. Earlier biographer Leonard Arrington reviewed specific journalist interviews with Young, but not the larger perception of Young developed in the popular press. The absence of specific engagement with the popular narrative by either author suggests their dismissal of the caricature of Young in the popular mind. This chapter will analyse the popular narrative of Brigham Young’s involvement with the massacre and examine how Young’s complicity in the massacre developed from an insinuation to a given over time. It will assess Young’s role in the massacre as the prosecution suggested in John D. Lee’s first trial, how that role was extended in the press, and how popular sources continued to grow and expand the narrative of Young’s involvement after Lee’s first trial. It will furthermore evaluate the role of Young—whether Young was the specific target or if the focus on Young was emblematic of fear of a larger Mormon threat.

Newspapers across the United States and her territories reported on Young’s death. He died amidst popular and legislative anti-polygamy fervour just prior to the

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United States Supreme Court polygamy test case *Reynolds v. United States.* The array of Young's obituaries demonstrated the American fascination with Mormon polygamy, with self-proclaimed prophets, and Young as a Mormon in particular. A focus on the Mormon Prophet was not new—whether it was Joseph Smith or Brigham Young—the possibility of a home-grown American prophet both fascinated and offended American sensibilities. As David Holland argues, despite a nineteenth-century American obsession with frequent infringement of the Protestant canon and a search for prophetic authority, many Americans did not welcome the idea of a Mormon prophet. Despite this context in which a Mormon proclivity toward prophets and breaching canonical boundaries could be considered to exemplify American qualities; for most Americans, Mormons went too far.

The “Imposter Prophet” was one of the earliest forms of anti-Mormon critiques. Criticism of the Mormon Prophet became political as Mormons attempted to establish their own settlements. “Anti-Smithism” in the 1830-40s reflected the Protestant majority’s fears of disestablishment. The focus on Young solidified and expanded early attacks on Joseph Smith, the first Mormon Prophet, but transformed into a political critique of Young as King over his theocratic Mormon Kingdom in the Mountain West. Local majorities had consistently censured the Mormons and pushed them across the continent to the West, but this history became a part of some authors’ collective amnesia. Some specifically adjusted the Mormon chronology of westward expulsion to fit their argument. For the *New York Evening Post*, America had only coddled the obstinate Young. He "opposed civilization and advancement successfully; he defied the Government of the US, and repeatedly compelled it to yield, and even to invest him

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with its authority." As Spencer Fluhman argues, when the Mormons moved west beyond the boundaries of civilization anti-Mormonism became particularly political in nature, though this political emphasis on Young also further demonstrated the continued trend of accusations of counterfeit religion and blasphemy.¹⁰

The New York Tribune reminded Americans "that Justice is used to being cheated, and would hardly believe her unaccustomed eyes if she would get the best of a bargain. Let it be remembered too, that the Prophet has gone with his bloody hands beyond our jurisdiction."¹¹ As it was, his death offered an opportunity for America to learn from its mistakes. For New York City’s Independent, “Mormonism, next to slavery, [was] the crowning disgrace of [the] nation.”¹² They lamented that Brigham Young, “a coarse brutal tyrant” would die peacefully in his bed, rather than being “shot, like Bishop Lee, who was no more guilty of the Mountain Meadows Massacre.”¹³ The editor loquaciously and dramatically declared the failure of America to let Young die without experiencing the weight of punitive action. Americans were bereft of their opportunity to celebrate Young’s demise. Had Young, like Lee, been convicted in a court of law, the American people could have celebrated remedying the damage he committed to civilization through legal channels. The Independent’s implicit belief in a counterfeit Mormon culture of violence was explicit. Young’s “so-called” religion “raised these crimes to the category of duties and founded upon them a system of society…which defied the laws of our land and all the moral instincts of our people.” It was the duty of Americans to guard against moral threats and for the Independent anything short of “punishing the man and crushing his system….dishonored our laws, as well as our civilization.”¹⁴

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¹⁰ Fluhman, A Peculiar People, 21–47.


¹³ Ibid. and “Brigham Young” The Colorado Banner (Boulder), 27 Sept. 1877.

¹⁴ Ibid.
The Independent lamented that Americans “allowed now for thirty years one of the United States territories to be dominated by a cruel murderer and adulterer.” An expectation of ubiquitous Mormon violence and defiance of American marriage conventions was central to assumptions about the Mormons prior to the massacre, these assumptions served to colour the reporting and legal processes as it solidified prior rumours. Hartford, Connecticut’s Christian Secretary reported that Brigham Young “introduced polygamy, and ruled with a strong hand, instigating or favoring at least, to further his interests, such crimes as the Mountain Meadow massacre.” Other news outlets correspondingly followed suit, reinforcing the American public’s image of Brigham Young with the themes of violence and polygamy through coercion. For the Maine Farmer Young “ruled his followers by their strongest passions, and his unscrupulous readiness to shed human blood, he held absolute dominion over them.”

The response to Young’s death was not wholly antagonistic, though hostile editors quickly censured the few potentially balanced reactions. The Chicago Tribune argued that any castigation of Young was justified because “public morals were injured by him to an incalculable extent.” Though all obituaries of Young were not as explicit in their condemnation of him, the massacre played a consequential role in their assessments of him. For some, the massacre was just one on a laundry list of Young’s offenses. Most sources assumed that Young ordered the massacre without a need to defend that assumption. For the Chicago Tribune, it was “more than suspected that he

15 “Death of Brigham Young,” Christian Secretary, 5 Sept. 1877.

16 “Death of Brigham Young,” Maine Farmer, 8 Sept. 1877.


was in part responsible for the horrible Mountain Meadows massacre.”20 Another Tribune article considered Mountain Meadows the “most terrible and notorious” of Young’s crimes, yet it was only one of Young’s “dark and bloody pages in the history of the Mormon occupation of Utah.”21

Joining a storied history of premature predictions of Mormonism’s demise, Young’s death was similarly an occasion to predict the death of Mormonism.22 A wide array of reports saw the massacre as part of the damning evidence that would bring about the end of Mormonism. Within Social Darwinism, as civilization evolved non-selected characteristics would be left behind. Despite distinct rationales as to why, authors consistently declared that Mormonism was on the wane. The New York Tribune proclaimed that Lee’s execution “proved conclusively that the temporal power in Utah is no longer in the hands of the Latter Day Saints” despite all of Young’s work.23 For some, Young’s death “shattered the last pillar of this monstrous faith.”24 For some it did not matter whether Young lived or died. For others, it was immigration or the railroad that was sweeping Mormonism out of Utah.25 If civilization were moving forward, then lesser forms of barbarity and savagery would be swept away. Mormon transgressions would bring about the demise of Mormonism eventually.

The New York Times exemplified a consistent strain of scandal surrounding Young when it argued, “Brigham Young’s connection with the massacre has never been judicially established, though there is no doubt that a strong feeling has always existed in

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the public mind that the unfortunate emigrants met their cruel fate by his orders.”  The Sacramento Daily Record-Union argued that there “can be no doubt that he was responsible for the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and for a score of less atrocious, but still bloody deeds.” However, The Times editor’s memory failed. Young’s involvement had not always been assumed, and it was not until John D. Lee’s first trial that belief in Young’s direct involvement in the massacre at Mountain Meadows became commonly accepted.

Connecting Young to the Massacre

The first reports of the massacre in California papers in October 1857 began to establish a clear narrative of events. It was not until early 1860 that William Rogers, who had been recruited as an assistant to the federal Indian agent to retrieve the surviving children, suggested the possibility of Young’s involvement. His letter, published in the avowedly anti-Mormon Utah paper, The Valley Tan, included a second-hand report from a Paiute Indian named Jackson. Rogers reported that “after the attack had been made a white man came to their camp with a piece of paper, which, [Jackson] said, Brigham Young had sent, that directed them to go and help whip the emigrants.” Initially this report did not get much traction. Yet, it would be given new life and proliferate after Lee’s trial began.

Though the embattled federal judges in Utah Territory had numerous concerns that Brigham Young was a “sovereign…possessing an Empire in the heart of a Republic,” there was no specific concern with Young’s connection to the massacre in their


investigation. Many federal officials were certain the Mormon hierarchy was antithetical to American ideals, but accusations against Brigham Young in regard to the massacre are almost completely absent in the voluminous correspondence documenting the early investigation. The majority of federal appointees did not share specific concerns that Brigham Young was involved in the massacre with leaders in Washington. Utah Territory Supreme Court Judge Delana Eckels was the exception to this, writing to the U.S. Attorney General, “I suspect that if an Attorney who understood his business and would try, could show that Brigham Young directed the Mountain Meadow Massacre, but no one under Mormon influence will try it.” Eckels claimed one of the few early attempts to prosecute Mountain Meadows, convening a grand jury in Southern Utah (Nephi) in 1859. A U.S. Attorney initially eager to prosecute those involved in the prosecution was to little affect and no sustained focus on Young followed the claim.

Then in 1871, former Mormon Charles Wandell, pseudonym Argus, accused

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Brigham Young of involvement in the massacre. Paul Reeve argues that the accusation came in response to a rumour that Wandell had participated in the massacre. Though Wandell encouraged participant Philip Klingensmith to make an affidavit of his massacre knowledge that led to the prosecution for the massacre, Klingensmith’s only explicit mention of Young came in the last two lines of the affidavit. They told how Lee reported the massacre to Young and that Young was at the time “commander in chief of the militia of the Territory of Utah.” Earlier in the affidavit, Klingensmith claimed Lee possessed an order from “headquarters” though Klingensmith could not see if there was an actual written order. The person who offered the affidavit to then U.S. Attorney George C. Bates, potentially Wandell, built on the text of Klingensmith’s affidavit saying the massacre occurred “under the written orders of Young himself.” Bates eagerly wrote to the U.S. Solicitor General the day he received the affidavit, telling of his great discovery and explained he found “no reason to doubt its truth” as it could “easily be corroborated.” Corroboration apparently did not come easily and Bates did not act against Young. Despite an absence of legal action against Young, the rumours took affect. He worried that he might also be arrested shortly after John D. Lee’s arrest in November 1874. As such, Young sent a cipher telegram instructing a close associate to...

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34 W. Paul Reeve, Making Space on the Western Frontier (Bloomington, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 200n29.


36 This point is absent from Klingensmith’s trial testimony. Klingensmith, “Testimony,” MSS JDL T1.

37 George C. Bates, “George C. Bates to Benjamin H. Bristow, Solicitor General,” 21 Dec. 1871, Source Chronological Files, Letters Received from District of Utah, General Records of the Department of Justice, RG 60, NARA.

38 By the time of Lee’s first trial Bates was employed as a member of Lee’s defence team.
put important evidence “into a safe where it will be secure and at hand if called for.’’
Young never needed to call for it.

As John D. Lee’s first trial began the following year, a focus on Young was not immediate. In his opening argument, U.S. Attorney William Carey did not explicitly emphasize Young; Carey saved his revelation until the end of his argument. He then proclaimed, “We shall show to you that that order was given by Brigham Young.”

Despite what some reported out of context, Carey was not guaranteeing the jury that he would bring evidence of Young ordering the massacre at Mountain Meadows. Carey carefully claimed that Young ordered Lee not to talk about the massacre. In some manner, Carey managed expectations. He promised that he would “prove to you [the jury] that the militia…was ordered out.” He then outlined the prosecution’s “hope to trace it, if possible, to the real source from whence it came in” implicitly nodding to Young potentially as the “real source.”

As the case progressed, each time the prosecution attempted to “trace” the order for the massacre “to the real source,” the defence balked with objections as to the pertinence of a particular line of inquiry. As he had mentioned in his original affidavit, witness Philip Klingensmith testified that two weeks after the massacre John D. Lee reported the massacre to Brigham Young. Klingensmith’s accounts did not include Lee’s explanation of the massacre as an Indian massacre in either source. The prosecution

39 Arrest warrant for John D. Lee, 13 Oct. 1874, Minute Book B, Second District Court Records, Leavitt Special Collections, Southern Utah University, Cedar City, Utah, 289–90; Brigham Young to Daniel H. Wells, 12 Nov. 1874. Young’s important evidence was his letter to Isaac Haight telling him to let the emigrants pass in safety. A portion of the telegram was written using Larrabee’s cipher with the code word “Wednesday.”


41 Ibid., M314.

42 Wilford Woodruff, present when Lee reported to Young, wrote in his journal the day that Lee reported to Young. John D. Lee also told the story of an Indian massacre as he travelled north. Those who argue that Lee told Young the truth based their claims in the problematic Mormonism Unveiled. This chapter later addresses the troublesome source. Wilford Woodruff, “Journal,” 29 Sept. 1857, CHL; “Provo Utah Central Stake, General Minutes,” 27 Sept. 1857, CHL; For an alternate version see: John D. Lee, Mormonism Unveiled; Or, The Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee (St. Louis, MO: Bryan, Brand, & Co., 1877), 252–3.
hon ed in on Klingensmith’s description of Young directing Lee to “take charge of” the
dead emigrants’ goods as “the Indian Agent.” In what became a frequently occurring
process, the defence objected to the line of questioning claiming it was not material to
the case; they considered it both “outside the allegations in the indictment,
and…immaterial and irrelevant.” In this instance and several others, Judge Boreman
overruled the objections, and the defence on multiple occasions noted their exceptions.
Lee’s defence attorney Bishop repeatedly asserted that Lee was not the real target of
the prosecution. He argued, “It is plain that the government officials are after higher
game than this old man” (referring to Lee). Baskin taunted the defence as it cross-
examined Klingensmith—“It is the real criminal getting touched now.” Baskin’s
question of the “real criminal” or the “real client” implicitly brought the discussion to
Young. This led the Arkansas Gazette to report that Brigham Young would likely be
“inculpated.” From the beginning of the trial, newspaper editors provided the public
details of arguments and witness testimony with transcripts and then as the testimony
lagged, trial summaries. Anxious editors supplemented trial news with additional
commentary to reawaken the public’s fascination with the “horrible romance of the
Mountain Meadows massacre.”

Brigham Young and George A. Smith were not called as witnesses, though the
defence attempted to use their testimony anyway. The defence had a doctor in Salt

43 Klingensmith, “Testimony,” M647.
44 Ibid., M458–459.
46 Ibid., M2533 .
48 “The Massacre. The Horrible Details—Brigham Young Will Probably Be Inculpated,” Arkansas
Daily Gazette (Little Rock), 25 July 1875.
1875.
50 Brigham Young, “Deposition,” 30 July 1875, CCF 31, Utah State Archives; “Brigham’s
Deposition: His Account of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. He Displays Astonishing
Lake City swear to their poor health, and attempted to file with the court depositions that had been given in Salt Lake City. The court rejected the deposition arguing that a deposition could not be read into evidence in a criminal case. Though rejected by the court, the clerk filed the statements and editors published them for public consumption. The New York Times and other news outlets published the affidavit. The Kansas Leavenworth Commercial saw the deposition as "a desperate effort" on the part of the Mormons "to clear Brigham Young of the Mountain Meadows massacre." They did not consider the “desperate effort” effective, nor could any such effort be effective for the Commercial. Though the Salt Lake Tribune usually sided with the prosecution, this time the Tribune aligned themselves with the defence and argued that this attempt asserted that the case was “really the trial of Brigham Young and the Mormon system at the bar of the civilized world, and not merely the trial of some murderers before a jury.” For the Tribune this was a positive, for the defence it was problematic in their attempt to defend Lee. Some papers considered Young's deposition to be “very damaging” to Young's “own case”—despite the lack of an official case against him. Some newspapers

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51 Young, “Deposition,” 30 July 1875, CCF 31; George A. Smith, “Deposition,” 30 July 1875, CCF 31, Utah State Archives.

52 Jabez G. Sutherland and Jacob S. Boreman, argument, MSS JDL T1, M1014-18, M1218-25. Resolutions and Memorials, Passed at the Several Annual Sessions, of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah, from 1851 to 1870 Inclusive (Salt Lake City, UT: Joseph Bull, 1870), Ch. 30, § 22.


54 Leavenworth Commercial as reproduced in Robert N. Baskin, Reminiscences of Early Utah, by R. N. Baskin, an Ex-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Utah. ([Salt Lake City, UT]: [Tribune-Reporter Printer Co.], [c1914]), 127.

55 “Brigham’s Testimony,” Salt Lake Tribune, 1 Aug. 1875.

had already decided who was responsible. The *Virginia Enterprise* went to the extreme, declaring, “The affidavit is as feeble as it is false . . . and he [Young] is striking wildly in defense of his neck.” For the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, the affidavit was not just about Young, it “seem[ed] to point unmistakably to the guilt of the whole Mormon Church in Utah.”

The defence quickly tired of the prosecution’s attempts to make the trial about more than Lee. Lee’s defence attorney W.W. Bishop argued that if the prosecution had been only concerned with convicting Lee, Assistant U.S. Attorney David P. Whedon would have argued the case. Whedon had assisted U.S. Attorney Carey for almost a year working in Southern Utah; he “drew the indictment” and “commenced the prosecution against Lee.” For Bishop, the federal officials—the “government”—made the decision to drag “in the church.” Whedon could not take on the Mormon hierarchy on his own. He continued,

> If it had simply been John D. Lee on trial, these legal lights would have remained in their comfortable offices in the city of Salt Lake, and when Lee was acquitted, would have contented themselves with saying “as I expected; another evidence of the outrages against law and order committed by the Mormon Church.”

Robert N. Baskin, an experienced non-Mormon private attorney in Salt Lake City who was active in federal legislation dealing with the justice system of Utah and citizenship, was appointed as another Assistant U.S. Attorney less than a week before the trial began. As it was, “legal lights” U.S. Attorney William Carey and his newly minted assistant Robert N. Baskin, arrived in the outpost of Beaver, Utah and took the reins from Whedon just days before Lee’s trial.

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60 Ibid.

Lack of evidence did not impede the prosecution’s focus on Young. The locus of Baskin’s passionate and long-winded—five hour—closing argument was clearly an attack against Young and the Mormon theocracy. The pro-Mormon Salt Lake Daily Herald called it “one of his characteristic, forcible, bitter speeches” in which he “embrac[ed] the opportunity for spewing out some bile.” Lead defence attorney W.W. Bishop maintained his conclusion that the prosecution thought the legal proceedings a “safe occasion to blacken and vilify the character of Brigham Young…and others who stand high in the church.”

The prosecution honed in on accusations of Young’s religious power and prophetic claim. Baskin used a Mormon argument used to justify polygamy—it was acceptable if God commanded it as evidenced in the biblical text—as a surrogate for Mountain Meadows. He argued that the Mormon militia claimed that the order to kill “came directly by command from the Lord of heaven.” He furthermore argued that Young claimed that the order to end the emigrants was “said to have emanated from God himself.” That kind of violence could not be justified, similar examples from the Old Testament notwithstanding. Carey argued that Young could not be called a Joshua—he seemed still able to fathom a God who could command Joshua to exterminate an entire people. Yet Baskin, like many other Americans in the nineteenth century, took issue with the violence demonstrated in the Old Testament. The extreme violence demonstrated the problems of imbuing the Old Testament text with complete authority—a problem of which the Mormons were all too guilty. For Baskin,

65 Baskin, “Closing Argument,” M2998.
66 Joshua 7–8.
68 Eran Shalev, American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013); Miller, “The Garden Of Eden And The Deacon’s Meadow”; Samuel L. Clemens, Roughing It, by Mark Twain. (Samuel L. Clemens.) Fully
the claim of a leader to speak for God was an egregious affront to Christian civilization; this affront was multiplied when used to condone violence. Employing the language of Christian blasphemy, he argued the Mormon heresy—“He [Brigham Young] is the second Jesus Christ. He speaks by authority, everything is said as seer, revelator and prophet.” Baskin maintained white men could not have done this—it was not in their natural capacity, except by a blasphemous belief in a counterfeit prophecy that ordered the massacre. If Young were guilty of any part of what Baskin accused, it would reinforce the counterfeit nature of Mormonism and thereby the implicit danger of a prophet. His religious argument then transformed into a political one. These were not merely religious concerns of heresy; Young was also a “man with almost omnipotent power—greater than the czar of Russia.” Though Young was no longer territorial governor, close alignment of ecclesiastical and government positions in Utah supported claims that Young still controlled the state. Implicit within Baskin’s argument was the danger of unchecked power and the conviction that the Mormon hierarchy was incompatible with American ideals.

Where the prosecuting attorneys lacked evidence they focused on prior perception and belief. The attorneys’ arguments focused on an assumption that Brigham Young ordered the massacre. Baskin’s chain of reasoning extended through a series of rhetorical jumps. In witness testimony Philip Klingensmith testified that Young ordered John D. Lee to sell the spoils from the massacre when Lee first met with Young a few weeks after the massacre. Young’s secretary Wilford Woodruff took notes of the meeting, recording Lee told Young of an Indian massacre at Mountain Meadows. Klingensmith did not testify to the content of Lee’s message to Young and Baskin argued, “There is not a man on this jury that doubts for a moment that the fact of this


69 Baskin, “Closing Argument,” M2937.

70 Ibid., M2988-89.
massacre was carried to [Young], and carried him by John D. Lee." Baskin’s inference was more powerful than the specific content. He inferred that an order required a report after it was accomplished. His assumption worked because at least in part his national audience maintained a belief in Young’s absolute despotic power—this was already a central accusation of Brigham Young by federal officials in Utah and in the popular press.

The title "King Brigham" reached American ears jarringly. Authors would argue there was no place for a "supreme dictator" within the republic, yet Young had "founded a Kingdom within a republic and yielded a power such as no civilized king enjoys." Writers hoped that the idea of an “autocracy” or an "absolute sovereign" in Utah Territory would compel their readers more fully to understand the urgency of the Mormon Problem. The folk song “The Mormon King” linked Young’s autocratic power with the potential to spread violence:

Brigham Young…. says we’ll rue the day,
That e’er we came into his way,
For all of us he’ll surely slay.
Out in Salt Lake City.

It melodically and sardonically argued that Young’s violent potential had to be quelled or all Americans might reap the result.

Building upon this perception, Baskin ranted, “It is impossible for any man occupying that position—having power in the Mormon Church, having control of matters ecclesiastical and legislative that such an occurrence could have occurred in the

71 Ibid., M2953.
74 Oswalt, Pen Pictures of Mormonism, 17.
country without the knowledge of it having been carried to him.””76 As Young ruled his kingdom with a ruthless hand, “not any person or head of the Mormon church would have dared to have taken such an important step to do such an heinous act, if he hadn’t a direct or implied sanction of that head of the church combination, and done under the church organization, and with malicious purpose in it. The evidence shows that the leaders of that massacre were leaders in that church.””77 Baskin worked under the assumption that Young’s power was so complete that no one would be brave enough to act without his specific direction. Baskin easily argued that it was “very natural that such orders [were] given…when you consider the power and authority of Brigham Young over the Mormon Church, with them the order would have been carried out.””78 Baskin’s argument built upon the perception of Young as an autocrat as it denied the agency of individual Mormons. The prosecution was careful in many instances not to distinguish between local leaders and general leaders of the LDS Church and in so doing created a rhetorical space that allowed reporters and readers across the country to interpret the prosecution’s assumptions as established testimony.

By the end of Baskin’s closing argument he alleged, “the evidence and all the circumstances show that the order made by Brigham Young was actually carried out—an order which sent seventeen little children, whose parents had been ruthlessly murdered, out upon the cold charities of the world.””79 Baskin did not have testimony that Young had ordered the massacre itself. Yet his accusations fuelled much broader indictments. No formal indictment fastened Young with complicity in the massacre, however, Baskin verbally “arraigned” Young at least a half dozen different times during his closing argument. This informal arraignment included “first as an accessory of this murder, because considering the power he had over this people, the position in the

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76 Baskin, “Closing Argument,” M2953.

77 Ibid., M2964.

78 Ibid., M2947.

79 Ibid., M2970.
territory he had over them.” Then Baskin arraigned Young “as having been accessory before the fact” for “quietly” sitting by as “little children [were] made orphans.” His verbal arraignment moreover included “accessory to the robbery of these infant children.” Finally, he “arraign[ed] this iniquitous system, and leaders of the church,” though he consistently assured the jury that this did not involve individual members of the LDS church.

Baskin held little back in his condemnation of Young and clearly struggled to value Mormon belief; though in a potentially pragmatic effort individual Mormon jury members received considerable positive attention in Baskin’s closing argument. Fending off accusations from the defence that his prosecution was a “religious crusade” against the Mormons, Baskin argued that it was not a malevolent desire to persecute Mormons for their belief in a prophet but “more of a tendency to mercy.” He framed his effort as salvific or a form of proselytizing—he and Carey only wished to show the Mormons the evidence and save them from “unscrupulous and fanatical leaders in the territory.” Baskin structured his prosecutorial efforts as a “merciful” opportunity for Mormon jury members to “throw off the shackles…assert [their] individuality and lop off the faults of the Mormon church.” He asked rhetorically, “Is that persecution?” In his zeal there was an implicit inability to accept that true American men could wilfully choose to become a Mormon or to remain Mormon. A “good citizen, an honest man, a law-abiding man” would take advantage of the opportunity offered him—he would throw off Mormon oppression. He persisted in this possibility telling the jurors “You can do it. You have in your power to lop off these faults.”

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80 Ibid., M223.
81 Ibid., M2955–6.
82 Ibid., M2966.
83 Ibid., M2975.
84 Ibid., M2998–3000.
85 Ibid., M3008.
Baskin’s proclaimed desire was not only reformatory, but he interpreted the power of jurors as having the potential to “strike down” Mormon leaders and tell them that “they have no right to bodily take hold of the members of the church and order them to go here and there to massacre these men or cut the throats of them.” If the jury chose a guilty verdict it would be involved in not just finding the individual, Lee, responsible for his crime, but would also become part of a greater cause. Law had the power to rectify the injury Mormonism had made on civilization. Just as Judge Boreman had given the grand jury that indicted Lee and the eight others, Baskin offered the jury the power to restore civilization through law. The nation would “rejoice that the supremacy of law has been established and asserted” and “that organization [of the Mormon Church had] been overturned.” Baskin gambled that the jury would not choose to participate in the avenue of Mormon redemption he offered them; it was not a risky bet. After offering Mormon jury members the opportunity, Baskin would argue that a hung jury demonstrated their rejection of the offer. Tapping into the popular narrative created political capital for Baskin. The hung jury helped bolster his claims that Mormons were not capable of acting as full citizens.

In the Salt Lake Tribune Lockley would later blame the lack of a verdict on inhibited Mormon jurors, yet Baskin’s closing argument did not allow space for a juror to both remain a believing Latter-day Saint and find John D. Lee guilty—as Baskin argued a vote to convict Lee was simultaneously a vote to indict the Mormon hierarchy. Baskin staked his efforts on the dual prospects of expanding a salacious account of the massacre and the Mormon hierarchy as he hoped for increased federal intervention and further legislative censure. Federal officials could use the hung jury to corroborate Baskin’s earlier claim that the Poland Act would not be enough to bring the rule of law to civilize the Mormon territory. Though some federal appointees hoped for additional legislation, the Poland Act would not be repealed, the federal government would stop short of stripping Mormon citizenship, and very far short of violently eradicating the

86 Ibid., M3019-20.

87 Ibid., M3133–34.
Mormons. Yet, over time legislation would be the manner in which the federal government would act against the Mormons.

Despite the strident efforts of the prosecution, those involved with the massacre investigation and prosecution could not directly implicate Young, other members of his hierarchy, or even convict Lee on their first attempt. Baskin later admitted, “There was no direct evidence in the trials of Lee, nor is it stated in Lee’s confession, that any order was given either by Brigham or [George A.] Smith to massacre the emigrants.” Judge John Cradlebaugh, who investigated the massacre in 1859, similarly later conceded, “There have been many theories advanced for this slaughter, and many charges have been made that have seriously implicated Brigham Young as being the instigator, though there is no proof that sustains it.” In spite of the evidence, the U.S. attorneys ensured that Young’s involvement became a central element of John D. Lee’s first trial notwithstanding their lack of witnesses that testified to Young’s direct involvement.

Insinuations Transformed to a Narrative of Guilt

Alongside growing public attention on polygamy, the story of “the gory horror” of the meadows flourished with the trial of John D. Lee.” Both topics further shaped the public perception of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, Brigham Young, and the Mormons in the press. During Lee’s trial, actual testimony hindered the popular press

88 Smith was head of the militia in Southern Utah, an LDS apostle, and later a member of Young’s First Presidency. Baskin, Reminiscences of Early Utah, by R. N. Baskin, an Ex-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Utah, 147.


even less than the prosecution and provided a wide range of opinions that constructed a narrative for the American public. In his closing argument, defence attorney Bishop argued that with “a chance for the counsel to gain notoriety” the prosecution were “pandering to the masses.” Before the trial began, published reports speculated widely as to its outcome. Some were hopeful that real resolution could be found with the trial. An Illinois newspaper reported, “It is believed and hoped that this terrible crime, which has been charged to the Mormon people for the past eighteen years, will be disproved, and that the guilty parties will be brought to justice.” Another declared, “Whether Lee is guilty of such an act we shall leave to a court of justice to determine. If he is innocent, we trust he will be able to make evident his freedom from offence. If guilty, we hope that the dread penalty of offended justice may be rigidly enforced.”

John D. Lee’s trial was never just a murder case in a small town on the frontier. As the prosecution worked to establish their case, the press spread the story of the trial far and wide filling a public appetite for sensational crime reports. Trial transcripts of arguments and some witnesses circulated along with considerable commentary allowing close public scrutiny of a crime claimed to be “without parallel in civilized history.” As the trial moved forward, the New York Times cogently described the trial as a “likely . . . curiosity in criminal jurisprudence.” The considerable time that had passed since the massacre, the change in the indictments “since the trial was opened,” and, most significantly, the assumption that “the entire hierarchy [of the Mormon Church] may be considered as involved in the result of this case” all exemplified this curiosity for the Times. Few newspaper editors professed belief that Lee would be convicted, nevertheless the Virginia Enterprise believed that an even greater goal could be accomplished with the trial: “There will be testimony enough before the trial is over to fasten the guilt where it belongs, and convince the people of the United States that

91 Bishop, “Closing Argument,” M2351.
92 “Telegraphic,” Decatur Daily Republican (IL), 13 July 1875.
93 “Editorial,” Pioche Daily Record (NV), 13 July 1875.
Brigham Young and his leading captains and counselors should be hanged.”96 Much of the press followed a pattern set by Lee’s prosecution, as the trial progressed indictments of Young and Mormonism increased in seriousness and frequency.

Publishing her exposé just a few months after John D. Lee’s first trial, Ann Eliza Young, Brigham Young’s former wife, mustered more restraint than many sensationalized accounts in her assessment of Young’s involvement. She would have approved of Baskin’s tactic to rhetorically focus on Brigham’s responsibility in the massacre. Though she did not claim to know “Young’s connection with the massacre itself,—whether it was done at his instigation or merely with his connivance,” she nonetheless argued for his accountability through his theocracy, claiming that “he was, to all intents and purposes, the murderer of these people, and should be held responsible for their lives.”97 Others were broader in their accusations, the Fort Smith, Arkansas Tri-Weekly New Era declared, “It is believed by a greater portion of the citizens of the United States, that the massacre was but the result of Brigham Young’s orders” and that “the criminality of Brigham Young and other high dignitaries of the Mormon Church might easily be established.”98 “As to Brigham’s guilt,” Connecticut’s Hartford Daily Courant observed, “the evidence accumulated.”99

After Lee’s execution, popular accounts of damning new evidence continued to surface despite the lack of action against Young on the part of federal officials in Utah. The month after Lee’s execution, the Dallas Weekly Herald would report that Mormons were “secretly arming themselves” to protect Brigham Young from arrest for “complicity with the Mountain Meadows Massacre.”100 In time a number of authors


97 Young, Wife No. 19 (1875), 233.


100 “The Mormons Arming to Resist the Arrest of Brigham Young,” Dallas Weekly Herald (TX), 12 May 1877.
would tell tales of evidence that purported to demonstrate Young’s responsibility. In one of several Young articles after his death, the Chicago Daily Tribune maintained Brigham’s death was a release from the moral “onus” of the massacre that Young had borne “for many years,” but had he lived the “onus of that massacre would [finally] have been fixed on him legally.”\footnote{BRIGHAM YOUNG,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 30 Aug. 1877.} The Tribune claimed, “Evidence in the hands of the proper authorities is said to fix upon him beyond a peradventure the instigation of the whole fiendish job, and there has been a growing determination on the part of the Government lately to bring the old man to justice.”\footnote{Ibid.} The Hartford, Connecticut Courant claimed, “A Mr. L C Hughes published in the Tucson (Arizona Territory) Star, March 27th, the special order for the massacre which was issued in 1858. The original of this order is in Hughes’s possession, together with three affidavits accompanying it.”\footnote{“The Mormons: Special Order,” Hartford Daily Courant (CT), 29 Mar. 1877.} (The massacre occurred in 1857, not 1858.) In an alternate version “it was dated April 19, 1858” (eight months late) and had come through Judge John Titus.\footnote{“Mountain Meadows: A Review of the Numerous and Conflicting Statements Concerning the Mountain Meadows Massacre,” California Daily Alta, 26 Mar. 1877.} Baptist and anti-Mormon author Martin Oswalt assured his readers that “Five true bills were secured against Young, but as his death occurred soon after, he was never brought to trial.”\footnote{Oswalt, Pen Pictures of Mormonism, 20.} The Messenger did not believe Young’s death was enough. They argued that “indictments brought against the Mormon Chief for inciting and directing the Mountain Meadows Massacre so involved his system” that the path of justice was to prosecute the “indictments…against the remaining officials at St. Lake City.”\footnote{“Among the Exchanges,” Messenger, 12 Sept. 1877.} No such indictments or affidavits were published or are extant among voluminous court records.

Some Mountain Meadows accounts pragmatically acknowledged the absence of direct evidence and moved to the possibility of circumstantial evidence. Anti-Mormon author Franklin Harris conceded, “It is not certain that Brigham Young issued the fatal
Moreover, authors like Harris consistently left room for the possibility that Young had outmanoeuvred them. Several narratives imbued Young with the draconian power to hide his accountability. Mountain Meadows author John Beadle conceded "the strong probability" that Young did not order the massacre. In a weak attempt at balance, Beadle mentioned arguments of a "majority of the Mormons" that would blame the massacre on local church leaders and "claim that they acted without Brigham's knowledge." He also told the story of Young bursting into tears upon hearing of the massacre, as Beadle claimed Young’s family often told. He, though, then provided a list of what he termed "many strong proofs" of Young’s guilt. Beadle wrote his Life in Utah; or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism trying to capitalize on the lucrative opportunity that was the Mormon question in the nineteenth century. In his introduction he describes living in Salt Lake City in a year he called “the most despotic period of Brigham Young’s rule.” For Beadle, the most damning evidence “more than all else, [was] the overwhelming certainty that no fact of great importance [was] ever entered upon without the advice and consent of Brigham Young.” Beadle and others combined their own prior conceptions with prosecutor Baskin’s assumption of unquestionable power and it became the standard in assessments of Young’s relationship to the massacre.

Following Robert Baskin’s closing argument, newspaper editors would continue to utilize both religious and political rhetoric to indict the Mormon leader Young. Sacramento reporter C. F. McGlashan reported during Lee’s first trial that “the very groundwork of Mormon Theocracy rests upon unbounded reverence for President

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107 Franklin Stewart Harris, The Fruits of Mormonism, by Franklin Stewart Harris, Ph.D....and Newbern Isaac Butt, B.S.... (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1925).

108 Beadle, Life in Utah, 6. In 1882 he essentially republished the same volume under the title more focused on polygamy: Polygamy; or, the mysteries and crimes of Mormonism. Reflecting the mobilization of women in the East against polygamy, the second version included a new dedication “to the Ladies of America, whose sympathies are ever active in behalf of the suffering and oppressed.” In both versions the massacre played a significant role.

109 Ibid., 183.
Young, their ‘Prophet, seer, and revelator.’” The American rejection of polygamy was in part a rejection of the ideal of a Mormon prophet. Mormonism’s affronts were most appalling when a prophet acted as a prophet and claimed revelation—claimed to speak for God. Robert Baskin had hinted in Lee’s first trial at the possibility that an order caused the massacre, but the source of such an order was a pretend revelation. This was not Baskin’s creation, sensationalized narratives stood at the source of this narrative and had already run wild with it.

Catherine Van Valkenberg Waite (C.V. Waite), anti-Mormon novelist, suffragist, and wife of Utah Territory Supreme Court Judge Charles Waite introduced the idea of a counterfeit revelation at the origin of the massacre. Ms. Waite lived with her husband in Utah for two years as he served as a federal judge. This experience and her own career as an attorney and activist cemented her reliability in the minds of many Americans. Her sensational Brigham Young biography, The Mormon Prophet and His Harem, was first published in 1866. It remains in print. Her success with The Mormon Prophet enabled her to establish her own publishing company—C.V. Waite and Co. in Chicago—and continue publishing activist tomes. Ignoring any possible Old Testament precedent Waite argued that polygamy came through a counterfeit revelation. She embodied Young’s declaration to revelation in verse:

And with a piece of scripture,
Tell them,—that God bids us do good for evil.
And thus I clothe my naked villainy
With old odd ends, sto’n forth of Holy Writ,
And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.¹¹¹

Standing as a religious imposter, Waite argued Young could transform nefarious goals using scripture in the process concealing his true intent.


Using Mountain Meadows as a surrogate argument for polygamy Waite similarly claimed divine instruction was at the source of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Her description of Young’s massacre “revelation” was powerful enough to earn much mileage in popular sources when John D. Lee first went to trial in 1875:

A revelation from Brigham Young, as Great Grand Archee, or God, was despatched to President J. C. Haight, Bishop Higbee, and J.D. Lee, commanding them to raise all the forces they could muster and trust, follow those cursed gentiles (so read the revelation), attack them, disguised as Indians, and with the arrows of the Almighty make a clean sweep of them, and leave none to tell the tale; and if they need any assistance, they were commanded to hire the Indians as their allies, promising them a share of the booty. They were to be neither slothful nor negligent in their duty, and to be punctual in sending the teams back to him before winter set in, for this was the mandate of Almighty God.¹¹²

The invented title “Great Grand Archee” reflected a secret Mormon hierarchy possibly reminiscent of covert Masonic or early Ku Klux Klan offices. It also added idolatry to the list of sins casting Brigham Young as God. This “revelation” included pertinent details known to Americans familiar with the massacre and was combined with the 1863 speech of Judge John Cradlebaugh to produce a veneer of authenticity. Juxtaposing her conclusions with Young’s counterfeit revelation, Waite elevates her narrative of Mormon atrocities in relation to the massacre claiming their ability to “fasten conviction upon” the Mormons “by ‘confirmations strong as proofs from Holy Writ.’” Beyond merely focusing on the actions of the few, Catherine Waite built her narrative of a revelation to implicate the whole of the Mormon community in Southern Utah. In her meadows story, “many…from the neighboring settlements” attended a council in Cedar, “the revelation was read, and the destiny of the unsuspecting emigrants sealed.”¹¹³

Despite (or perhaps because of) the clearly sensationalized nature of Waite’s account, it proliferated widely. Within two years Waite was already offering her newly revised and expanded fifth edition (1868).

¹¹² Ibid., 60.
¹¹³ Ibid., 60–77.
A few years later Mark Twain’s 1872 *Roughing It* softened some of the standard anti-Mormon rhetoric in his description of Salt Lake City, particularly as he questioned the ubiquity of violence. He left Salt Lake City “a good deal confused as to what state of things existed there.” Was Salt Lake the tranquil place he experienced or was violence lurking in the shadows? He then explained how after his trip he read Ms. Waite’s “entertaining” book and she cleared up his earlier confusion about the Mormons. Her exposé of the massacre helped him realize that Mormons were as dangerous as he previously thought. Waite’s declarations of Young’s “revelation” became central to his own Mountain Meadows story in its own appendix to *Roughing It*. Other authors similarly expanded on Waite’s notion of a revelation. In Franklin Harris’s account, the Mormons on the massacre field prayed, “Lord my god receive their spirits for it is for the kingdom of heaven’s sake we do this.” Similarly, in John Beadle’s expansion of Waite’s claim of a Brigham Young revelation, the local Mormon leaders met together in a “grand Council” (including multiple bishops) to decide on the massacre. In that council “they stated that they had received a command from Salt Lake City ‘to follow and attack those accursed Gentiles and let the arrows of the Almighty drink their blood.’” In this manner, the story of the massacre continued to play multiple roles highlighting the physical danger of the Mormon Problem as well as blasphemy of the Mormon counterfeit.

Some had particularly strong incentives to highlight this blasphemy. The RLDS Church (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) was a competing schism of the church Joseph Smith established. For these Saints, centred in Missouri, a claim to revelation was not problematic on its face, though they disavowed Mormon polygamy claiming that Brigham Young instituted it. Nevertheless, the RLDS concept of a prophet could not condone all behaviour—Mountain Meadows was a counterfeit.

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114 Clemens, *Roughing It*.

115 Harris, *The Fruits of Mormonism*.

116 Beadle, *Life in Utah*, 181; Beadle, *Polygamy; Or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism*, 181.

117 Today both LDS and RLDS (now the Community of Christ) historians concur that Joseph Smith, not Brigham Young, introduced Mormon polygamy.
revelation as was polygamy. The church newspaper announced, “The awful blasphemy of Brigham Young, in assuring Lee that he had spoken to God about the matter and received His approval of the butchery, will send a thrill of horror through the whole land, and awaken an unappeasable cry.” This unappeasable cry should clearly be “for the punishment of all the leaders implicated in the bloody affair,” but furthermore “for the wiping out of the whole corrupt and polygamic association, and the faithful execution of the law of the land throughout its territory.” Many of the popular sources quickly moved to the accountability of the rest of the Mormon hierarchy after Young or the whole of Mormondom.

A prophet was antithetical to American ideals, but so were those close to him. Often Young signified the whole hierarchical structure of the Mormons. For Franklin Harris, "The power of the Mormon hierarchy was employed to suppress the truth....From the first, however, many persons, who had seen enough of Mormonism to discover something of its odious practices, asserted that this was a butchery by Mormons." These accounts created made up offices (such as Waite's Great Grand Archee) or used actual Mormon priesthood offices. In one account Mormons "murdered...at the command of fanatical priests after the order of Melcizedek." There is similar emphasis on “grand councils” that came together to plan the massacre. But, a focus on the office of bishop was virtually omnipresent.

John D. Lee’s autobiography published by his attorney, W. W. Bishop, labelled Lee the Mormon Bishop in its title—*Mormonism Unveiled; or, the Life and Confessions of Late Bishop, John D. Lee*. This was not the first source to label Lee a bishop—Lee’s label of Mormon bishop was almost ubiquitous. With his intimate knowledge of Lee,

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118 [No title], *Zion’s Herald (1868–1910)*, 29 Mar. 1877. The RLDS Church also disavowed polygamy.

119 Harris, *The Fruits of Mormonism, by Franklin Stewart Harris, Ph.D....and Newbern Isaac Butt, B.S....*


122 For a small smattering of examples see: Gulian Lansing Morrill, *On the Warpath* (Minneapolis, MN: 1918), 225; Fanny Stenhouse, “Tell It All”: *The Story of A Life’s Experience in Mormonism*.
William W. Bishop knew Lee was never a Mormon Bishop.123 Lee had previously been a local ecclesiastical leader of the LDS Branch in Harmony—called a branch president, but by the time of the massacre was a major in the Territorial militia and farmer to the Indians. More than merely a semantic difference or misinformation, the title bishop carried the weight of nineteenth-century anti-hierarchical thought frequently evidenced in American anti-Catholicism. The Sacramento Record saw Mormonism as a second Church of Rome—“a power more autocratic than Rome” and did not understand why there was such hesitation to censure Mormon leaders “claim[ing] supreme allegiance from her votaries.”124 Though a Mormon bishop was not the hierarchical equivalent of a Catholic bishop, the implied relationship was clear.

In the burgeoning popular narrative Lee was not the only one to incorrectly be given the title bishop; John M. Higbee and Isaac Haight were in similar fashion appointed bishops in the expanding narratives.125 In John Beadle’s account two Mormon bishops, Lee and Haight, met with the emigrants on the massacre field to convince the victims to give up their weapons thereby opening the way for the massacre.126 Though involved in the decision that initiated the massacre, neither Isaac Haight nor William Dame, LDS

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123 Following a conflict between Lee and members of the Harmony congregation, Lee was removed from his office of branch president during the summer of 1856. John D. Lee to Brigham Young, 22 Aug. 1856, incoming Correspondence, Brigham Young Office Files, CHL; Isaac C. Haight to Heber C. Kimball, 20 Aug. 1856, Incoming Correspondence, Brigham Young Office Files, CHL. The offices of bishop and branch president in 1857 Mormonism were two distinct positions. At the same time Lee was branch president, the office of bishop in Harmony was held by William R. Davies. The branch president presided over the local congregations’ spiritual affairs, while the bishop handled temporal matters such as the collection and allocation of tithing.


125 Oswalt, Pen Pictures of Mormonism, 28.

126 Beadle, Life in Utah, 182.
stake presidents (above the office of bishop in the LDS hierarchy, similar to a diocese) and militia leaders, were present at the Mountain Meadows for the massacre. Often considered one of the most vicious on the massacre field, William Stewart was not an ecclesiastical leader, yet one account called him a leader to further indict the Mormon hierarchy. Cedar City Bishop and early confessor Philip Klingensmith was the only current LDS bishop at the meadows and directly involved in the massacre, yet he is conspicuously absent from the accounts. His status of former Mormon and decision to turn states’ evidence limited the usability of his former title. Moreover, a variety of different sources place other members of the Mormon hierarchy on the massacre field with a complete absence of evidence associating them with the massacre. Ann Eliza Young placed Daniel H. Wells, member of Young’s First Presidency and Lieutenant-General of the Nauvoo Legion, at the massacre killing “one of these babes with his own official hand.” Frank Tripplett chose LDS Apostle and Utah Territorial Congressional Delegate, George Q. Cannon as a possible accessory after the fact “if not an adviser” of the massacre. Abraham Gash picked up prosecutor Baskin’s suggestion that William Hooper, another Territorial Congressional delegate from Utah, received the emigrant’s cattle from the massacre spoils.

Beyond cattle, rewards and penalties were depicted as one of the ways Young maintained allegiance and power within his hierarchy. Tales of Mountain Meadows leaders receiving more young polygamous wives “as a reward for their valor” on the massacre field thrived. The Chicago Tribune reported that Young rewarded massacre participants John D. Lee, Isaac Haight, and John M. Higbee with wives. The Zion’s Herald assured its readers “Special heavenly favors were promised to those men who

128 Young, Wife No. 19, 1875, 248.
129 Triplett, Conquering the Wilderness, 553.
131 Gash, The False Star, 397; Stenhouse, Tell It All, 1874, 651; Taylor, “A Peep at the Mormons,” 642.
took part in the affair." In the same vein the penalties for disobedience were detailed in graphic horror as a stock element of anti-Mormon tomes. Ann Eliza Young dramatically revealed, "Brigham's law was not to be broken, and the person who should venture to disregard it pronounced his own death sentence." 

Pastor of the People's Church and worldwide explorer Gullian Lansing (Golightly) Morrill, included the Mormons in his late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travelogues of the heathen and hellish. In his Mountain Meadows narrative Brigham Young's penalties became both a cause of the massacre and the manner in which to maintain secrecy after the massacre. Young threatened "his Mormon followers that he would sentence them to death if they gave food, clothing, medicine or any help to these needy emigrants." After the massacre, "The murderous Mormons took the emigrant's jewelry, clothing, stock and wagons to the amount of over $300,000, and went home to read their Mormon Bible and praise their gods Brigham Young and Joe Smith for their great victory." Like the heathen, the Mormons worshipped their counterfeit gods after a successful battle. Morrill also created evidence to directly inculpate Young. In his story Lee provided evidence of Young's misdeeds in his trial testimony. (Lee never testified at either of his trials.)

Author Franklin Harris asserted Mormonism held "two cardinal principles": the infallibility of priestly leaders and their commitment to the destruction of all enemies of the true faith. Violence sprang from these cardinal principles. Devotion to fanatical

133 [No Title], Zion's Herald, 29 Mar. 1877.

134 Young, Wife No. 19, 1875, 233.


136 Morrill, On the Warpath., 225.

137 Ibid.

138 Ibid., 226.

139 Harris, The Fruits of Mormonism, by Franklin Stewart Harris, Ph.D....and Newbern Isaac Butt, B.S....
oaths maintained the principles. Grisly tales of blood oaths were already an element of sensational anti-Mormon literature; some Mountain Meadows accounts built on the theme dramatically. The anonymously authored *Crimes of the Latter Day Saints in Utah* was said to be written *By a Mormon of 1831*.\(^{140}\) The anonymity heightened the element of fear present in the narrative implying that it was dangerous for a Mormon to speak out against Mormonism. The purported first person account professed further credibility. In this narrative, the decision to massacre the emigrants was made long before the train arrived in Utah. Mormons disguised as Indians followed the Arkansas train across the plains and attacked them twice unsuccessfully. One of the disguised Mormons was shot in the thigh, in his anger, he signed “a pledge with blood from thigh wound.” He drew enough blood with a fountain pen to write an oath in blood “in fact, it was the one which had been used to indict a ‘General Epistle to all the Saints throughout all the World.’” Mormons would from time to time use this work of cyclical address; such a suggestion moved beyond Young to implicate all Mormons. These pretend “Indians” then participated in a Mormon “ritual.” They drew “bowies knives, and placing the blades in contact, so that the points were aimed at the written agreement,” they then “repeated in unison the words, ‘By God’ three times, and the ‘Mountain Meadow Massacre’ was ‘done all but doing,’ as the Chief laughingly said.”\(^{141}\)

Foreign, savage, and blasphemous oaths demonstrated the heathen nature of Mormonism as well as insinuating the inability of Mormons to be true to oaths as American citizens. The claim of a counterfeit religion also became political.

### Creating the Right Confession

A central source for the foundation of many of these accounts was the book length extension of William Bishop’s version of John D. Lee’s autobiography, *Mormonism Unveiled*. In life, John D. Lee had multiple offers from different individuals to publish his

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story. After his conviction, Lee consistently searched for funds to support his continuing defence. When funds for his appeal were not forthcoming, he agreed that he would write his autobiography for his defence attorney, William W. Bishop, as a form of payment for his legal services and in hope that any residual would go to his family. Lee’s manuscript was slow going and Bishop consistently prodded him to write more about the Utah period of his life—particularly about the massacre. Bishop feared Lee would be executed before he could finish—his story would not be as valuable without what Bishop considered the most important part. Bishop told Lee that he would work with Lee’s autobiographical writings so as to “make the story useful and interesting” to the public.

Though Bishop left Lee isolated after his conviction with little support other than U.S. Attorney Sumner Howard and Marshal William Nelson, Bishop felt clearly betrayed when Lee offered Howard another confession for publication just prior to his execution. In March 1877, Bishop lamented, “Your confession given to Howard is having a bad effect so far as the sale of your writings are concerned but by giving me your history during your life in Utah I can make the thing work all right yet I think.” Interestingly, the confession was not yet public, however it was negatively affecting Bishop’s publishing prospects. Bishop’s attempt to “make things work all right” was two-fold. Bishop preempted Howard and published an altered version of Lee’s July 1875 confession in the days leading up to Lee’s execution. Bishop sold his version of Lee’s confession for $750 to a number of papers, promising them exclusives in their particular states. Costing 25 cents Barclay and Co. of Philadelphia published the Bishop confession in pamphlet form. That pamphlet went through two editions in 1877, another in 1882, and

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Image 2. Each time John D. Lee wrote a confession it produced a frenzy of speculation. W.W. Bishop and others would work to slake or heighten the public’s thirst with Lee’s confessions. This is one of the few sources that correctly labelled Lee as a Mormon elder, rather than the hierarchically weighty bishop. CHL, 1877.

another in German.145 Moreover, the Old Franklin Publishing House in Philadelphia published another pamphlet of Lee’s confession in both English and French that touted

the “implication of Brigham Young.”146 The day after Lee’s execution the Sacramento Daily Record-Union and the San Francisco Daily Bulletin, published Howard’s version of “Lee’s Last Confession.”147 Citing these papers as their source, a number of other newspapers also quickly published the confession before the day was out. During the next week, numerous other newspapers across the nation republished this confession as well.148

U.S. newspapers battled over which was the “right” confession. The main difference in the two confessions was in the accountability of Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders. In contrast to Bishop’s earlier claim that Lee’s confession did nothing to implicate Young and the Howard confession’s lack of incriminating material on Young, Bishop’s second confession proclaimed that the “massacre was the result of the direct teachings of Brigham Young, and it was done by the orders of those high in authority in the Mormon community.”149 In Bishop’s version Young frequently ordered Mormon violence. Mountain Meadows became evidence of a perception of ubiquitous Mormon savagery. Bishop made “the thing work out right” as he altered Lee’s confessional text prior to publication. Since Lee did not give him the narrative he desired, he altered the


manuscript to match the discourse the nation expected. After considerable debates as to the veracity of the different confessions, many Americans choose the narrative they desired—the one that implicated Brigham Young.

Bishop’s version of Lee’s Confession was expanded upon with a “useful and interesting” book. The day of Lee’s execution, the Eureka Republican began to advertise Lee’s more complete autobiographical writings Bishop would also publish in book form—Mormonism Unveiled. They quickly worked to get the book out within a month of Lee’s death. What became Mormonism Unveiled: The Life and Confessions of John D. Lee and the Complete Life of Brigham Young had a dozen editions before the end of the nineteenth century. Another version was published in 1905 edited and annotated by another author. The University of New Mexico Press published a reprint beginning in 2001. It, too, has already been through multiple editions.

The publication of Mormonism Unveiled gave the public what they desired but what Lee had never offered while he was alive: it argued for Brigham Young’s guilt and further heightened the complicity of the Mormon hierarchy in the massacre and widespread Mormon violence. The confession became:

Mormonism Unveiled; Including the Remarkable Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee; (Written by Himself) and Complete Life of Brigham Young, Embracing a History of Mormonism from its Inception Down to the Present Time, with An Exposition of the Secret History, Signs, Symbols, and Crimes of the Mormon Church. Also the Mountain Meadows Massacre


151 “The Life of John D. Lee,” Eureka Republican, 5 May 1877.

152 Lee, Mormonism Unveiled, 1877.


As the extended title suggests, *Mormonism Unveiled* was clearly more exposé than history. In the preface Bishop unequivocally places the responsibility for the massacre on Young and other LDS Church leaders. The crime “without a parallel…was done by a band of fanatics, who had no cause of complaint against the emigrants except that the authorities of the Mormon Church had decided that all the emigrants who were old enough to talk, should die—revenge for alleged insults to Brigham Young, and the booty of the plundered train being the inciting causes of the massacre.”\(^{155}\)

As the first edition was published the *Ogden Junction* questioned the source of the tell-all titling its review “A little Lee and a little lawyer.”\(^{156}\) In 1932, author Birney Hoffman contended, “The evidence is strong—although entirely circumstantial in its nature—that certain portions of that narrative were skilfully altered after Lee’s death so that the volume could be employed as a weapon against the Mormon Church.”\(^{157}\) Despite these warnings the volume continues today to be often used as an uncontested primary source.\(^{158}\) Under scrutiny it is clear that the original manuscript was altered.\(^{159}\) Evidence demonstrates that Bishop added sensationalized and erroneous details to the manuscript. Bishop’s embellishments show distinct trends expanding the responsibility for the massacre heightening the accountability of Mormon leaders—particularly the role of Brigham Young and Apostle and former Utah militia general George A. Smith—

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159 Orton, “Confessions of John D. Lee.”
in relation to Mountain Meadows and a host of other claimed Mormon atrocities. Though Lee himself had not acted as the public anticipated by earning redemption from American citizens and inculpating Young in the massacre, his attorney stepped in after Lee’s death. Bishop provided the narrative the public desired and the public responded in kind buying the book in droves.

Almost thirty years later, John D. Lee’s confessions would again be resurrected. Journalist and author Alfred Henry Lewis wrote eighteen books on topics that spread from western novels to a biography of Aaron Burr to a history of Tammany Hall. Lewis wrote several exposé pieces on the Mormons, including a preface to his own unauthorized version of John D. Lee’s confessions published in 1905—*The Mormon Menace*. From 1903 to 1907 a broad coalition of Protestant organizations challenged the seating of Reed Smoot, LDS Apostle and recently elected U.S. Senator from Utah. Kathleen Flake notes that the popular press revived the Mountain Meadows narrative with much zeal, but she did not see it affecting the congressional debates—it merely provided grist for the sensational newspaper campaign. However, the grist was quite extensive. When Smoot supported a fellow Utahan for a seat in the House of Representatives, newspapers claimed the candidate was John D. Lee’s favourite son-in-law because he had married a Lee (not a daughter of John D. Lee, nor either of them a Mormon). Flake argues they used Mountain Meadows because they didn’t have any


Image 3. This *Puck* cartoon titled “The real objection to Smoot” a bearded patriarch donning his “Mormon Hierarchy” hat drops his Reed Smoot rag doll through the Senate door. The patriarch’s patchwork coat incorporated a polygamy sleeve while the lower flank of the coat exemplified rumours of Mormon violence. The blue Mountain Meadows Massacre patch as one specific example of that violence reminds the reader not only of the violent potential of the Mormons, but their violent history. “The Real Objection to Smoot,” *Puck*, 27 April 1904, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU.
more recent tales of Mormon atrocity. The Mormon Menace certainly could qualify as grist for the Smoot hearings. (Lewis also published an abridged version in pamphlet form.) Lewis was inspired to publish the Menace because he found Reed Smoot emblematic of the Mormon threat to overtake American politics. His introduction again built on the popular narrative wholly connecting Brigham Young to the massacre. He asserted that “in the name of Mormon safety Brigham Young” suppressed Lee’s Confessions when originally published. (Lewis ignored the dozens of editions of Mormonism Unveiled published between 1877 and 1905.) “At least two volumes escaped,” wrote Lewis, “These have been placed in my hand by certain patriotic influences.” Honouring their risk and fulfilling his own patriotic duty, Lewis published a new edition of Lee’s confessions. Though the book’s chapters appear generally unaltered from Mormonism Unveiled, Lewis claimed he could not publish the text as originally produced, it was his duty to expurgate “much that was shocking and atrocious” making the volume fit for “modest ears and eyes.”

As did others retelling the Mormon story, Lewis insisted that Mountain Meadows was still representative of the Mormons as a whole, Brigham Young was no different than the current LDS Church President, Joseph F. Smith—“black kitten makes a black cat.” Whether that was a reference to the lack of Mormon whiteness is debatable, but clearly the Mormons were still a threat from which America needed to be protected. Lewis saw himself as an American protector from the immorality and treason of the Mormons. The Mormons were the American version of Guy Fawkes and Lewis saw Lee’s confessions as a way to burn the effigy. For Lewis, this treason would not be accomplished if Congress just “cleansed itself from Smoot,” the Mormon threat would continue. That same year, a Washington Times magazine headline read “How 1,500,000 American Women Are Fighting Mormonism.” The article profiled the work of the National League of Women’s Organizations against the Mormons with one of their more recent efforts being the sale of the first edition of Lewis’ “powerful arraignment of Mormonism” in The


165 For other examples see ibid., 5–6.
Mormon Menace “proving that [Mormonism] is a conspiracy rather than a religion.”

As the congressional debates over the seating of Senator elect Smoot neared their end in 1907, Arkansas Senator James H. Berry argued against Smoot. He declared no personal animosity against Smoot, but that it was within the power of the Senate to reject Smoot. Initially he noted the motivating opinion of his constituents in a veiled reference to the massacre. Later, he also contended that the Mormon Church was no different than in Joseph Smith or Brigham Young’s day. He supported his contention as he recited the full details of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. It seemed a last ditch effort. The work of Berry and many others failed and after four long years of testimony the Senate voted to seat Smoot.

Alfred Henry Lewis’s concern only heightened when the controversy over Smoot quelled and Smoot was finally settled in the Senate working successfully. In 1911, Lewis wrote a three-part series for Cosmopolitan magazine entitled “The Viper on the Hearth.” Though Utah appeared to be finally Americanized, he argued their invisible tentacles were reaching into America’s home to strangle and poison unsuspecting Americans. He repeated his earlier contention that nothing had changed. Massacres like Mountain Meadows would happen “in every corner” of America, if Mormons were given the chance. For Lewis, Mountain Meadows was one of the clues that should come together to help Americans finally acknowledge the danger and act on it. If left alone, as the Mormons wanted and America seemed to be content to do, then the “Mormon Church might in any campaign be easily strong enough to make or mar a White House.” The two follow-up pieces argued


170 Ibid., 450.
that political power and money were ultimately the goals of Mormonism—for Lewis every senator who voted for Smoot was a puppet of the Mormon Church and letting Smoot into the Congress was a step to hasten the Mormon takeover. ¹⁷¹

A Legacy of Young’s Guilt

In the last decade a number of books have parroted the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century indictments of Young for complicity in the massacre without significant alterations to the evidence offered in the nineteenth century. Kansas’ Leavenworth Commercial presciently asserted that the Mormons would “never succeed in convincing the world that the old sinner [Young] was not guilty of participation in the preliminary to inhuman outrage, nor that the work of butchery was not perpetrated with his sanction, if not by his positive command.”¹⁷² The Helena [Montana] Herald similarly argued,

Brigham Young was the High Priest and Governor, and is still the head of the church. No one who knows the extent of his power over his dupes, and the spirit in which he wielded this power so long as he thought himself at a safe distance from the eyes of the world, can doubt for a moment that this massacre lies at his door, either as a result of his direct order or at least the natural and necessary result of his teachings.¹⁷³

Young’s guilt became a standard assumption when discussing the massacre; this was a direct result of John D. Lee’s first trial.

While building on elements already present in the popular narrative—the idea of counterfeit revelation and Young as a theocratic despot, the U.S. Attorneys in John D. Lee’s first trial advanced a broader foundation to implicate Young in the massacre and further demonstrate the sins of Mormonism. The popular narrative expanded along lines that further built and reinforced the autocratic elements of Mormonism Young and his hierarchy perpetuated, and manufactured evidence that


¹⁷² As cited in Baskin, Reminiscences of Early Utah, by R. N. Baskin, an Ex-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Utah., 127.

¹⁷³ As cited in ibid.
purported Young ordered the massacre. Attacks on the hierarchy often concluded in expanding the accountability for the massacre to all Mormons and straying from any initial respect the prosecution might have offered the Mormons on the jury during Lee’s first trial. As Lee’s first trial came to an end, the *Sacramento Record* harshly labelled Young’s followers his “plastic tools”—“wretched dupes of superstition that [had] abandoned their citizenship.” The editor encouraged that “public opinion [be] organized to compel a suppression of this hideous blot upon American civilization.” The *San Francisco Post* recommended extreme measures: “We should deal with those Mormon savages as we would with the Indians, their allies and tools in the work of butchery. No Mormon should be left in the United States.”

Moreover, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported the accusations were not just against Mormon leaders, they published a report that “the outrages committed in the name of Mormonism will certainly justify a cleaning out of the whole settlement and applying the knife to a festering and dangerous sore on the body politic.” Once again, the language of excision and extermination became a reality for the Mormons.

Prior to Lee’s first trial Young’s involvement had not been significantly at issue. With only slight exception, the host of federal officials investigating the prosecution did not consider Young to be a likely suspect. Prosecutor Carey insinuated a link to Young in Lee’s first trial, while his assistant Baskin eventually waged a war against Young and the Mormon hierarchy unsupported by witness testimony. Widespread assumptions of Young’s guilt came after the prosecution’s efforts in that trial. When combined with journalists and sensational anti-Mormon authors, the belief in Young’s guilt became a central element in the Mountain Meadows narrative. In the trial, the prosecution use of elements of the established popular story of Mountain Meadows, as in the example of Young’s purported revelation, demonstrates the push and pull between the official narrative and the popular focus on the massacre. Both worked together to expand the censure of the Mormon hierarchy. Brigham Young was not the only concern; the focus on Young

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175 *San Francisco Post* as reprinted in “Crime of the Priesthood,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 31 July 1875.

was also signal for the Mormon hierarchy, and again reinforced the need to quell the Mormon Problem as a whole. Together the prosecution and the popular narrative fortified both why a prophet was dangerous and why a religious hierarchy was antithetical to American ideals. Evaluating Young’s involvement and accountability historically is complex and is still contested today. Yet for some, his guilt is a given assumption now as much as it was for the popular press at the time of his death.
Epilogue

“Ex Uno Disce Mones”

In Catherine V. Waite’s 1866 anti-polygamy book *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem*, she defended her inclusion of a chapter on Mountain Meadows with the phrase *ex uno disce mones*—from one person learn all persons (from one we can judge the rest).\(^1\) Though Waite’s focus was Mormon theocracy and polygamy, she saw Mountain Meadows as the exemplar of Mormon sin—the single example that allowed Americans to know all they needed to know about Mormons. Waite, as did many others, wielded the massacre narrative to both heighten the Mormon Problem and encourage action against the Mormons. The Mormon Question demonstrated some of the limits to *e pluribus unum*; were the many to become one, the limits of Americanness had to be carefully circumscribed. The Mountain Meadows narrative became a tool to reinforce the limits of difference within the American project. There was no need to enumerate the rest of the Mormon crimes—the Mountain Meadows Massacre was emblematic of the rest.

The way the Mountain Meadows story was told quantified a multitude of Mormon sins. A wide swath of sources followed Waite’s lead and used Mountain Meadows as a critical element in the Mormon Question—their narratives of the massacre demonstrating how they saw Mormons transgressing the boundaries of American civilization. Many authors freely expanded around the massacre as they worked to ensure that Americans recognized these transgressions and the gravity of the Mormon Problem. Sensational tales used emotional pathos to characterize Mormon martial incursions while simultaneously heightening the focus on their marital sins. If

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transgressing marriage norms was not enough to require punishment of the Mormons, the massacre and the growing narrative around it might serve to convince Americans that action against the Mormons was necessary.

The foundation of the popular narrative was in a sufficiently terrible event; the narrative grew and spun around the seed of the original event in predictable directions for post-bellum Americans defining citizenship and Americanness. If the theoretical idea of the United States America was created in the eighteenth century, the practical definition and execution of America was constructed and reconstructed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The process of practicably defining America and Americanness was a turbulent process, fraught with difficulties and possible destructive dissolution. Civilization was the ubiquitous discourse that structured the worldview of Americans during this chaotic period. Categorization, labels, and limits were ways for Americans to order their world and protect their ideals for the expanding country.\(^2\) The way in which the stories of Mountain Meadows grew instructs us more about those creating the narrative than those who participated in the original event. The popular tales of Mountain Meadows and the prosecution for Mountain Meadows were closely linked—they were dependant on one another. At times the prosecution found material for their arguments against the Mormons in the popular narrative, at times the popular narrative expanded on suggestions made during the prosecution for the massacre. The manner in which the massacre narrative grew over time furthermore reveals considerably how such narratives grow and how they are utilized. Both law and the popular press could work together to test the fitness of America’s citizenry, attempt to remake citizens, as well as a means to fix breeches to the limits of civilization.

The stories told about Mountain Meadows offered a way for disparate groups of Americans to unite against a common foe as well as feed their hunger for sensational news. With the discourse of civilization as text, a popular Mountain Meadows narrative unfurled with great alacrity with few objections other than from the Mormons themselves. Though the Mormons were categorized as singular and their horrible behaviour a rationale for exclusion, Mormons were not exceptional in this—other minority groups were correspondingly excluded by similar means. Salacious stories of violence, debasement, and conspiracy were often used as a means of defining the limits of the American project whether the offenders were to be divided from Americans by race, ethnicity, fraternal affiliation, foreignness, or religion. Sensational reports both fed an appetite for the macabre while demarcating and maintaining boundaries.\(^3\) Within the Mountain Meadows Massacre discourse the narratives of contested whiteness, savagery, repudiated manhood, and despotic theocracy demonstrated where many Americans placed the boundaries of civilization. Even borders in flux usually placed the Mormons beyond those limits. Nevertheless, as much as the discourse of civilization was responsible for the growth of an extreme and salacious expansion of the Mountain Meadows narrative, it also paradoxically enabled the possibility of Mormon redemption.

A wide range of investigators and authors saw Mountain Meadows as a unique atrocity notwithstanding a wide range of comparable violence in the nineteenth century. Despite a litany of contemporary massacres and a bloody Civil War, most authors who wrote about Mountain Meadows were blind to these similarities. This massacre was labelled a singular example within a racial construct—whites did not kill whites in civilization. The appearance of Mormons was not understood to align with the actions at

the meadows—both appearance and behaviour were a part of citizenship. Massacre reports became a place to question and debate the “vexed” whiteness of the Mormons and their place in the expanding American empire. Mormons were not the only minority group whose presence was questioned. Contesting Mormon whiteness reflected American fears of foreign influences, racial repudiation, and concerns over expansion. Authors asked if Mormons could be cured and return to civilization or if they needed to be eradicated. If they were white, they might be cured. As it had with other minority groups, the legal process reinforced the Otherness of the Mormons.

Questions of race separated the Mormons from Americans as did the physical threat of violence implicit in analyses of the massacre. Polygamy demonstrated barbarism; Mormon savagery cemented the Mormon departure from civilization. It was the disgraceful opposite side of the polygamy coin. Civilization versus savagery became a powerful trope for both the prosecution and defence in John D. Lee’s first trial. Claims to extreme violence indicated concerns that a lack of limits on minority groups could ultimately have disastrous violent consequences. Native Americans, African Americans, Jews, and Catholics were all similarly targeted often without evidence.⁴ This massacre narrative built on prior conceptions of a Mormon alliance with Native Americans, Mormons playing Indian, and ubiquitous Mormon violence. Concurrent with fluctuating ideas of Native American savagery, after Mountain Meadows the Mormons were presented as hyper-savage—more savage than the Indians. Implicit within the claims to hyper-savagery was greater accountability placed on the Mormons. Because they had the capability to choose chose savagery over civilization, the Mormon regression was more severe than those natives who were innately savage. The U.S. Attorneys believed that John D. Lee’s first trial had the power to bring Mormon savagery to the attention of American civilization in a way that must inevitably bring further censure upon the Mormons.

Though subject to different yardsticks dependant on location, anxieties about civilization were further demonstrated with explicit concerns over Mormon manhood. Violence and manhood were mercurial standards dependant on immediate context. Violence could be honourable and manly if given the right circumstances. Mormons were never allowed the right circumstances to meet the American standard offering another method to exert power over the Mormons.\(^5\) During the Mountain Meadows prosecution, ideals of manliness became another stick by which to measure the civilization of the Mormons. At different times both federal judges and U.S. Attorneys equated legal action against massacre participants and guilty verdicts as tests for the Mormons. Federal officials believed the rule of law capable of squelching threats and transgressions of civilization. Adhering to the rule of law, prosecuting, and convicting those involved in the massacre would evidence potential aptitude for full Mormon citizenship. Negligence would corroborate the gendered accusations made against the Mormons. The legal actions against Lee combined with the popular press to focus on the unmanly failure of Mormon men to protect women and children. The dishonourable violence of the Mormons was magnified when juxtaposed against tales of American bravery.

Fears of polygamy and violence coalesced as many authors expanded salacious narratives about the Mormon in relation to women and children. The law was seen as the medium through which both individual Mormons and the Mormon people as a whole might atone for the damage they were understood to have inflicted upon civilization. Within the legal process confession played a consistent role in evaluating Mormon contrition and Mormon manliness. Demonstrating independence from Mormon leaders became an essential test of manhood, which few Mormons passed. The

path to John D. Lee’s execution was a highly publicized event that enabled the American public to judge the possibility of Lee’s redemption and in turn the possibility of Mormon redemption. Both Lee and the Mormons in general failed despite actions that in different contexts could be considered qualities of American men by not giving Americans the narrative they desired.

Despite frequent hopes in the popular press, the prosecution in John D. Lee’s first trial was unable to connect Brigham Young directly to the massacre via witness testimony. This did not stop the U.S. Attorneys from using the trial to informally indict Young and the whole of Mormondom. The prosecution proceeded with the assumption of Young’s guilt and left discursive space in which a tale of the Mormon leader’s culpability could flourish. The newspaper reporters present and the editors and authors who would build on their assessments ran with the implications made by eager U.S. Attorneys. Those insinuations evolved to a full-scale attack on Young as the trial concluded. Though John D. Lee did not implicate Young in life, the able editorial hand of his defence attorney would implicate Young after Lee’s death to further add to the narrative of Young’s guilt. Over time Young’s complicity in the massacre became a certainty in the popular press complete with fictional evidence. Moreover, as the popular massacre narrative spun it elaborately critiqued the Mormon claim of a prophet and revelation despite the fact that some Americans seemed to be searching for just that. The growth of a narrative of guilt around Young and the hierarchy beyond Young often had more to do with fears of conspiracy, unbounded power, and undemocratic threats, than with Young specifically. The narrative of guilt continues to stain Young’s reputation into the twenty-first century.

The contours of the Mountain Meadows narrative were not something new or unique; all of these facets of the discourse of civilization demonstrate efforts at boundary maintenance. Despite American claims to religious freedom, Mormons either had to throw off their Mormonism to be reformed or Mormons had to be expelled from the American empire, so civilization could return to its quest for a millennial goal. The narrative was never wholly focused on the punishment of the guilty participants at Mountain Meadows—a lack of punishment actually better served the narrative. The
story of the meadows could be moulded to create political capital and heighten whatever argument was being made against the Mormons. Disparate groups of Americans routinely attempted to sway Americans against the Mormons. Though many different marginalized groups shared their experience of exclusion, those excluded did not automatically find solidarity with each other. In the case of the Mormons, often other marginalized groups saw an opportunity to unify with those in power in their anti-Mormonness. Hispanic Americans in California, Cherokee advocates in Oklahoma Territory, even other Mormon sects used the Mountain Meadows narrative to limit their own differences and unite with other Americans against the Mormons.6

Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert N. Baskin’s goal of furthering public sentiment against the Mormons in John D. Lee’s first trial was clearly successful. Baskin drew on the popular narrative and left a rhetorical space in which the popular narrative could grow during and as a direct result of the trial. As a public sensation Lee’s first trial created a larger discourse that for some ignited already present fervour against the Mormons. The fiery rhetoric in the popular press correspondingly built on a foundation constructed by the prosecution’s efforts. For the more bellicose authors, the blustering evolved into 1870s calls for Mormon extermination.7 Similar calls had been heard in the immediate aftermath of the massacre, just as the Mormons had experienced earlier both in Missouri and Illinois. The popular response surged even more forcefully with Lee’s execution in 1877 and when Brigham Young died later that year.

However despite all the violent rhetoric, the only collective action against the Mormons would be legislative. As with other marginalized groups exclusion was at times supported by sustained legal efforts. The legislative strictures placed on the Mormons between 1861 and 1890 were onerous to be sure. The language was strident and

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harrowing, but despite the rhetoric that separated Mormons from white civilization, to some extent they were still considered part of it. Mormons were given the opportunity to reform and return to civilization. Local violence in the 1830s and 1840s turned into sustained legislative censure in the 1860s and individual prosecutions in the 1870s and 1880s. Varying from the earlier local conflicts, in the latter half of the nineteenth century the extreme rhetoric was not backed up with violence and Mormon expulsion—or eradication, despite an American tradition of violently dealing with minorities. In contrast, Utah transformed to achieve statehood in 1896. At variance with the experience of other minority groups similarly racialized, disenfranchised, and ostracized, the Mormons would not be lynched or exterminated en masse. At a time when much of America focused on “reforging the white republic” and defining the relationship between citizens and their government after the Civil War, the Mormons were brought into civilization without the violence imposed on their Native American or African American counterparts.⁸ If the Mormons were initially white, then they still had the potential to change. Despite calls for vigilantism against the Mormons (and some individual violence particularly to Mormons in the South⁹) most of it remained as threats solely to encourage government action. Perhaps white privilege existed even amongst severe prejudice and harsh rhetoric.

Despite years of continuing cases against indicted massacre participants other than John D. Lee and talk of continuing prosecution, nothing substantial would be accomplished through legal channels after John D. Lee’s execution. The absence of a comprehensive Mountain Meadows prosecution left yet another gap in which the popular narrative continued to sprout. After the 1890 Mormon disavowal of polygamy, Utah appeared sufficiently reformed to be finally granted statehood. Nevertheless for decades after Utah’s acceptance into the Union, some authors would continue to decry the Mormons. Overall it seemed as though the Mormon Question had been answered by statehood, yet acceptance of the Mormons into the Union seemed only to encourage


some authors that the Mormon threat was even greater.

Another surge in the Mountain Meadows narrative came after the turn of the century. As the Senate debated the seating of Mormon Senator-elect Reed Smoot from Utah, the popular attention again gushed. Kathleen Flake asserts that “the ultimate purpose of the Senate hearing was to determine whether or not Mormonism was to be ‘integrated’ or ‘dismissed.’” The American public was not suddenly wholeheartedly supportive of the Mormons, but was now willing to reserve judgment. Flake contends, once the Senate decided to integrate Mormonism the Mormon Problem quickly waned and the evils of the Mormonism remained only for those who sought to argue for the Mormon heresy. The Mountain Meadows story would continue to be resurrected as a potent anti-Mormon tool—Mormon whiteness was still considered deceptive by some and they would continue to warn Americans of the need to be wary of the Mormon Menace. America and the Mormons settled into an uneasy truce, nevertheless some anxious Americans continued to use Mountain Meadows as the example that proved the larger threat of Mormonism.

Though there were still new accounts relying on Mountain Meadows for subject matter after 1907—particularly new novels—the controversial seating of Senator Smoot was the last specific event to bring a flurry of concentrated attention to the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Cristine Hutchinson-Jones labels 1917 to 1942 a period of “moderating stereotypes” for Mormonism in the American mind. The image of Mormons began to fluctuate as Americans came together to celebrate the Mormon pioneer spirit and revel in patriotism for wars won. Representations of Mormonism as a whole began to shift between wholly negative to more pragmatic and sometimes positive assessments. The narrative of Mountain Meadows would correspondingly begin to shift, if ever so slightly. The 1930s marked the beginning of a shift towards a more nuanced view of the massacre. Though authors were still repeating some


significant tropes of the sensational narrative they were also beginning to place the massacre in its larger American context, past persecutions of the Mormons became important to the narrative, and the narrative no longer blamed all Mormons for the actions of a few. The extreme sensationalism of the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for the most part was left behind. These changes began to allow the Mountain Meadows Massacre to recede into the larger myth of the American West.\textsuperscript{12}

A Twenty-first Century Return

Surprisingly, the beginning of the twenty-first century has brought a new surge of sustained attention on the massacre; multiple works of fiction and histories continue to be written. In the intervening years, Mormons evolved from an Other not capable of American citizenship to the epitome of American patriotism.\textsuperscript{13} A contemporary argument of Mormon savagery might seem lost to history with the salacious nineteenth-century novels and melodramas, but the Mountain Meadows narrative has flowed in recent years. Many of these efforts have been historical attempts to better understand a contested narrative, however wielding Mountain Meadows as a tool in anti-Mormon works, a foundation for fictional forays, and a consistent element in new political tomes has expanded once again. Many sources parrot sensational nineteenth century expansions on the narrative. The grammar of civilization has changed, yet despite the shift in the outside context the general shape of the Mountain Meadows massacre story

\textsuperscript{12} Merritt Parmelee Allen, \textit{Out of a Clear Sky ... Decorations by James Macdonald}. (New York, NY: Toronto: Longmans & Co, 1938); Hoffman Birney, \textit{Zealots of Zion} (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania Publishing Company, 1931). Allen’s novel rehabilitates the Mormon people as a whole; the massacre was the work of fanatics, but he likewise contextualizes the account with a focus on persecution perpetuated on the Mormons. Hoffman’s novel devotes four chapters to Mountain Meadows. Though his title and the uneven emphasis on Mountain Meadows may suggest strains of the salacious, it is a relatively encouraging narrative to Mormons as a whole. For Hoffman, those who participated in the massacre were fanatics of the worst stripe, the zealous belief and hard work of most Mormons was a critical part of the larger than life narrative of the West.

has not changed for some. Nor has the desire to use Mountain Meadows as shorthand for larger issues with Mormonism. The possibility of profit can still be an attractive reason to turn to Mountain Meadows—violence is marketable and Mountain Meadows continues as a shocking backdrop for fiction. However as with many of the nineteenth-century authors enamoured with the massacre story, motivations are often more complex than mere profitability.

For some the massacre remains the primary signal of Mormon heresy or heresy disguised as a political threat. Though thoroughly panned, a major motion picture depicted a romance caught in the horror of the meadows proclaiming a “time to die in the name of God.” The parallel published narrative was inspired “to inform the general public of an important event that has been kept relatively quiet” and “the extraordinary lessons” to be learned from it. For others it still exemplifies the possibility for religious extremism generally and Mormon violence specifically—the conspicuous 9/11 date of


the massacre emboldens labels of domestic terrorism.\textsuperscript{17} The threat of a Mormon U.S. presidential candidate in 2008 and an actual Mormon presidential candidate in 2012, gives the Mountain Meadows narrative new life as well.\textsuperscript{18} For one author the massacre provides clear evidence of the Mormon potential for theological radicalism and underscores the need to amend the U.S. Constitution and establish a religious test for office in the United States.\textsuperscript{19} Another author finds the source of new xenophobic Arizona immigration laws in the legacy of the massacre.\textsuperscript{20} The circumstances may be different, the grammar of a nineteenth-century discourse of civilization lost, but these sources suggest that Mountain Meadows continues to be a tool employed by some authors to motivate Americans to action.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century the narrative of a Mormon massacre grew and expanded out of a single historical event. The sensational story would mushroom with the rise of sensational crime reports across the United States. While federal officials worked to prosecute the event, they created a narrative of the massacre. Civilization was their motivating discourse—the legal process was not immune to its own historical context. Their official narrative worked in tandem with a multitude of American authors and entertainers crafting their tales of the atrocity. These massacre narratives were often a space in which both groups worked together to determine the place of Mormons within the American polity—if they could be healed and return to civilization or if excision was necessary. Like the experience of other minority groups, scandalous stories effectively delineated the

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boundaries of American civilization. The enumeration of Mormon sins through narrative divulged where Americans placed the limits of civilization, but opened the way for a Mormon return to civilization at the same time—if they took advantage of the opportunity the law afforded them. This micro-history of the Mountain Meadows Massacre narrative enables further evaluation of the Mormon Problem as one of many minority groups excluded as America expanded in the latter-half of the nineteenth century. Furthermore it demonstrates the interdependence between law and American culture, belief and action, religion and government. This singular tragic event became a tool shaped to an author’s anxieties and concerns to punish Mormon transgression; perhaps the pattern still continues—ex uno discere mones.
Source Abbreviations

BYU
L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

CCF 31–40
Criminal case files 31–40, Utah State Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

CHL
Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Huntington Library
Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

MSS JDL T1 (or T2)

LofC
Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

MSS SDoc 42
Messages of the President, Numbers 10 and 42, 36th Congress, Manuscript, Papers Pertaining to the Territory of Utah, 1849–1870, Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46, NARA.

NARA
National Archives and Record Association, Washington, DC and College Park, Maryland.

SDoc 42
Message of the President of the United States, Communicating, in Compliance with a Resolution of the Senate, Information in Relation to the Massacre at Mountain Meadows, and Other Massacres in Utah Territory, Senate Executive Document No. 42, 36th Congress, 1st Session, Message of the President of the United States, Senate Document No. 36–42 (1860).

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