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MEMOIRS OF THE PERSECUTED: PERSECUTION, MEMORY, AND THE
WEST AS A MORMON REFUGE

by

David W. Grua

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

Brigham Young University

December 2008

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of David W. Grua in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

MEMOIRS OF THE PERSECUTED: PERSECUTION, MEMORY, AND THE WEST AS A MORMON REFUGE

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Department of History

Master of Arts

The memory of past violence in Missouri and Illinois during the 1830s and 1840s shaped how members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Latter-day Saints or Mormons) saw themselves, their persecutors, and the states and the nation where the violence occurred. This thesis explores the role of collective memory of violence in forming Mormon identities and images of place from 1838, when governor Lilburn W. Boggs expelled the Latter-day Saints from Missouri, to 1858, with the conclusion of the Utah War. I argue that Latter-day Saint authors during these two decades used the memory of persecution to create and reinforce a communal identity as a means of resistance against oppression. The memory of persecution led Mormon writers to alter their image of the United States as a land of liberty, recasting the nation as a place

of oppression, and coming to see the American West, in particular the Salt Lake Valley, as a new land of liberty.

The thesis contains four chapters. Chapter I provides historical and theoretical background. Chapter II is an analysis of the martyrological tropes utilized by Mormon essayists from 1838 to 1858 to construct a group identity based on the memory of shared suffering and resistance against oppression. I show that remembering persecution allowed these writers to portray themselves as members of an elect community that included biblical prophets and ancient Christians. In turn, Mormon authors also represented their persecutors as part of a community of God's enemies, upon whom God would bring vengeance, either in this life or the next. Chapter III explores how Latter-day Saint essayists used the memory of persecution to form images of place. Although the Mormons believed that the nation was a divinely-established country based on religious freedom, portraying the violence against them as religious persecution led Latter-day Saint authors to discursively cast the deserts and mountains of the Great Basin as their new refuge. In Chapter IV I briefly examine ways that the memory of persecution shaped Mormon-non-Mormon interactions in the American West as a means to summarize the themes introduced in the thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the course of writing this thesis I have acquired many debts. The faculty and staff in BYU's History Department have provided me substantial support. If there is such a person as a player's coach, then there must be a student's professor. My advisor, Brian Q. Cannon, has from the beginning believed in my project and on more than one occasion sacrificed his own time and energy to answer my questions, provide support, and extend friendship. William G. Hartley and J. Spencer Fluhman both gave me substantial feedback on drafts and encouraged me along the way. Ignacio M. García was not only a committee member but also a valued teacher, employer, and friend that showed as much interest in my thesis as the work I was doing for him. Grant Underwood, Susan Sessions Rugh, Matthew Mason, Mary Stovall Richards, and Paul Pixton also provided helpful comments, insights, and suggestions. Julie Radle is a department secretary without equal and her help has been invaluable.

Fellow graduate students and historians at other institutions have endured my long discussions of ways that Latter-day Saints remember persecution. Chris Jones provided not only sources and feedback to the thesis but also much-valued friendship. Samuel Brown, Matthew Grow, W. Paul Reeve, Daniel W. Scallet, and Steven C. Taysom read and commented on early versions of Chapters II and III. Mark Ashurst-McGee, Jeff Cannon, Joe Darowski, Kay Darowski, Steve Fleming, Richard Jensen, Robin Jensen, Jeffery O. Johnson, and Alex Smith each shared important ideas and suggestions for the

thesis. Matt Bowman, Justin Butterfield, Ed Jeter, Ben Park, Ardis Parshall, Jonathan Stapley, Jared Tamez, and Stan Thayne have all refined my arguments through thoughtful comments and discussion.

Last of all, I would like to thank my family, especially my parents, for their love, support, and interest in my thesis.

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CHAPTER I

“I WOULD BE HAPPY...TO LET OUR PAST EXPERIENCE AND AFFLICTIONS SLEEP FOR EVER; BUT THE LORD WILL NOT SUFFER ME TO LET THEM SLEEP”: PERSECUTION, MEMORY, AND IMAGINING THE AMERICAN WEST

On August 1, 1853, Brigham Young was irritated. His critics were accusing members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (referred to hereafter interchangeably as Latter-day Saints and/or Mormons) of being disloyal to the Constitution of the United States, breaking laws, and being intolerant of emigrants passing to California. Young insisted in an oration given that day that his people had broken no laws and that even if the Latter-day Saints were practicing polygamy, as was alleged, there were no laws against it. In regards to emigrants, Young declared that the Mormons had treated them well, and that all people were free to worship as they pleased in Utah Territory. Young challenged what he considered to be false allegations by not only denying their validity, but by also reminding his audience of the persecutions suffered by the Mormon people in Missouri and Illinois during the 1830s and 1840s. In characteristic hyperbolic style, Young proclaimed that he would “rather have [his] head severed from [his] body in this room, than be compelled to be silent on this matter,” and

that he was compelled by God to remember past persecutions.¹ Remembering past wrongs therefore served as a means for Brigham Young to struggle against what he saw as continued injustices. This thesis is an exploration of Mormon collective memory of the Missouri and Illinois persecutions from 1838, when the Mormons were expelled from Missouri, to 1858, the conclusion of the Utah War. I argue that the memory of persecution shaped Latter-day Saint identity as religious outsiders and Mormon images of the American West as a religious refuge.

Historical Summary

This thesis is primarily an exploration of the ways that Latter-day Saint authors from 1838 to 1858 constructed and used the memory of past violence. Aside from the following summary based on recent historical publications on the Mormon persecutions, I will not discuss in detail “what really happened” during the persecutions in Missouri and Illinois themselves. Latter-day Saints began settling in northwestern Missouri in the early 1830s, primarily in Jackson County. Although relations with non-Mormons were at first friendly, by the winter of 1833-1834 vigilantes demanded that the Latter-day Saints leave the county. There were multiple causes of the friction. The rapid increase in the Mormon population led many non-Mormons to assume that the Latter-day Saints would gain political and economic control of the county. Anti-Mormons also complained of Latter-day Saint poverty and accused the Mormons of criminality. These fears were filtered through the lens of fanaticism, constructing the new religious group as irrational, un-republican, and, like Native Americans and African Americans in antebellum America,

¹ Brigham Young, “Weaknesses of Man—Loyalty of the Saints—Corruption of the World—True Liberty—Conduct of the American People,” August 1, 1852, *Journal of Discourses of Brigham Young, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, His Two Counselors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards and S. W. Richards, 1854-1886), 1:362. The title of this introduction comes from page 365 of Young’s discourse.

unworthy of citizenship. By late 1833, vigilantes expelled one thousand Mormon residents of Jackson County and the Latter-day Saints resettled in adjoining Clay County from 1833 to 1836.² Non-Mormon residents in Clay County expressed many of the same concerns as the Jackson County vigilantes, though they (Clay County non-Mormons) generally opposed the violent removal of the Latter-day Saints. In order to diffuse the tensions, the Missouri Legislature created Caldwell County in northern Missouri specifically for the Mormons in 1836 as a place for them to settle in semi-isolation.³

Within a few years anti-Mormon vigilantes threatened to expel Latter-day Saint settlers from Caldwell and surrounding counties. Like the Jackson County expulsion, multiple causes spurred the conflict. Some of these paralleled the earlier violence, namely, rapid population growth (which led to political and economic conflict) and non-Mormon perceptions of Latter-day Saints as fanatics. In addition, in June 1838 some Mormons formed the Danites, an ultra-loyalist vigilante group organized to stop dissent and oppose external persecution, which further aroused non-Mormon suspicions of Latter-day Saint fanaticism. Also, remembering the 1833 expulsion from Jackson County, the Latter-day Saints declared their intentions to resist future persecutions.⁴ In August and September 1838, Mormon and anti-Mormon vigilantes both committed scattered acts of violence, culminating in a Mormon raid of Daviess County in October

² Warren A. Jennings, "Zion is Fled: The Expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County, Missouri" (PhD. Diss., University of Florida, 1962); J. Spencer Fluhman, "Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Antebellum America" (PhD. Diss., The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006).

³ Max H. Parkin, "A History of the Latter-day Saints in Clay County, Missouri, from 1833 to 1837" (PhD. Diss., Brigham Young University, 1976); Stephen C. LeSueur, "Missouri's Failed Compromise: The Creation of Caldwell County for the Mormons," *Journal of Mormon History* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 113-44.

⁴ Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 28-53.

1838 that resulted in the sacking and burning of several buildings and the theft of non-Mormon property as war appropriations.⁵

On October 25, a Mormon militia attempted to liberate three captured Mormon scouts by engaging non-Mormon militiamen at Crooked River, near the Caldwell and Ray County border. Although the Latter-day Saints routed the Missourians, three members of the Mormon company, including Apostle David W. Patten, were killed, as was one Missourian.⁶ Rumors of a massacre perpetrated by Mormons led Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs to issue an extermination order authorizing his militia commanders to exterminate or drive the Mormons from the state.⁷ While a large militia force marched to Far West in Caldwell County, rogue Missouri militiamen attacked the Mormon settlement of Haun's Mill, killing seventeen Mormon men and boys, apparently to avenge earlier Mormon depredations in Daviess County.⁸ On November 1, word of the massacre reached Joseph Smith, convincing him to submit to the governor's militia force at Far West.⁹ During November 1838, Smith and other Mormon leaders were charged with treason, murder, and other crimes.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the main body of perhaps 8,000

⁵ LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War*, 54-130; Alexander L. Baugh, *A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense of Northern Missouri*, Dissertations in Latter-day Saint History (Provo: The Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History and *BYU Studies*, 2000), 47-98.

⁶ Baugh, *A Call to Arms*, 99-114; LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War*, 131-42.

⁷ LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War*, 143-53.

⁸ Baugh, *A Call to Arms*, 115-34; LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War*, 162-68.

⁹ Baugh, *A Call to Arms*, 135-70; LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War*, 161-79.

¹⁰ *Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, ect., In Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons; and the Evidence Given Before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the State of Missouri, at the Court-House in Richmond, in a Criminal Court of Inquiry, begun November 12, 1838, on the Trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and Others for High Treason and Other Crimes against the State* (Fayette, Missouri: Boon's Lick Democrat, 1841), 150. See also Gordon A. Madsen, "Joseph Smith and the Missouri Court of Inquiry: Austin A. King's Quest for Hostages," *BYU Studies* 23, no. 4 (2004): 92-136.

Latter-day Saints made preparations to leave the state for Illinois, where, after Smith's escape from prison in April 1839, they began building Nauvoo, a new Mormon settlement.¹¹

Nauvoo grew to be a city of over ten thousand inhabitants. As in Missouri, tensions with anti-Mormons accompanied growth. Aside from suspicions of expanding economic and political power, non-Mormons were alarmed by the militarism exhibited by the Mormon militia, known as the Nauvoo Legion. Rumors ran rampant in the surrounding areas that Mormons were practicing polygamy, which Smith had secretly introduced among his most trusted followers in the early 1840s. In addition, non-Mormons suspected the Latter-day Saints of harboring thieves and criminals in Nauvoo. Internal dissent led Smith, acting as mayor of the city, to order the suppression of a dissident newspaper in 1844 and to institute martial law in Nauvoo, resulting in his incarceration on state charges of riot and treason. Before his case came to trial, anti-Mormon vigilantes from Illinois and Missouri murdered Smith while he was in prison.¹² In the confusion following Smith's death, Brigham Young emerged as leader of the largest body of Latter-day Saints.¹³ Young, seeing continued threats of violence, decided to move the Latter-day Saints out of the United States and into the West.¹⁴

¹¹ William G. Hartley, "'Almost Too Intolerable a Burthen': The Winter Exodus from Missouri, 1838-39," *Journal of Mormon History* 18 (Fall 1992): 6-40.

¹² See Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (1965; repr., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book Company and BYU Press, 2002), and Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (1975; repr., Urbana: Illini Books, 1979).

¹³ D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844," *BYU Studies* 16 (Winter 1979): 187-233.

¹⁴ Richard E. Bennett, *We'll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus 1846-1848* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997).

Memory and Persecution

Since the 1980s, the historical study of memory has attracted a growing number of scholars. Cambridge historian Jay Winter, ruminating on what he calls the “memory boom” of recent years, argues that “everywhere in the Anglo-Saxon world, historians young and old have found in the subject of memory, defined in a host of ways, the central organizing concept of historical study, a position once occupied by the notions of race, class, and gender.”¹⁵ January 2008 marked a milestone in the academic study of memory with the launching of *Memory Studies*, an on-line multi-disciplinary journal with the stated intent of “affording recognition, form and direction to work in this nascent field, and in facilitating a critical forum for dialogue and debate on the theoretical, empirical and methodological issues central to a collaborative understanding of memory today.”¹⁶ The journal’s goal of focusing primarily on theoretical and methodological concerns suggests a maturity in a field that first emerged haphazardly in response to the identity politics characteristic of post-1960s culture.¹⁷

Although memory studies has drawn scholars from a variety of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, historians have increasingly been attracted to theoretical models developed by sociologists rather than psychologists.¹⁸ In particular, historians

¹⁵ Jay Winter, “The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the ‘Memory Boom’ in Contemporary Historical Studies,” *GHI Bulletin* 27 (2000), <http://www.ghi-dc.org/bulletin27F00/b27winterframe.html> (accessed 11/22/06).

¹⁶ Andrew Hoskins, Amanda Barnier, Wulf Kansteiner, and John Sutton, “Editorial,” *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2008): 5, <http://mss.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/1/1/5> (accessed 7/15/08).

¹⁷ Kerwin Lee Klein, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” *Representations* 69, Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering (Winter 2000): 143. See also Henry L. Roediger III and James V. Wertsch, “Creating a New Discipline of Memory Studies,” *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2008): 9-22, <http://mss.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/1/1/9> (accessed 7/15/08).

¹⁸ Wulf Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 (May 2002): 179-97. In particular, Kansteiner warns

have found the writings of French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who wrote during the interwar period but was largely ignored in English-speaking scholarly circles prior to the 1980s, to be especially useful.¹⁹ Halbwachs is primarily concerned with describing the social contexts within which memories are formed and used. “In order to remember, one must be capable of reasoning and comparing and of feeling in contact with a human society that can guarantee the integrity of our memory.”²⁰ Arguing against psychologists who had depicted memory as solely an individual activity, Halbwachs is intent on showing the inherently collective nature of memory. “One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories.”²¹ Halbwachs therefore does not advocate some type of “collective unconscious,” but rather argues that the memories of individuals are shaped by the mores of the group.

Halbwachs contends that societies construct social frameworks that set the parameters for how the past is remembered. “Collective frameworks are . . . precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord . . . with the predominant thoughts of the society.”²² These frameworks reflect group conventions and constraints that provide limits on what a group is willing to

against the application of Freudian concepts of “trauma” and “repressed memories” to the study of societies.

¹⁹ On Halbwachs, see Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Burlington, Vermont: University Press of New England, 1993), 73-90. But see also Daniel Gordon, untitled review of *History as an Art of Memory*, *History and Theory* 34, no. 4 (December 1995): 340-54.

²⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. and ed. Lewis A. Cosner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 41.

²¹ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 40.

²² Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 40.

include in its recollections.²³ Commenting on these restraints, David Thelan argues that the historian “can explore how [groups] establish their core identities, how much and what kind of variations they permit around that core, and what they rule out as unacceptable.”²⁴ Memory is therefore shaped by present concerns and is often mustered in the service of ideology. For example, as Peter Novick has shown, American Jews rarely spoke publicly of the Holocaust during the late 1940s and 1950s, but with perceived threats against Israel combined with emergent anti-Semitism in the United States during the 1960s, the Shoah quickly became the very foundation of Jewish public memory.²⁵

Since memory is shaped primarily by ideological concerns, collective narratives often have contested histories both within and without the group. In his *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land*, Halbwachs builds on the work of biblical scholars by arguing that the early Christians were divided over how to remember Jesus. One segment of early Christians (later to be known as orthodox) valued Jesus as a divine Savior. Another Christian segment (known as Gnostics) contended that Jesus should be remembered as a teacher of enlightened truth. With the conversion of Constantine, the orthodox memory became the “official” memory, which cast the Gnostic memory as heterodox and invalid.²⁶ David Blight’s *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, winner of the Bancroft Prize (2002), is perhaps the best known example of a

²³ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 44, 50-51.

²⁴ David Thelan, “Memory and American History,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (March 1989): 1118.

²⁵ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (1999; repr., New York: Mariner Books, 2000).

²⁶ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 228-29.

historical investigation of the politics of memory. Blight argues that during the fifty years following the Civil War, advocates of three narratives of the war's origins struggled for primacy. Northerners primarily argued that the war was fought to maintain national unity, while Southerners largely came to see the war as a battle for white supremacy, and freed blacks and their sympathizers remembered that the war was fought to end slavery. Blight concludes that proponents of the first two visions reached a compromise that ultimately excluded the third narrative from national memory.²⁷

Just as Jews remember the Holocaust, Americans remember the Civil War, and Mormons remember the Missouri and Illinois persecutions, past violence is a central pillar in the collective memories of many groups. Understanding the language and narratives used to confront violent pasts is equally significant as comprehending the facts of the violence themselves. For example, Edward Linenthal, in his study of the Oklahoma City bombing in American memory, argues that Americans have employed three narratives to explain the meaning of the atrocity. The progressive narrative emphasized the tenacity of Oklahomans in the aftermath of tragedy, the redemptive narrative utilized religious images to highlight the higher significance of struggle in life, and the toxic narrative explored the negative effects of loss. Individuals used these narratives, often interchangeably, in the months and years following the bombing to make sense of what occurred in 1995.²⁸ Elizabeth Castelli further argues in *Martyrdom and Memory* that early Christians created their martyrs through the stories told about them. Martyrdom stories

²⁷ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

²⁸ Edward T. Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (2001; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

functioned not only to construct identities in a marginalized and persecuted group, but also as a means to ideologically resist further oppression by recasting martyrs not as helpless victims but as ultimately triumphing through their deaths.²⁹

Memory therefore has become a central concern for historians in recent decades. As the above paragraphs suggest, my approach to the study of memory is shaped by the works of sociologists and historians that see memory as a collective phenomenon that is informed by contemporary concerns. Due to the subjective nature of narrative constructions, collective memories are marked with contested histories by both insiders and outsiders that for ideological reasons contend for different understandings of the past. Memory is therefore political, as groups with access to power often control official versions of the past. However, subordinate and marginalized groups maintain alternative narratives that help form separate oppositional identities. Collective memories often revolve around contested versions of past violence, as groups employ narratives to make sense of atrocities. In particular, the notion of martyrdom provides language and concepts that aid groups in forming communal identities and promoting resistance and contestation against perceived aggressors.

There is a growing body of historical literature on the role of religion in shaping the collective memory of violence in the trans-Mississippi American West. The studies produced to date have focused primarily on the late nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Edward Linenthal's examination of the Oklahoma City bombings, discussed above, is perhaps the best-known study of religion's role in shaping memory in the region. W. Douglas Seefeldt, in his doctoral study of the Mountain Meadows Massacre in

²⁹ Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

Mormon memory during the twentieth century, contends that the LDS Church has sought to control the memory of the atrocity through the construction of memorials.³⁰ Jared Farmer's recent study of Mormons and Indians in Utah Valley illustrates that as the Latter-day Saints remembered their ancestors' heroic pioneering of the Great Basin they also forgot their forebears' role in the violent displacement of Nation Americans in the region.³¹ My thesis fills a topical lacuna, by examining ways that the memory of religious violence shapes communal identity and images of place, as well as a chronological gap, by analyzing memory during the antebellum period.³²

Memory, Religion, and Place

This thesis is as much an investigation of Latter-day Saint memory and identity as it is an examination of how Mormons used memory to construct images of place. Belden C. Lane has suggested concerning the connection between place and identity that “[w]ho we are . . . is inseparably a part of where we are.”³³ Scholars of religion Oren Stier and Shawn Landres argue in the introduction to their path-breaking *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place* that “[a]trocities render places religiously charged, indigestible in their toxicity Places of memory are transformed into spaces, some far removed from

³⁰ W. Douglas Seefeldt, “Constructing Western Pasts: Place and Public Memory in the Twentieth-Century West” (PhD. Diss., Arizona State University, 2001).

³¹ Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

³² Although not the immediate historiographical concern of this thesis, my study also contributes to the history of Christian martyrology. Historians have produced quality studies of the role of martyrology in early Christianity and in the early modern era, but to date there is no study of martyrology in American history (see Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory* and Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999]). My thesis seeks to fill this lacuna in part by examining how American identity shaped how Mormons used martyrological discourse.

³³ Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, expanded ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 6.

the sites themselves, where the wounds of the past nevertheless still resonate.”³⁴ Stier and Landres define the relationship between religious violence, place, and memory “as a cultural product emerging from the negotiation and contestation of meaning within religious frameworks at specific sites marked by violent histories.”³⁵ For Mormons these “specific sites” were in Missouri and Illinois, but the memory of violence in those places also shaped how Latter-day Saints imagined the American West as a religious refuge.

The academic study of ways that Americans have imagined the West as a region can be partly traced to Henry Nash Smith’s 1950 *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. In this path-breaking work, Smith argues that “one of the most persistent generalizations concerning American life and character is the notion that our society has been shaped by the pull of a vacant continent drawing population westward through the passes of the Alleghenies, across the Mississippi Valley, over the high plains and mountains to the Pacific Coast.”³⁶ Smith examines literature from eighteenth and nineteenth-century America, concluding that American authors primarily imagined the West as a passage to India, the realm of Mountain Men and other western heroes, and as a garden of the world. Smith’s work opened new vistas by which the history of the West could be seen, by examining not just the actions of those Americans moving west, but also how these emergent westerners (and the easterners they left behind) imagined and constructed the region.

³⁴ Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres, *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006), 9-10.

³⁵ Stier and Landres, *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place*, 6.

³⁶ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Myth and Symbol* (1950; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

Valuable as is *Virgin Land*, Smith listens primarily to a single group of voices comprised of Anglo male authors. As Belden C. Lane has articulated, “The impulse of postmodernity has been to recover what was lost.”³⁷ Smith’s approach has proven useful for later historians seeking to recover other voices and images of the West. At heart this endeavor has been less about simply finding new stories to tell and more about determining significance in the western past. William Deverell has suggested that a powerful means by which to do this is to “render plural that which has been regarded as singular.” Rather than think of a single West, we can profitably examine multiple Wests, analyze how they are constructed, and scrutinize the meaning conferred upon these imaginings by various groups.³⁸

Elliott West has shown that imagining the West is not confined to perceptions of the landscape. “There was always a social dimension to the vision. Easterners looked westward and pictured who was and would be living there. These perceptions were often as bizarrely wrongheaded as those of the physical potential of the land, and when pioneers acted on them, the results were similarly calamitous.”³⁹ In recent decades scholars have utilized race and gender to examine how different groups have perceived the West and its inhabitants.⁴⁰ Individuals and groups also use religion as another

³⁷ Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, 7.

³⁸ William Deverell, “Fighting Words: The Significance of the American West in the History of the United States,” in *A New Significance: Re-Envisioning the History of the American West*, ed. Clyde A. Milner II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32.

³⁹ Elliott West, “The Shadow of Pikes Peak,” in *A New Significance*, 207.

⁴⁰ See Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Blake Allmendinger, *Imagining the African American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

category to perceive the West. Thomas A. Tweed has remarked that “[r]eligions are cultural processes whereby individuals and groups map, construct, and inhabit worlds of meaning.”⁴¹ Following Patricia Nelson Limerick’s lead in describing the West in terms of the convergence and mixing of peoples, Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp has called for scholars of religion to re-envision the West as the meeting point of religious cultures. “Religiously, it matters greatly who one’s neighbors are, and who controls the cultural, political, and economic resources of a given region.” For Maffly-Kipp the West was a meeting ground for peoples that came not only from the eastern United States but also eastward from Asia, southward from Canada, and northward from Mexico.⁴² When each of these groups came to the West (or, like Native Americans, were there to meet those that came), they employed religious frameworks to map and sacralize the region. Maffly-Kipp utilizes theories developed by geographers of religion to understand how religious people map space and interact in that space with others.⁴³

Methodology

Adapting the practice of Richard Slotkin, a leading scholar of American mythology, I differentiate between “producers” and “consumers” of memory. Producers articulate memories that are printed and disseminated to consumers, who in turn read, interpret, and use narratives for their own purposes. Slotkin argues that while it may be

⁴¹ “Introduction,” in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 12.

⁴² Convergence, along with conquest, complexity, and continuity comprise Limerick’s four C’s for understanding the new western history paradigm (Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West* [New York: W. W. Norton, 2000], 13-28). Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, “Eastward Ho! American Religion from the Perspective of the Pacific Rim,” in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, 128.

⁴³ Maffly-Kipp, “Eastward Ho!,” 131-32.

difficult to determine how audiences respond to texts, scholars can know that printers value the writings that they choose to publish and promote and that they do not value those that they discard. It is therefore possible for scholars to examine published writings as a window into producers' ideological concerns and thereby extrapolate from a publisher's view that such writings reflect to some degree consumers' interests.⁴⁴

Throughout the thesis I refer to producers of memory as Mormon authors, writers, essayists, and orators. Inclusion in this group depends less on an author's status or authority within Mormonism than on articulation of common themes and concerns. Mormon elites such as Parley P. Pratt, Joseph Smith, Eliza R. Snow, and Brigham Young are logical candidates for inclusion in my sample of Mormon writers. However, in an effort to illustrate that elites and ordinary Mormons often articulated the memory of persecution within the same social frameworks, I have also sought to include the voices of less-prominent Latter-day Saints when their writings treat similar themes as the elites. In this sense Joseph Smith and ordinary Latter-day Saints are often identified together as Mormon authors.

In terms of sources, I rely primarily on published materials. Michael Kammen argues that collective memory is "the publicly presented past: in speeches and sermons, editorials and school textbooks[.]"⁴⁵ As the published literature during the two decades of this study is voluminous, I focus my analysis for the 1840s on documents printed in the church's *Times and Seasons*. The editors of the newspaper published letters, narrative

⁴⁴ Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (1985; repr., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 26-32.

⁴⁵ Michael Kammen, *In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), xii.

histories, sermons, petitions, and poems written by both elite and ordinary Latter-day Saints that treat the memory of persecution. In addition, I also examine pamphlets and books written by Parley P. Pratt, Joseph Smith, and Sidney Rigdon. The sermons printed in the *Journal of Discourses* provide my primary sources for the decade of the 1850s. In a handful of cases, I use unpublished Parley P. Pratt documents, when they articulate well and parallel themes found in published sources. In addition, due to the contested nature of the topic of vengeance, I use unpublished journals that provide important nuance and clarification to the discussion.

I delimit the chronological scope of the thesis to a twenty-year period. I begin my study of Mormon collective memory of persecution in 1838, when Governor Lilburn W. Boggs expelled the Latter-day Saints from Missouri. Although groups of Latter-day Saints had suffered persecution prior to that year (most notably in Jackson County in 1833-1834), 1838 marked the first time that the entire body of the church suffered as a group. The impact of the expulsion on the Latter-day Saints is illustrated by the massive outpouring of writings and petitions describing the violence produced by Mormon authors in the following years. I conclude the study in 1858, with the end of the Utah War. Latter-day Saint authors and orators continued to write and discuss the past persecutions in the years and decades after 1858, but it was in that year that the semi-isolation enjoyed by the Latter-day Saints in Utah Territory effectively ended when Brigham Young was replaced by a non-Mormon territorial governor and federal troops occupied the territory, which affected how Latter-day Saints positioned themselves in relation to outsiders.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ See Donald Moorman with Gene A. Sessions, *Camp Floyd and the Mormons: The Utah War* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992) and William P. MacKinnon, ed., *At Sword's Point, Part 1:*

Organization of Thesis

The following chapters explore these themes. Chapter II examines ways that Mormon authors in Nauvoo and in Utah employed martyrological tropes to construct a collective memory of the persecutions in Missouri and Illinois. I argue that these essayists used the Missouri and Illinois persecutions to construct a group identity based on the memory of shared suffering. Remembering persecution allowed Mormon authors to contest anti-Mormons who argued that the Mormons were dangerous fanatics that deserved to be persecuted. Latter-day Saint writers contended that persecution was a sign of their chosenness and that their sufferings placed them in a community with the biblical prophets and early Christians. The persecutors of the Mormons were in turn portrayed as having continuity with the tormentors of the ancient saints. Mormon authors, realizing that they might not reverse the prevailing power relations by convincing the national government to grant them redress, argued that at some future date God would bring vengeance upon their enemies, either in this life, or the next. In its most extreme formulation, some Mormons used the memory of persecution to justify violence and vigilantism.

Chapter III shifts to an exploration of how the memory of past persecutions shaped Mormon images of the American West as a religious refuge. Latter-day Saint authors imagined America as a divinely-established nation that was founded on principles of religious liberty. Mormon essayists responded to the persecutions in Missouri and Illinois by portraying the Latter-day Saints as true republicans and their persecutors as lazy and savage-like. Rhetorically, Missouri and Illinois became places of tyranny and

A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858, Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier, ed. Will Bagley, vol. 10 (Norman: Arthur H. Clark, 2008).

oppression in a land of liberty. The Mormons were unsuccessful in persuading the federal government to grant redress for losses, which, combined with the murder of Joseph Smith and continued violence in Illinois, led Latter-day Saint authors to cast the United States as a place of tyranny and the American West as a religious refuge. In Chapter IV I examine briefly how memories of past persecutions shaped Mormon-Gentile interactions in the American West as a means to summarize the primary arguments in this thesis.

CHAPTER II

“WE CAN NEVER FORGET THE BLOOD OF OUR BRETHREN”:

MARYTROLOGICAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE MISSOURI AND ILLINOIS PERSECUTIONS

During his incarceration in a Missouri prison in 1838-1839, Parley P. Pratt wrote a history of the persecution of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Toward the end of his eighty-four page narrative, Pratt wrote that “having this ministry to fulfil we glory in tribulation, in persecution, in imprisonment, in banishment, in reproaches for Christ’s sake and the Gospel; yea, we take joyfully the spoiling of our goods, and even count our lives not dear to us, if it so be that we may finish our course with joy, and the ministry we have received of the Lord Jesus.”¹ Pratt’s statement, peppered with biblical martyrological allusions, reflected his contention that his suffering confirmed that he had received his ministry from Jesus Christ.² Pratt’s meditations came at perhaps the nadir of his sojourn in Missouri during the 1830s, an experience that he would later describe as an “awful tale of woe and suffering.”³ During the decade Pratt and

¹ Parley P. Pratt, *History of the Late Persecution Inflicted By the State of Missouri Upon the Mormons, In which Ten Thousand American Citizens were Robbed, Plundered, and Driven from the State, and Many Others Murdered, Martyred, &c. for Their Religion, and All This By Military Force, By Order of the Executive* (Detroit: Dawson and Bates, 1839), 80.

² See 2 Corinthians 12:10, Hebrews 10:34, and Acts 20:24.

³ Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt, One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Embracing his Life, Ministry, and Travels, with Extracts, in*

other members of his faith were expelled from several Missouri counties, leaving behind a great deal of property, and perhaps thirty Latter-day Saints who had been killed in the clashes.

The Latter-day Saints, like other Americans, were adept at using the language of martyrdom and persecution to describe their sufferings.⁴ Despite the prevalence of martyrological themes in early Mormon thought, there is a paucity of scholarly literature on the subject. Noteworthy is historian R. Laurence Moore's argument that remembering persecution was an important strategy by which Latter-day Saints created a sense of difference from other Americans as outsiders on the religious landscape.⁵ By utilizing the language of martyrology, marginalized Mormons were able to re-cast their experience in the United States during the 1830s and 1840s not as a series of failures, but rather as triumphs. Building on Moore, I argue that Latter-day Saint authors used the language of martyrology to create a group identity based on the memory of shared suffering and resistance against future oppression. These articulations demonized Mormon enemies and, in their most extreme form, created space for vengeance and vigilantism. Latter-day Saint essayists and orators sought to influence how their readers remembered and

Prose and Verse, from his Miscellaneous Writings, ed. Parley P. Pratt, Jr. (New York: Russell Brothers, 1874), 322.

⁴ On the use of martyrological language in early America, see Susan Juster, "What's 'Sacred' about Violence in Early America?" *Common-Place* 6, no. 1 (October 2005), <http://www.common-place.org/vol-06/no-01/juster/> (accessed 6/18/08).

⁵ R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (1986; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 34, 35. See also Zachary L. Largey, "The Rhetoric of Persecution: Mormon Crisis Rhetoric from 1838-1871" (M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 2006), for a study of rhetorical forms employed by Mormon orators Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, and Brigham Young in persecution narratives. Largey's thesis, while useful, is limited due to its lack of emphasis on how Mormons used these rhetorical forms in constructing identity and difference from others.

understood the persecutions in Missouri and Illinois in an effort to control not only the past but also the present and future.

Deluded Fanatics or Designing Knaves

Latter-day Saint martyrology and persecution narratives subverted those utilized by hostile anti-Mormons in Missouri and Illinois to explain and rationalize the violence against the Mormons. It would be naïve to conclude that Mormon memory was articulated in a vacuum, but it would be equally so to argue that all Latter-day Saint writings were direct responses to their tormentors. Jackson County vigilantes articulated grievances by calling the Mormons “fanatics or knaves (for one or the other they undoubtedly are).”⁶ Anti-Mormons in Missouri and Illinois justified their vigilantism by constructing Mormons as either deluded fanatics or thieves and criminals, or, most likely, both.

As Spencer Fluhman has argued, antebellum Protestants denied that Mormonism (along with Islam and other marginalized groups) was an authentic religion. This strategy allowed Protestants to organize the American religious landscape, with themselves at the center and all other groups at the periphery, outside of the boundaries of true religion.⁷ This argument is apparent in the 1833 declaration of the Jackson County vigilantes that described Mormons as adhering to a “pretended religious sect[.]”⁸ The declaration’s authors argued that they were beset by a host of evils stemming from Mormon settlements in the county. These evils included Mormon belief in continuing revelations,

⁶ Pratt, *History*, 7.

⁷ J. Spencer Fluhman, “Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Antebellum America” (PhD. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006), 2, 6-9.

⁸ Pratt, *History*, 7.

healing the sick, replicating the miracles performed by the apostles and prophets of old, speaking in tongues, and openly declaring that God had given them Jackson County.⁹ Many Protestants saw these beliefs as evidence of religious enthusiasm, which Fluhman describes as “a term detractors used to designate various forms of religious craziness[.]”¹⁰ The vigilantes presented these reasons as part of the justification for forcefully removing the Mormons from Jackson County, and later, from the state of Missouri in 1838-1839. In 1840 Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs described the Mormons as an “infatuated and deluded sect” that threatened public welfare and therefore warranted expulsion.¹¹

Aside from fanaticism and enthusiasm, anti-Mormons also charged the Latter-day Saints with being knaves, or deceivers, which could imply criminal activity. The Jackson County vigilantes argued that the Mormons should be expelled because they were the dregs of society, lazy, idle, and vicious.¹² Likewise, the state presented allegations in a November 1838 hearing that the Mormons had committed treason, murder, and other crimes during the violence of the summer of 1838.¹³ After hearing these allegations Missouri general John Clark concluded that the Mormons had committed “an insurrection of no ordinary character. It had for its object *Dominion*, the ultimate subjugation of this

⁹ Pratt, *History*, 8-9.

¹⁰ Fluhman, “Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion,” 85. See also Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹¹ “Extract from Gov. Boggs’ Message of 1840,” *Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &C. in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons; and the Evidence Given Before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the State of Missouri, At the Court-House in Richmond, In a Criminal Court of Inquiry, Begun November 12, 1838, On the Trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and Others, for High Treason and Other Crimes Against the State* (Fayette, Missouri: Boon’s Lick Democrat, 1841), 9.

¹² Pratt, *History*, 9.

¹³ See generally, *Document*.

State and the Union to the laws of a few men called the Presidency.”¹⁴ This interpretation of the causes of the 1838 Mormon War was oft repeated by anti-Mormon commentators in subsequent years.¹⁵ According to Fluhman, after 1838 anti-Mormon authors argued that political tyranny was inherent in the Mormon system of thought, making Mormonism itself “malicious.”¹⁶ In Illinois, anti-Mormons likewise accused the Latter-day Saints of fanaticism and criminal activity, justifying violence against the Mormons by relying on the accusations originally put forward by Missouri anti-Mormons.¹⁷

Latter-day Saint authors directly challenged these characterizations of the causes of the violence against them in Missouri and Illinois. To the charges of fanaticism, Parley Pratt asked “whether our belief as set forth in this declaration, as to gifts, miracles, Revelations, and tongues, is not the same that all the Apostles and disciples taught,

¹⁴ John B. Clark to Lilburn W. Boggs, November 29, 1838, *Document*, 92.

¹⁵ See especially Thomas J. Kirk, *The Mormons & Missouri: A General Outline of the History of the Mormons, From Their Origin to the Present, (Including the Late Disturbances in Illinois;) and a Particular Account of the Last Mormon Disturbance in Missouri, or the Mormon War: An Appendix, Containing and Epitome of the Book of Mormon, with Remarks on the Nature and Tendency of the Mormon Faith* (Chillicothe, Missouri: J. H. Darlington, 1844); James H. Hunt, *A History of the Mormon War: With a Prefix, Embracing the Rise, Progress, and Particular Tenets of Mormon Doctrine; with an Examination of the Book of Mormon, The Trial of The Prophet Joe Smith, and his Brethren for High Treason, Murder, &c., With the Motion of the Counsel and Decisions of the Court in Each Case: Together With an Account of the Assassination of Ex-Governor Boggs* (St. Louis: Ustick & Davies, 1844).

¹⁶ Fluhman, “Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion,” 144.

¹⁷ “Correspondence of the *New York Evangelist*,” April 17, 1841, *Warsaw Signal*, June 16, 1841; “Work on Mormonism,” *Warsaw Signal*, September 8, 1841; D. W. and Edw. Kilbourn, “Latter-Day-Saintism, Number 1,” September 20, 1841, *Burlington Hawkeye and Patriot*, reprinted in *Warsaw Signal*, October 6, 1841. The Missouri documents confirmed the suspicions of some anti-Mormons that the Mormons were thieves and rogues. Thomas Sharp, upon hearing of Mormon harassment of anti-Mormon William Harris (who was lecturing in the area on the Missouri publication), stated: “Let these men no longer talk of Missouri mobs, for their conduct shows that they are but mobbers themselves” (“Mormonism at Montrose,” *Warsaw Signal*, September 22, 1841). Susan Rugh provides evidence that “the Mormons were particularly vulnerable to charges of theft because some Mormons had justified thieving as their God-given right. The bulk of the church had been in Missouri when the militaristic attitude of expropriation developed among many members of the Church, not just the self-proclaimed group called Danites” (Susan Sessions Rugh, *Our Common Country: Family Farming, Culture, and Community in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001], 48).

believed and practiced, and the doctrine of the New Testament?”¹⁸ In so doing, Pratt inverted the Missourian narrative, by portraying Mormonism as the heir to primitive Christianity while recasting Protestantism as inauthentic.¹⁹ The church’s *Times and Seasons* challenged Boggs’ allegations that the Mormons were persecuted because they were fanatics by portraying Boggs as Nero, the great persecutor of the ancient Christians.²⁰ As to charges of criminality, Parley Pratt challenged the vigilantes to find in the records of the Jackson County Circuit Court any indictments that named a Mormon as a defendant.²¹ William Smith later contested Boggs’ claims of Mormon criminality by portraying Latter-day Saint actions as self-defense against mobs and Boggs’ Extermination Order.²² Latter-day Saint essayists and orators also employed their own narratives in an effort to control how the past, and by extension, the present and the future, was to be understood.

Persecuted for the Cause of Christ

Although during the 1830s and 1840s the Latter-day Saints on several occasions lost their homes and in some cases lost their lives, they were determined not to lose the battle over how these atrocities were to be remembered and understood. Beginning with the expulsion of the Latter-day Saints from Jackson County in the winter of 1833-1834, Mormons dedicated pamphlets, poems, letters, narrative histories, petitions, and autobiographies to narrating the causes and events of the persecutions. In contrast to anti-

¹⁸ Pratt, *History*, 10.

¹⁹ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 230.

²⁰ “Lilburn W. Boggs,” *Times and Seasons*, January 1, 1841, 265.

²¹ Pratt, *History*, 11.

²² William Smith, “Infatuated and Deluded Sect,” *Times and Seasons*, February 15, 1841, 314-18.

Mormon narratives that portrayed the Latter-day Saints as dangerous fanatics or criminals, Mormon orators and authors argued that they were opposed because God was with them and that they were persecuted for the cause of Christ. In this manner, they drew upon martyrological discourse to construct their narratives of persecution and in doing so challenged alternative understandings of why the Latter-day Saints had suffered their fate. Joseph Smith, for example, knowing that there was considerable confusion among his followers concerning the reasons behind his incarceration in Liberty Jail, wrote in December 1838: “Know assuredly Dear brethren, that it is for the testimony of Jesus, that we are in *bonds* and in *prison*.”²³ Brigham Young likewise argued in 1852 that “I can say to those who do not understand and know our history, that we have been persecuted because we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and do just as he has told us, and not because of the evil acts of Joseph Smith.”²⁴ Claiming that they were persecuted for the cause of Christ, rather than the crimes that their opponents charged against them, therefore served as a rhetorical device by which to contest alternative narratives.

Latter-day Saint writers also contended that their membership in the Church of Christ and status as Mormons led to the persecutions. Joseph Young recounted his experience with Missouri vigilantes during fall 1838, explaining that he was stopped on the road by a mob and threatened with death if he proceeded to the Mormon settlement Far West. “I asked them the reason of this prohibition, to which they replied that we were *Mormons*, and that every one who adhered to our religious faith would have to leave the

²³ Joseph Smith to the Church, 16 December 1838, *Times and Seasons*, April 1840, 83.

²⁴ Brigham Young, “Knowledge of the Doctrine of Christ—The Religions of Men, and the Religion of God—Joseph Smith—Persecutions, etc.,” July 11, 1852, *Journal of Discourses of Brigham Young, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, His Two Counselors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards and S. W. Richards, 1854-1886), 1:41-42.

State in ten days or renounce their religion.”²⁵ Mormons used the persecutions to certify the truth of their church. This belief especially manifested itself in Mormon interpretations of the church as the kingdom spoken of in the seventh chapter of the Apocalypse of Daniel. In November 1857, as the Mormons awaited the arrival of federal troops to Utah Territory, John Taylor asked:

Why is it that we are persecuted? It is because we believe in the establishment of the kingdom of God upon the earth—because we say and know that God has established his kingdom—because the principles of righteousness are introduced among the children of men, and they expose the evils, corruption, priestcraft, political craft, and the abominations that everywhere exist. They lay naked before all men the abominable acts of the human family. It is not because there is evil among us, but because there is goodness, truth, holiness. It is because God has spoken, and his word has had effect on our hearts, to govern and influence our conduct.²⁶

It was therefore a privilege for the Latter-day Saints to suffer persecution “for the sake of laying the foundation of the kingdom of God.”²⁷ Rather than agreeing with their ideological opponents that claimed that Mormon suffering was proof of their folly, Latter-day Saint authors interpreted their anguish as evidence that their ministry was indeed of God.

Not only was it a privilege to be persecuted, some Latter-day Saints felt they were called to lay down their lives to further the work of God. Soon after his escape from Missouri, Joseph Smith wrote that “although, some of our beloved brethren, have had to seal their testimony with their blood; and have died martyrs to the cause of truth; yet,

²⁵ Joseph Young, affidavit, in “A History, of the Persecution, of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter Day Saints in Missouri,” *Times and Seasons*, August 1840, 145-46.

²⁶ John Taylor, “The Kingdom of God or Nothing,” November 1, 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, 6:21-22.

²⁷ [Parley P. Pratt], *Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (New York: n.p., 1845), 4.

Short, though bitter was their pain, Everlasting is their joy.”²⁸ The importance of martyrdom in early Mormonism cannot be overstated. The church’s Nauvoo newspaper printed an editorial in 1844 claiming that Mormonism was “the only sect in christendom, who in this nineteenth century can exhibit the irresistible evidence of martyrdom, in support of its cause.”²⁹ Catholics initiated the pattern of claiming martyrdom certified truthfulness. Protestants in turn claimed that their martyrs made them God’s true church when debating Catholics. Latter-day Saint essayists were therefore using the evidence of martyrdom to promote their own claims for authenticity against Protestants.

Three Latter-day Saints died at the Battle of Crooked River in 1838, including Mormon apostle David W. Patten, who was quickly hailed as a martyr. Parley Pratt explained in his 1839 history that Patten “died that evening in the triumphs of faith: having laid down his life as a martyr in the cause of his country and his God.”³⁰ Later in his autobiography Pratt further explicated the impact of the deaths of Patten and his compatriots on the Latter-day Saint community. “[A] whole people, as it were followed them to the grave. All wept whose feelings were not too intense to find vent in tears. He was the only member of the Quorum of the Twelve who had as yet found a martyr’s grave.”³¹ Heber C. Kimball recorded in his journal that “[i]t was indeed a painful circumstance to be deprived of the labors of this worthy servant of Christ, and cast a gloom upon the Saints: yet the glorious and sealing testimony which he bore of his

²⁸ Joseph Smith, “Extract from the Private Journal of Joseph Smith, Jr.,” *Times and Seasons*, November 1839, 8.

²⁹ J. L., “Joseph Smith, Mayor of Nauvoo, Murdered,” *Times and Seasons*, August 15, 1844, 621.

³⁰ Pratt, *History*, 36.

³¹ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 197-98.

acceptance with heaven, and the truth of the gospel, was a matter of joy and satisfaction not only to his immediate friends, but to the Saints at large.”³² Patten’s status as an apostle no doubt amplified the importance of his death among the Latter-day Saints.

In addition to Patten and the other Crooked River victims, seventeen Mormon men and boys were killed on October 30, 1838, at the Mormon settlement of Haun’s Mill by rogue Missouri militiamen. These too were remembered by Latter-day Saints as martyrs.³³ Benjamin Andrews spoke for many Latter-day Saints in saying that “[w]e can never forget the blood of our brethren, so wantonly lavished to satisfy the infernal thirsts of men, as heinous to the righteous, as the fiends of hell. Were we to forget them, heaven itself would upbraid us. The immortal shades of our martyred brethren would spurn us from their presence. Their cries with those seen under the altar of God, as viewed by the ancient prophet, would ascend to the throne of Jehovah against us.”³⁴ Mormon poetess Eliza R. Snow described the massacre thus:

The most ferocious of the brutal race:—
Men without hearts—else, would their bosoms bleed
At the commission of so foul a deed
As that, when they, at Shoal Creek, in Caldwell,
Upon an unresisting people fell;
Whose only crime, was,
DARING TO PROFESS THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.
Twas not enough for that unfeeling crew,
To murder men: they shot them through and through?
Frantic with rage; they pour’d their moulded lead
Profusely on the dying and the dead. . . .³⁵

³² Heber C. Kimball, “Journal,” *Times and Seasons*, June 15, 1841, 444.

³³ Pratt, *History*, 39.

³⁴ Benjamin Andrews, “An Appeal to the People of the State of Maine,” *Times and Seasons*, January 15, 1844, 404, 405.

³⁵ Eliza R. Snow, “The Slaughter on Shoal Creek, Caldwell County, Missouri,” *Times and Seasons*, December 1839, 32.

Although many Mormon narratives reflected a male perspective, Snow directed the conclusion of her poem to the women of Mormonism. She encouraged them to think of the widows that lost their loved ones at Haun's Mill, how these widows did not lose hope after the atrocity, and that God, who sees all things, is aware of the widows' sorrow.³⁶ Snow's poem embodied the sorrow that many Mormons felt when remembering the emblematic event of the Missouri persecutions.

Not only were the victims at Crooked River and Haun's Mill remembered as martyrs by Mormons, individuals that passed through Missouri and later died were also heralded as martyrs. Obituaries published in the *Times and Seasons* during the 1840s often praised the deceased for faithfulness while passing through persecution. The obituaries of church Patriarch Joseph Smith Sr. and Bishop Edward Partridge, both of whom died in 1840 in Illinois, provide two of the most specific cases of retroactive application of martyrological imagery to the deaths of individuals.³⁷ Partridge's obituary stated that "[h]e lost his life in consequence of the Missouri persecutions, and he is one of that number whose blood will be required at their hands. As a church we deplore our loss, but we rejoice in his gain."³⁸ This retroactive martyrology not only heightened the status of the recently deceased, it also further bolstered Mormon contentions that they were the only sect that could claim martyrs in the nineteenth century.

³⁶ Snow, "The Slaughter on Shoal Creek," 3.

³⁷ William Smith to D.C. Smith, 1 December 1840, *Times and Seasons*, December 15, 1840, 253.

³⁸ Obituary of Bishop Edward Partridge, *Times and Seasons*, June 1840, 127-28. See also "Extracts from a Revelation Given to Joseph Smith, Jr.," 19 January 1841, *Times and Seasons*, June 1, 1841, 425.

The central figure in Mormon martyrology was Joseph Smith, victim of mob violence himself in 1844. Even before Smith's death, his followers cast him in the martyr's role. William J. Appleby wrote to Smith in 1842, recounting Appleby's anguish at hearing of the prophet's sufferings in Missouri. Appleby however stated that a "soft still sweet voice" comforted him, giving assurances that if Smith remained true he would be sustained by God, and that all the faithful should expect persecution. Appleby then prayed that Smith would be sustained in the face of continued persecutions and even death. "May you never falter, but meet it all with a triumphant smile, obtain the victory over all your enemies; death, hell, and the grave;—fall asleep in the arms of Jesus;—and receive the crown, which thus far you have so nobly and gallantly contended and fought for like a true soldier of the cross, and follower of the Lamb[.]"³⁹ Even before his death, then, Smith's followers endowed him with the image of the martyr.

Latter-day Saint poets therefore possessed a ready means by which to make sense of the violent death of their leader. Smith was "the chosen vessel honored of God," a man "whose innocent blood is now dripping fresh, as it were, from the hands of assassins and their accessories."⁴⁰ One anonymous poet asked soon after the deaths of Smith and his brother Hyrum that

Ye men of wisdom tell me why,
When guilt nor crime in them were found,
Why now their blood doth loudly cry,
From prison walls, and Carthage ground
Your tongues are mute, but pray attend,
The secret I will now relate,

³⁹ William J. Appleby to Joseph Smith, *Times and Seasons*, May 2, 1842, 778.

⁴⁰ Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology: Designed as an Introduction to the First Principles of Spiritual Philosophy; Religion; Law and Government; As Delivered by the Ancients, and as Restored in this Age, for the Final Development of Universal Peace, Truth and Knowledge* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855), 76.

Why those whom God to earth did lend,
Have met the suffering martyr's fate.
It is because they strove to gain,
Beyond the grave a heaven of bliss;
Because they made the gospel plain,
And led the Saints in righteousness.
It is because God called them forth,
And led them by his own right hand
Christ's coming to proclaim on earth,
And gather Israel to their land.⁴¹

Smith's death was also something that demanded explanation, given the common belief that Providence determined everything that occurred in this life.⁴² How could God have allowed his chosen and honored vessel to be murdered? Parley Pratt's explanation was simple. Smith had died defending the cause of truth and had sealed his testimony with his own blood.⁴³ Pratt and other Mormon leaders wrote to the devastated Latter-day Saints that Smith's death should not be interpreted as a sign that God had failed in his promises. Rather than hindering Smith in his mission, his death had simply prepared him "to enter upon a greater and more effectual work," that of bringing about the restoration of all things.⁴⁴ The Latter-day Saints were not to falter despite the loss their leader, but rather they were to continue in the work with renewed dedication.⁴⁵

This sense of purpose in the face of failure was shaped by the biblical martyrology of early Mormon writings on persecution. Martyrology served as the lens

⁴¹ Untitled Poem, *Times and Seasons*, August 1, 1845, 991.

⁴² On the culture of Providence, see Lewis O. Saum, *The Popular Mood of Pre-Civil War America* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), 3-26 and Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴³ [Pratt], *Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles*, 4.

⁴⁴ Parley P. Pratt and others to the Saints Abroad, *Times and Seasons*, July 15, 1844, 586.

⁴⁵ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 371.

through which Latter-day Saints constructed their identities. As Étienne Balibar has argued, “there is no individual identity that is not historical or, in other words, constructed within a field of social values, norms of behavior, and collective symbols.”⁴⁶ In response to critics that suggested that persecution was not a sign of chosenness, one Latter-day Saint argued that “[s]ome suppose, and some believe that the prophets were perfect and holy—and every body knew them to be so, and venerated them as the Lord’s annointed: but let us examine the scriptures and learn how the prophets sent at various times by the Lord, were treated by the saints and the wicked world.” In the Bible this Latter-day Saint found a host of prophets that had been persecuted for their testimonies.⁴⁷ The Bible therefore served as a primary means through which early Mormon essayists saw themselves as a persecuted people.

Latter-day Saint authors found parallels and inspiration in both the Old and New Testaments. They for example saw themselves when they read about God delivering the Israelites from the Egyptians.⁴⁸ Jesus’ prediction that the world would reject his disciples resonated with Latter-day Saints, showing to Edward Partridge and other Mormons that “all the persecution that is heaped upon us, only goes to prove that we are not of the world.”⁴⁹ Mormon authors also drew upon St. Paul’s idea that persecution was to be expected by the godly, and suffering was therefore to be embraced with joy.⁵⁰ Latter-day

⁴⁶ As quoted in Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead, eds., *Theories of Memory: A Reader* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 254.

⁴⁷ “Persecution of the Prophets,” *Times and Seasons*, September 1, 1842, 902-903.

⁴⁸ The First Presidency to the Saints Scattered Abroad, *Times and Seasons*, October 1840, 178.

⁴⁹ Edward Partridge to Samuel Partridge, 23 May 1839, *Times and Seasons*, January 1840, 38, referring to John 15:19.

⁵⁰ See “Persecution,” *Times and Seasons*, August 15, 1842, 886, referring to 2 Timothy 3:12.

Saint writers also saw themselves as part of the great multitude in St. John's Revelation that had passed through great tribulation, leading Partridge to ask "how many in this age of the world, will be among the number? Who, among all the professors of religion throughout Christendom except Latter day Saints, can say that they have had to pass through great tribulation?"⁵¹ The Bible therefore served as a means by which Mormon essayists portrayed themselves as God's persecuted people, separate and distinct from other Americans that had not been persecuted.

This use of biblical language was part of a larger effort to establish continuity between the Mormons of the nineteenth century and the early Christians. Benedict Anderson has argued that establishing a link to a past civilization is a crucial element of constructing group identity and a boundary-maintenance device.⁵² Although the church had been founded in 1830, establishing this continuity allowed Latter-day Saint orators and authors to imagine a history that extended through the time of Christ and even into the biblical era. Latter-day Saint essayists and orators represented the biblical prophets and early Christians as proto-Mormons, adherents to the same gospel and compatriots in the cause of Zion. John Taylor argued in an 1858 speech that "there has never been a time, since the world began, but men of the most elevated character, of the most exalted natures, of the best and most moral habits,—virtuous men that feared God and worked

⁵¹ Edward Partridge to Samuel Partridge, 23 May 1839, *Times and Seasons*, January 1840, 38, referring to Revelation 7:14-15.

⁵² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 195-96.

righteousness, have been persecuted, cast out, and trodden under foot.”⁵³ In Taylor’s view of world history, persecution was the lot of Christ’s disciples from the beginning.

But claiming that persecution was a sign of chosenness left open the possibility that *any* persecuted group, “false systems as well as true ones[.]” could contend that they were “equally correct . . . [and] would be to rank them in one general mass and seat them down in the same kingdom, partakers of the same joys and blessings[.]”⁵⁴ Latter-day Saint authors vacillated between including and excluding individuals and groups that lived during the centuries after the early Christians but before the founding of the Mormon Church in 1830 within the history of God’s persecuted people. Alanson Ripley, for example, argued that the suffering of the Latter-day Saints was distinct, “a parallel of which cannot be produced in the annals of history since the days of our saviour[.]”⁵⁵ But this exclusive narrative was counterbalanced by other Mormons that tentatively envisioned such groups as the Waldenses, Baptists, Quakers, Shakers, Methodists, the followers of Jemima Wilkinson, the early modern martyr John Rogers, and even such individuals as Christopher Columbus and Isaac Newton as having some claim in the history of God’s persecuted people. Mormon essayists included these groups and

⁵³ John Taylor, “The People of God in All Ages Led by One Spirit, and Subject to Persecution—Condition of the World,” January 10, 1858, *Journal of Discourses*, 7:120.

⁵⁴ Oliver Cowdery, “Address to the Patrons of the Evening and the Morning Star,” *The Evening and the Morning Star*, September 1834, 185.

⁵⁵ Alanson Ripley to All the Saints in Christ Jesus, n.d., *Times and Seasons*, July 1840, 137. See also “Prospectus of the *Times and Seasons*,” *Times and Seasons*, November 1839, 16 and Parley P. Pratt to the Editors, 12 October 1839, *Times and Seasons*, January 1840, 43.

individuals not necessarily because they shared a common cause, but rather as a means to condemn persecutors in all ages as “children of ‘that wicked one.’”⁵⁶

Orson Spencer, a former Baptist minister converted to Mormonism, wrote the most detailed explanation of persecution as evidence of authenticity. Spencer was convinced that there was “an identity in the doctrines of the Latter-Day Saints and the Ancient Saints,” leading him to investigate whether the Mormons were treated in the same manner as the early Christians.⁵⁷

The result of my observation seemed to be that even Jesus Christ had many objectionable points of character to those who observed him: those who were reputedly most conversant with Abraham, Moses, and other prophets of the Lord, pronounce him unfit for the respect and confidence of a pious community: and why did such men find so many objectionable points in the character and conduct of Jesus Christ? For substantially the same reasons that men of high intelligence and devotion find fault with Joseph Smith and his doctrines.⁵⁸

Due to the numerous imposters that had preceded both Jesus Christ and Joseph Smith, Spencer argued that religious elites were conditioned to be suspicious of all new claims. In addition, the editors of religious newspapers perpetuated misinformation concerning Joseph Smith, impeding ordinary people from learning his true character. For Spencer and many Latter-day Saints, these reasons combined as sufficient “evidence both internal and external” that Mormonism was a manifestation of authentic religion.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Cowdery, “Address to the Patrons,” 185; John Taylor, *An Answer to Some False Statements and Misrepresentations made by the Rev. Robert Heys, Wesleyan Minister, in an Address to His Society in Douglas and its Vicinity, on the Subject of Mormonism* (Douglas: Printed by Penrice and Wallace, 1840), 9; Elias Higbee and Parley P. Pratt, “Friends and Fellow-Citizens,” *Times and Seasons*, March 1840, 69-70. I am indebted to Christopher C. Jones for the Taylor reference.

⁵⁷ Orson Spencer to W. C., 17 November 1842, *Times and Seasons*, January 2, 1843, 52.

⁵⁸ Spencer to W. C., 17 November 1842, *Times and Seasons*, January 2, 1843, 52.

⁵⁹ Spencer to W. C., 17 November 1842, *Times and Seasons*, January 2, 1843, 53-55.

In his poem “Farewell,” Parley Pratt asked if Latter-day Saints should “spend our lives as pilgrims here,/ Or lose them for the gospel’s sake?/ When Jesus Christ has done the same[.]”⁶⁰ The audacity of such a statement was not so much in its content (Christians had sought to imitate Christ’s sufferings for centuries) but in its context—that Pratt, a Mormon, would claim in Protestant America that his fellow Latter-day Saints had died for the gospel’s sake as Christ had done. In his history, Pratt went further by arguing that “[t]he spirits of the ancient martyrs will hail their brethren of the Church of latter-day Saints, as greater sufferers than themselves[.]”⁶¹ As Protestants largely regarded Mormons as residing outside the pale of authentic religion, such a claim to communion with and even superiority to ancient Christian martyrs no doubt augmented the distance between the groups.⁶²

When describing the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, Latter-day Saint writers imagined continuity between Smith’s death and the deaths of the ancient Saints. W. W. Phelps wrote not long after the assassination that

[a]s has been the case in all ages, these saints [Joseph and Hyrum Smith] have fallen martyrs for the truth's sake, and their escape from the persecution of a wicked world, in blood to bliss, only strengthens our faith, and confirms our religion, as pure and holy . . . [T]he murder of Abel to Joseph, sprinkled with the best blood of the Son of God, as the crimson sign of remission, only carries conviction to the business and bosoms of all flesh, that the cause is just and will continue; and blessed are they that hold out faithful to the end[.]⁶³

⁶⁰ Parley P. Pratt, “Farewell,” in Parley P. Pratt, *The Millennium and Other Poems: To Which is Annexed a Treatise on the Regeneration and Eternal Duration of Matter* (New York: W. Molineux, 1840), 61.

⁶¹ Pratt, *History*, 56.

⁶² See Fluhman, “Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Antebellum America.”

⁶³ W. W. Phelps and others, “To the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,” July 1, 1844, *Times and Seasons*, July 1, 1844, 568. Eliza R. Snow similarly linked the death at Calvary with those at Carthage Jail. “For never, since the Son of God was slain/ Had blood so noble, flow’d from human vein/... The blackest deed that men or devils know/ Since Calv’ry’s scene, has laid the brothers low!” (“The Assassination of Gen’ls Joseph Smith and Hyrum Smith, First Presidents of the Church of Latter Day

Parley Pratt saw compelling parallels between Smith's life, mission, and death and John the Baptist.⁶⁴ These similarities not only assured Latter-day Saint essayists of Smith's place in the history of martyrdom, but also contested anti-Mormon narratives describing Smith's death. In his autobiography, Pratt described returning to Nauvoo in 1844 following the martyrdom and being taunted by a crowd of non-Mormons that asked how the Latter-day Saints would persist without their prophet. Pratt replied that they would continue Smith's work, and, as the deaths of the prophets, apostles, and Christ himself had not impeded the spread of Christianity, neither would Smith's death deny Mormonism's triumph.⁶⁵

Despite great losses in Missouri and Illinois, Latter-day Saint orators and writers primarily remembered God's interventions and deliverances. For example, Brigham Young argued in 1852 that God held the Mormons in his power, and that the Lord had delivered them in the past.⁶⁶ What could have been seen as God's abandonment of the Latter-day Saints was interpreted by Joseph Smith to be the ultimate sign of divine chosenness:

And as for the perils which I am called to pass through, they seem but a small thing to me, as the envy and wrath of man have been my common lot all the days of my life; and for what cause it seems mysterious, unless I was ordained from before the foundation of the world, for some good end, or bad as you may choose to call it. Judge ye for yourselves.—God knoweth all these things, whether it be good or bad. But nevertheless, deep water is what I am wont to swim in; it all has

Saints; Who were Massacred by a Mob, Hancock County, Ill., on the 27th of June 1844," *Times and Seasons*, July 1, 1844, 575).

⁶⁴ Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 76-77.

⁶⁵ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 359.

⁶⁶ Young, "Knowledge of the Doctrine of Christ," 1:42.

become a second nature to me. And I feel like Paul, to glory in tribulation, for to this day has the God of my Fathers delivered me out of them all, and will deliver me from henceforth; for behold, and do, I shall triumph over all my enemies, for the Lord God hath spoken it.⁶⁷

Deliverance from persecution therefore became for Latter-day Saint authors a sure sign that they were proceeding along a path acceptable to God.

Mormon authors believed that persecution would actually strengthen the Latter-day Saints rather than hinder them. Writing from prison, Parley Pratt assured his wife's parents that "[t]his persecution so far from discouraging the Saints or hindering the work of God from rolling on will increase and spread it with tenfold [speed?] the Saints endure all these things cheerfully and help each other in removing to the dividing of their last mite with each others."⁶⁸ William Appleby expanded this metaphor by describing the Church as a ship that would continue onward in the face of rising opposition prior to the millennium. "[T]he God of heaven is at the helm, and he will steer the ship and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ; yes, the mighty kingdoms of China, Austria, Russia, Prussia, France, England and America not excepted, with all the sectarian denominations of the present day will be utterly overthrown;—and Christ will come with all his Saints, and establish his kingdom upon their ruins."⁶⁹ In this way Latter-day Saint essayists turned what could have been seen as a massive blow to the Mormon people into a temporary setback that would ultimately be for their benefit.

⁶⁷ Joseph Smith to All the Saints in Nauvoo, 1 September 1842, *Times and Seasons*, September 15, 1842, 919.

⁶⁸ Parley P. Pratt, letter, March 20, 1839, Parley P. Pratt Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁶⁹ Appleby to Smith, *Times and Seasons*, May 2, 1842, 778.

Latter-day Saint orators and writers found a direct connection between persecution and proselytizing expansion. In an 1855 speech George A. Smith recalled that Joseph Smith had prophesied that the church would spread if its enemies would leave it alone, but “if they did not let us alone, we would spread it anyhow, only a little quicker.” George Smith saw the results of persecution as similar to those of the old man that saw a mustard plant flourishing in his garden. Irritated, the old man beat the plant with a hoe, hoping to kill the plant, but only succeeding in scattering the seed all over the garden.⁷⁰ Brigham Young compared persecution to the efforts of thieving boys hoping to get an old man’s apples that conspired to knock down the man’s garden wall. With the task completed, the boys discovered that the toppled wall was in fact taller than it had been originally.⁷¹ Persecution, rather than leading to a decrease in membership, would rather increase conversions by tens of thousands.⁷² Sympathetic non-Mormon John Gunnison argued in his 1852 book *The Mormons* that persecuting the Latter-day Saints was counter productive, as opposition only strengthened and unified the Mormons.⁷³ Brigham Young encouraged other non-Mormons to take Gunnison’s advice, arguing that

⁷⁰ George A. Smith, “Gathering and Sanctification of the People of God,” March 18, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:219.

⁷¹ Brigham Young, “The Priesthood and Satan—The Constitution and Government of the United States—Rights and Policy of the Latter-Day Saints,” February 15, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:190.

⁷² Parley P. Pratt, “The Millennium,” in Pratt, *The Millennium*, 20; “Psalm—124th,” *Times and Seasons*, July 15, 1841, 471, 472.

⁷³ J. W. Gunnison, *The Mormons, or Latter-day Saints, in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake: A History of their Rise and Progress, Peculiar Doctrines, Present Condition, and Prospects, Derived from Personal Observation, During a Residence Among Them*, ed. Robert Kent Fielding (1852; Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1860; reprint, Brookline, Massachusetts: Paradigm Publications, 1993), 113, 164. Fielding’s edition is a reprint of the 1860 edition.

continued persecution from the federal government during the 1850s would, as Gunnison concluded, just multiply and strengthen the Saints.⁷⁴

Part of this optimism doubtless stemmed from the Mormon belief that ancient and modern prophets had predicted that in the last days the Saints of God would suffer persecution. Oliver Cowdery promised Parley Pratt in a blessing given in 1835 that he would suffer persecution, be dragged before authorities to be tried for his religion, and be imprisoned for his faith, predictions that he believed were fulfilled in Missouri 1833 and in 1838-1839.⁷⁵ It was perhaps to such personal blessings that George A. Smith referred in an 1855 sermon, when he recalled that “[t]he very first thing that Joseph told the brethren” was that they should expect to be tarred, feathered, and “driven from house to house, and from country to country, and be hated of all men because of your religion[.]”⁷⁶ In his poem “The Millennium” Parley Pratt answered modern critics that argued that persecution proved that Mormonism was false. “O fools, and slow of heart to understand/ The prophecies concerning Zion’s land./ Have ye not read the words of them of old?/ When wrapt in vision clear they have foretold/ The wicked deeds that you of late fulfill’d.”⁷⁷ Pratt believed that the Mormon course had been foreseen by God’s prophets, and that their persecutions were of divine design.

⁷⁴ Young, “The Priesthood and Satan,” 2:190.

⁷⁵ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 129-30; see also 128, 133-35.

⁷⁶ George A. Smith, “Arguments of Modern Christian Sects against the Latter-Day Saints,” June 24, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:331. See also George A. Smith, “Ordained Young Men to Office—Word of Wisdom—Union,” April 8, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 2: 362-63; Ezra T. Benson, “Necessity of Opposition,” February 16, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:350-51; Brigham Young, “Faithfulness and Apostacy,” April 6, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 2: 250.

⁷⁷ Pratt, “The Millennium,” in Pratt, *The Millennium*, 18. See also Pratt, *History*, 54.

Many Latter-day Saint writers and orators believed that suffering persecution was necessary for salvation. In an 1853 sermon Brigham Young directed his comments to those in his audience that had not passed through Missouri and Illinois, assuring them that although they had not suffered during the 1830s and 1840s, they would at some point in their lives suffer similarly.⁷⁸ In 1856, Young argued that “[m]any of the people in these valleys have no experience in these things [that is, persecutions], and I would be very glad to have such persons escape those trials, if they could receive the same glory and exaltation that they would if they had passed through them.”⁷⁹ At least one Mormon leader, Alanson Ripley, taught that there was another means by which individuals that had not suffered persecution could receive the same blessings as those that had suffered in Missouri. In asking for funds for the church newspaper in Nauvoo, Ripley contended that donating money was a sufficient sacrifice to allow Latter-day Saints that were not in Missouri to receive the same blessings with those that suffered physical persecution.⁸⁰

For many Latter-day Saint essayists, being called to suffer and even die for the truth was preferable to the alternative of remaining unscathed in Babylon. Joseph Smith wrote in 1839 that he considered “it good fortune to suffer affliction with the people of God[.]”⁸¹ While in prison Parley Pratt wrote to his relatives encouraging them to join the

⁷⁸ Brigham Young, “Building Temples,” February 14, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:279.

⁷⁹ Brigham Young, “The Gifts of Prophecy and Tongues—The Former Circumstances and Present Condition of the Saints Contrasted—Trials and Temptations Necessary to Exaltation—The Condition of Disembodied Spirits—Redemption of the Dead,” June 22, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:363. Young himself was not always consistent on this point. In an 1839 missive he stated that “we would say to all the saints who have made a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice, that inasmuch as you are faithful, you shall not lose your reward, although not numbered among those who were in the late difficulties in the west” (Brigham Young and others to the Elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, to the Churches Scattered Abroad, and to all the Saints, *Times and Seasons*, November 1839, 12-13).

⁸⁰ Alanson Ripley to All the Saints in Christ Jesus, n.d., *Times and Seasons*, July 1840, 137-38.

⁸¹ Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, 22 March 1839, *Times and Seasons*, February 1840, 52.

main body of the Saints then leaving Missouri. “I most earnestly wish that our friends in Maine would come to the west and live with us[,] that is if they choose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of the Gentiles for a season.”⁸²

This sentiment was common among the Latter-day Saints, and illustrated that there was a special significance in suffering with the Mormons as a people, rather than simply as individuals.⁸³ Pratt’s representation of the Mormons as the suffering people of God also served as a means by which to maintain a boundary between true believers and their opponents.

Constructing the “Other”

Latter-day Saint writers sought to maintain that boundary by portraying the Missourians and Illinoisans within frameworks derived from American and biblical cultures. The frameworks cast the Mormons’ tormentors in opposition to the Latter-day Saints, and therefore served as a means by which Latter-day Saint authors defined themselves by what they were not. In doing so, Latter-day Saints also imputed motivations to their persecutors which they themselves perhaps would not have articulated, but that were necessary for the Mormons to present a coherent picture of what had happened in Missouri and Illinois during the 1830s and 1840s.

Latter-day Saint essayists portrayed their persecutors and their actions as inhuman. Parley Pratt for example referred to “a lawless banditti, who were utter

⁸² Pratt, letter, 20 March 1839, Pratt Collection, Perry Special Collections. Pratt’s language echoes Hebrews 11:25.

⁸³ See Parley Pratt and others to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 19 February 1840, *Times and Seasons*, March 1840, 71; James Blakeslee, in “From the Elders Abroad,” *Times and Seasons*, December 1839, 26; Parley P. Pratt, “Charity and True Patriotism,” in Pratt, *The Millennium*, 3; Francis G. Bishop, Nauvoo, Illinois, to High Priest Quorum President, 4 February 1840, *Times and Seasons*, March 1840, 77-78.

strangers to humanity.”⁸⁴ Mormon authors described their persecutors’ actions as barbarous and cruel and represented their persecutors as emissaries of Satan.⁸⁵ This construction fit the Missourians and Illinoisans within a cosmic scene, in which the children of darkness fought against the children of light. Mormon opponents were therefore “fiends of the lower region,” “monsters in the shape of men,” “fiends in human form” and a “gang of demons in human shape.”⁸⁶ When describing his arrest and entering the Missouri militia camp on October 31, 1838, Parley Pratt indicated that “[i]f the vision of the infernal regions could suddenly open to the mind, with thousands of malicious fiends all clamoring, exulting, deriding, blaspheming, mocking, railing, raging and foaming like a troubled sea, then could some idea be formed of the hell which we had entered.”⁸⁷ In this manner Latter-day Saint writers explained their persecutors’ motivations and situated the Mormons as God’s people opposed by Satan’s minions.

Latter-day Saint orators and authors contended that Protestants were the primary movers behind the persecutions, which highlighted Protestant hypocrisy. George A. Smith for example recounted in 1855 how in the 1830s and 1840s he had been “driven before the muskets of the Christian mob[,]” and in 1845 Orson Pratt prayed that God would deliver the Latter-day Saints “out of the hands of the blood thirsty Christians of

⁸⁴ Pratt, *History*, 43; Pratt, *Autobiography*, 207. On “captivity” narratives, see Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973; repr., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000).

⁸⁵ Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1842, 708; Pratt, *History*, 81, 82; Hyrum Smith, testimony, July 1, 1843, *Times and Seasons*, July 1, 1843, 256; Parley P. Pratt and others, “‘Mormons,’ So Called,” Extra, *The Evening and the Morning Star*, February 1834.

⁸⁶ Smith, “Extract,” 6-7; Smith, testimony, 256; Pratt, *History*, iii; Pratt, *Autobiography*, 324.

⁸⁷ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 204.

these United States[.]”⁸⁸ But these “Christian” mobs were but pawns in the hands of Protestant ministers, argued many Latter-day Saints.⁸⁹ Joseph Smith invoked biblical images of Christ’s opponents when writing that the “mobbers were encouraged by priests and levites, by pharisees and saducees, by essenees and herodions[.]”⁹⁰ Orson Spencer reported to a Baptist friend that the Missouri mobs were led by Protestant missionaries and priests, likely referring to Baptist Isaac McCoy, Presbyterian Sashel Woods, and Methodist Samuel Bogart.⁹¹

Mormon authors and orators imputed various motivations to these Protestant leaders for their actions. First, Protestants hated the Mormons because the Latter-day Saints were God’s true church. Parley Pratt wrote that “[t]he hireling priests against the truth engage,/ While hell beneath stands trembling with rage.”⁹² Wilford Woodruff concluded that as long as the Latter-day Saints adhered to the principles of revelation Protestants would persecute the Mormons.⁹³ Second, Mormons believed that they were persecuted because Protestants were jealous of Mormon proselytizing success, leading

⁸⁸ Smith, “Arguments of Modern Christian Sects,” 2:330 and “Farewell Message of Orson Pratt,” *Times and Seasons*, December 1, 1845, 1042.

⁸⁹ See for example Pratt, *Autobiography*, 102-103.

⁹⁰ Joseph Smith, Liberty, Missouri, to the Church, Caldwell County, Missouri, 16 December 1838, *Times and Seasons*, April 1840, 84.

⁹¹ Pratt, *History*, 84; see also Pratt, “Pratt’s Defence,” in Pratt, *The Millennium*, 97-98. He mentioned three Protestants ministers by name, Isaac McCoy, Sashel Woods, and Samuel Bogart. On McCoy, see Pratt, *History*, 21; Pratt and others, “‘Mormons,’ So Called”; Pratt, *Autobiography*, 108. On Woods, see Pratt, *History*, 29; Pratt, *Autobiography*, 191; Parley P. Pratt, “The Mormon Prisoners,” Parley P. Pratt Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. On Bogart, see Pratt, *Autobiography*, 197.

⁹² Pratt, “The Millennium,” in Pratt, *The Millennium*, 17.

⁹³ Smith, “Arguments of Modern Christian Sects,” 2:333.

them to turn to persecution in efforts to stem Mormon progress.⁹⁴ In narrating the causes of the persecutions in his autobiography, Parley Pratt argued that “religious priests and bigots felt that we were powerful rivals, and about to excel all other societies in the state in numbers and in power and influence[.]”⁹⁵ Closely related to this second motivation was the Mormon belief that Protestant ministers turned to persecution because they saw in Mormonism a threat to priestcraft, reflecting the democratic rejection in the early republic of paid clergy that Nathan Hatch has documented in *The Democratization of American Christianity*.⁹⁶ Asel Owens, writing to the *Times and Seasons* in March 1840, concluded that priests turned to violence when their arguments and claims to the truth failed.⁹⁷ Joseph Smith likewise contended that “the sole cause of the persecution against the Mormon people[,]” and the only reason that he was imprisoned in Missouri, was because “long-faced Baptists” were alarmed that Mormon success would challenge their priestcraft.⁹⁸

Aside from Protestants, Mormon authors and orators also argued that dissenters were primary movers in the persecutions. Parley Pratt recalled in 1853 that in every major persecution during the 1830s and 1840s, with the sole exception of the Jackson County persecutions of 1834, dissenters had instigated the opposition.⁹⁹ Joseph Smith,

⁹⁴ Parley P. Pratt, “Reminiscences,” 7 September 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 5:199.

⁹⁵ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 102-103.

⁹⁶ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁹⁷ Asal Owen to Robinson and Smith, 20 March 1840, *Times and Seasons*, April 1840, 89. See also William R. Vance to the Editors, 3 February 1841, *Times and Seasons*, March 15, 1841, 350.

⁹⁸ Smith to Galland, *Times and Seasons*, February 1840, 53, 53-54.

⁹⁹ Parley P. Pratt, “Persecutions of the Church—Apostates—Freedom—Self-Defence,” March 27, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:85.

when discussing the scandalous departure of Nauvoo Mayor and First Presidency member John C. Bennett, concluded that those that “made the greatest professions of friendship” often became the Latter-day Saints’ greatest enemies. “They were more violent in their persecutions, more relentless and sanguinary in their proceedings, and sought with greater fury the destruction and overthrow of the Saints of God who had never injured them, but whose virtue made them blush for their crimes.”¹⁰⁰ Following the murder of Joseph Smith, the *Times and Seasons* printed an editorial that claimed dissenters were behind the killing and that they “have retarded the work more, and combined more influence to rob him [Smith] of life, than all christendom; for they having mingled in his greatness, knew where and when to take advantage of his weakness.”¹⁰¹ Although dissenters had once been Latter-day Saints, Mormon authors had little trouble portraying their former brethren as worse than those that had never been associated with the church.

Mormon essayists and poets not only condemned Protestants and dissenters for perpetrating and condoning the persecutions, these writers also reserved their ire for government officials that participated in the violence. In particular, Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs became for Latter-day Saints the embodiment of government complicity, and the governor was often limned in Mormon prose with colors drawn from images associated with the governmental persecutors of the ancient Christians.¹⁰² To poetess Eliza R. Snow, Boggs’ name had “become synonymous with oppression, cruelty,

¹⁰⁰ Joseph Smith, “John C. Bennett,” *Times and Seasons*, August 1, 1842, 868-69.

¹⁰¹ “The Murder,” *Times and Seasons*, July 15, 1844, 585.

¹⁰² See Smith, “Extract,” 9.

treachery and murder.”¹⁰³ In a letter to his wife written from prison, Parley Pratt referred to the governor as “his Missouri Magesty, Emperor Boggs,” and on other occasions Mormons constructed Boggs as “the modern Herod,” “the modern Nero,” and “Maximum.”¹⁰⁴ Just as Mormon authors imagined community between the Latter-day Saints and the early Christians because both groups had been persecuted, they also imagined continuity between Boggs and earlier rulers that opposed God’s people. Snow averred that Boggs ranked high among “haters of righteousness and the shedders of innocent blood” and that a host of ancient tyrants awaited him anxiously.¹⁰⁵ Parley Pratt argued in his history that “tyranny itself will blush to hear her [Missouri’s] deeds mentioned in the annals of history; and the most cruel persecutors of the [C]hristians or reformers, in Pagan or Papal Rome, will startle with astonishment from their long slumbers, and with a shudder of the deepest horror, and a frown of the most indignant contempt, they will look upon her unheard of deeds of blind infatuation, and inconscienable [*sic*] absurdity.”¹⁰⁶ When Pratt revised this passage for his autobiography, he altered the image by having the ancient persecutors react to Missouri’s persecutions “with a mixture of envy and admiration, yield[ing] to her the palm.”¹⁰⁷ Pratt however was not willing to yield to his tormentors the palm, preferring instead to show his readers that

¹⁰³ Eliza R. Snow, “Missouri,” January 1844, *Times and Seasons*, February 1, 1844, 431.

¹⁰⁴ Parley P. Pratt to Mary Ann Pratt, April 12, 1839, Parley P. Pratt Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Joseph Smith, and others to Edward Partridge, *Times and Seasons*, May 1840, 99; Pratt, *History*, 54; Pratt, *Autobiography*, 217-18, 230-31; Ebenezer Robinson and Don Carlos Smith, “Address,” *Times and Seasons*, November 1839, 2; “Lilburn W. Boggs,” *Times and Seasons*, January 1, 1841, 265; “Biography of Nathan Pratt,” *Times and Seasons*, January 15, 1844, 414.

¹⁰⁵ Snow, “Missouri,” 431.

¹⁰⁶ Pratt, *History*, 56.

¹⁰⁷ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 237.

although his persecutors had temporarily won the upper hand, the Latter-day Saints would ultimately have power over them.

“That Saints shall have power . . . the kingdom to take . . .”

The language of martyrdom and persecution provided Latter-day Saint writers and poets the linguistic tools by which they could reverse power relations as they had been defined by the Missourians and Illinoisans. Mormon opponents were successful in expelling the Latter-day Saints from both Missouri and Illinois and prosecuting and imprisoning Mormon leaders for crimes, all while avoiding legal sanctions for non-Mormon vigilantes. Mormon authors were well aware of these inequalities, leading them to imagine a time when God would vindicate their people. Edward Partridge yearned in an 1840 poem for that time:

How long, O my God, shall the enemy reign,
And rob, drive and murder, the saints without cause?
When shall *they have power their rights* to maintain,
Shall *mobs* always *triumph*, in spite of the laws?
Oh! no, for the prophets have foretold a time,
(But not till the Ancient of days shall have sit,)
That saints shall have power, wisdom divine,
The kingdom to take, and then to possess it.
Oh! hasten dear Lord, hasten on that blest day.¹⁰⁸

With this yearning for power to defend their rights and take the kingdom, Latter-day Saint essayists also found that pleading for “the day of vengeance” served as a means by which Mormons could challenge their tormentors’ narratives of what had happened in Missouri and Illinois. Rather than being fanatics punished for their crimes, as anti-Mormons portrayed the Latter-day Saints, the Mormons reversed those power relations

¹⁰⁸ Edward Partridge, “A Hymn,” *Times and Seasons*, April 1840, 95.

by representing themselves as God's people, waiting for a future day when the Lord would rescue them and punish their enemies, whether in this life or the next.

Latter-day Saint writers viewed their notions of vengeance through the lens provided in two biblical verses, Genesis 4:10 and Revelation 6:9-11. The fourth chapter of Genesis described Cain's murder of Abel and God's punishment of Cain. In the tenth verse, God inquired of Cain concerning Abel: "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."¹⁰⁹ Latter-day Saint essayists followed seventeenth-century Quakers and Baptists in early New England that used this verse to inform their tormentors that their deaths would be noticed and avenged by God.¹¹⁰ Joseph Smith for example argued that had the Missourians wanted peace as did the Mormons, then "neither would the cries of orphans and widdows [*sic*] have ascended to God or the blood of the saints have stained the soil, and cried for vengeance against them."¹¹¹ Mormons also used the sixth chapter of St. John's Revelation, verses nine through eleven, which described martyrs under the heavenly altar, pleading for God to avenge their deaths:

. . . I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they *were*, should be fulfilled.

¹⁰⁹ This language of blood crying from the ground was also reflected in Mormon scriptures in 2 Nephi 28:10, Mormon 8:27, and Doctrine Covenants 136:36.

¹¹⁰ David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 187-89.

¹¹¹ Smith to Partridge, 20 March 1839, *Times and Seasons*, May 1840, 100. See also Pratt, *History*, 36 and James Riley, "To the Ladies and Gentlemen of St. Louis," *Times and Seasons*, January 15, 1845, 782.

These verses, among the most frequently cited in early Mormon martyrological writings, shaped how Latter-day Saints understood the workings of vengeance and functioned as a means by which Mormon authors defined their relationships with God, ancient martyrs, and other Americans.

As Mormon essayists saw continuity between themselves and persecuted peoples of ancient times, Latter-day Saint writers imagined their own martyrs as being under the altar with martyrs from earlier ages, pleading for God to bring vengeance upon their tormentors.¹¹² Parley Pratt imagined this community with the former-day Saints by claiming that “the blood of ancient and modern Saints, will mingle together in cries of vengeance, upon those who are drunken with their blood, till justice will delay no longer to excuse his long suspended mission of vengeance upon the earth.”¹¹³ After Joseph Smith’s death, Pratt penned a poem entitled “Cry of the Martyrs” that described the ancient martyrs under the heavenly altar, pleading to God for vengeance, with a voice answering that they must wait until the Mormons have bled in Missouri and Illinois:

“How long, O Lord! holy and true, dost thou
Not judge and avenge our blood on them that
Dwell on the earth?”
Are these the awful words? And what reply
Is given by the avenging heavens?
BE PATIENT O ye martyred souls and wait
Till your fellow servants who are to be
Killed in like manner shall be fulfilled.
WAIT—till Missouri’s plains are soaked in blood
Of innocence, and the souls of Latter day Saints
Mingle their cries with yours for vengeance on
The earth. Wait, till the plains of Illinois,
And the walls of Carthage, are soaked with

¹¹² Young and others to the Elders, *Times and Seasons*, November 1839, 12.

¹¹³ Pratt, *History*, 56.

The blood of martyred prophets, whose cries
Ascend to heaven for vengeance on a mob.¹¹⁴

By linking Mormon martyrs with ancient martyrs, Pratt and other Mormon authors established authenticity for the Latter-day Saint gospel.

Both the image of the blood of the martyr crying to God for vengeance and the picture of ancient and modern martyrs crying for vengeance under the altar involved the dead. But what was the role of the living in this schema of vengeance? For one, Mormons believed that they should continue to expect persecution until all those that were to be martyred were killed.¹¹⁵ It also became commonplace for Latter-day Saint authors to include petitions to God for vengeance in their prayers and rituals. Parley Pratt, for example, wrote in his poem “Zion in Captivity” a plea that God would haste “the day of vengeance on,” teaching the nations that he is God and delivering his captive Saints.¹¹⁶ Orson Pratt likewise prayed for the hastening of the day of vengeance, but asked in 1845 that the Lord would “destroy not thy people who are poor, with the wicked; but hide them with thine own hand and shield them from judgment.”¹¹⁷ Mormons then added their voices to those of their fallen brethren in pleading to God to bring vengeance on their persecutors.

¹¹⁴ Parley P. Pratt, “Cry of the Martyrs,” *Times and Seasons*, September 2, 1844, 639. See also Parley P. Pratt, “Literal Fulfillment of Prophecy,” October 7, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:137.

¹¹⁵ Smith, “Extract,” 8-9.

¹¹⁶ Parley P. Pratt, “Zion in Captivity,” in Pratt, *The Millennium*, 73. See also [Alexander Niebaur], “Lamentation,” *Times and Seasons*, July 15, 1844, 591 and Parley P. Pratt, “Reflections,” in Pratt, *The Millennium*, 62.

¹¹⁷ “Farewell Message of Orson Pratt,” 1042.

Mormon authors warned the American people that if they did not address and correct the wrongs perpetrated against the Latter-day Saints in Missouri and Illinois, God would punish the nation as a whole. Parley Pratt argued that

so long as they [the American people] remain indifferent and ignorant on these subjects, and so long as they continue to breathe out slanders, lies, hatred and murder against the Saints and against the remnants of Israel, and to speak evil of and oppose the things which they understand not, so long the blood of the Saints and of the martyrs of Jesus must continue to flow, and the souls to cry from under the altar for vengeance on a guilty land, till the great Messiah shall execute judgment for the Saints, and give them the dominion.¹¹⁸

All Americans, by virtue of the ties of citizenship, were for Parley Pratt under condemnation for not helping the Latter-day Saints. “The blood of innocence is crying from the ground against, not only the perpetrators of these crimes, but against the protestants, catholics, clergy, rulers and people, because they were bound by the common ties of humanity, by the common bonds of citizenship, by the laws of God, and by the most sacred obligations of their laws and constitution, to have protected persons and property, and punished crime.”¹¹⁹ The day of vengeance therefore lay ahead of all Americans that did not come to the aid of the Latter-day Saints.

Latter-day Saint writers used this understanding of God’s vengeance to assign causation to the subsequent deaths of their persecutors. In his autobiography, Parley Pratt described an incident in 1834 when a rainstorm impeded a mob from attacking a small body of Latter-day Saints. When word came that several of the mobbers had drowned when their boat sank in the rainstorm, Pratt recalled Joseph Smith saying that “it was the

¹¹⁸ [Pratt], *Proclamation of the Twelve*, 12-13.

¹¹⁹ Parley P. Pratt, *Proclamation Extraordinary*, in Parker Pratt Robison, ed., *Writings of Parley Parker Pratt: One of the First Missionaries and a Member of the First Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1952), 158.

angel of the Lord who sank the boat.”¹²⁰ Drawing on a centuries-old tradition, Latter-day Saint writers described the gruesome ends to individuals that had persecuted the Mormons in Missouri and Illinois, such as having maggots eat their limbs and their faces rot.¹²¹ Whether there is any truth behind such stories matters less than the function that they played in Mormon discourse during the nineteenth century.¹²² Perhaps the most well-known of this retroactive assignment of God’s vengeance on the deaths of perceived enemies was Brigham Young’s 1860 visit to the site of the Mountain Meadows massacre. Young, believing that many of the victims were perpetrators of crimes against the Latter-day Saints, concluded that God had brought his vengeance upon them.¹²³ These interpretations reassured the Latter-day Saints that God would ultimately bring the vengeance upon their persecutors that the Mormons themselves were powerless to enact themselves.

¹²⁰ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 125. See also George A. Smith, “Reminiscences of the Jackson County Mob, the Evacuation of Nauvoo, and the Settlement of Great Salt Lake City,” July 24, 1854, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:24.

¹²¹ See for example George A. Smith, “Gathering and Sanctification of the People of God,” March 18, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:216-17 and Pratt, *Autobiography*, 475-77. Such lurid descriptions of the fate of the persecutors had cultural precedents reaching back centuries in the writings of Christians. This tradition was perhaps most readily available to Pratt in the form of Stephen Cattley, ed, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, 8 vols. (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1837-1841), 7: 656-7 and Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary: Containing Definitions of all Religious Terms: A Comprehensive View of Every Article in the System of Divinity, an Impartial Account of all the Principal Denominations which have subsisted in the Religious World from the Birth of Christ to the Present Day: Together with an Accurate Statement of the Most Remarkable Transactions and Events Recorded in Ecclesiastical History* (Philadelphia: J. J. Woodward, 1837), 282. I am indebted to Samuel Brown for these references.

¹²² For an analysis of these stories within the context of American folklore, see Richard C. Poulsen, “Fate of the Persecutors of Joseph Smith: Transmutations of an American Myth,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 11, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 63-70.

¹²³ “Pres. Young Said that the company that was used up at the Mountain Meadows were the Fathers, Mothe[rs], Bros., Sisters & connections of those that Muerders the Prophets; they Merritd their fate...when he [Young] came to the Monument that contained their [the victims] Bones, he made this remark, Vengeance is Mine Saith the Lord, & I have taken a litle of it” (John D. Lee, Journal, May 30, 1861, in Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848-1876*, 2 vols. [1955; repr., San Marino: The Huntington Library, 2003], 1:314).

Although many Latter-day Saints believed that vengeance would be brought about by supernatural means, there is also evidence that some Mormons believed that they would be instruments in God's hands to punish their enemies. For example, William Clayton recorded in his diary on September 19, 1845, that members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles "offered up prayers that the Lord would preserve his servants and deliver those who had been active in the mob that killed Joseph and Hyrum into our hands that they might receive their deserts."¹²⁴ This language implies that those involved in the prayer believed that they would be instruments in bringing vengeance on Smith's murderers.¹²⁵ Nine years later in southern Utah, David Lewis related that "My brother Benjamin was killed in Missouri. I am alive to avenge his blood when the Lord will."¹²⁶ In an 1857 speech, George A. Smith reported that a brother Jameson in Provo, Utah, who "carried a few ounces of lead in his body ever since the Haun's Mill massacre in Missouri, and he wants to pay it back with usury, and he undertook to preach at Provo,

¹²⁴ George D. Smith, ed. *An Intimate Chronicle: The Diaries of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 183. Heber C. Kimball likewise recorded in his diary that "ever since Joseph's death . . . seven to twelve persons who had met together every day to pray . . . have covenanted, and never will rest . . . until those men who killed Joseph & Hyrum have been wiped out of the earth" (Heber C. Kimball, diary, 21 December 1845; quoted in David John Buerger, "The Development of the Mormon Temple Endowment," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 4 [Winter 1987]: 53. The original journal is housed in the LDS Church archives, but was not included in Stanley B. Kimball, ed., *On the Potter's Wheel: The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987], apparently because the diary is restricted.).

¹²⁵ Beginning in the late 1840s and continuing throughout the nineteenth century, anti-Mormons and dissenters accused the Latter-day Saints of swearing oaths in their temples to avenge the blood of the prophets. The several accounts of the vengeance oath however are contradictory, and there is as of yet no substantial scholarly analysis of the vengeance oath (See Van Hale, "The Alleged Oath of Vengeance," <http://mormonmisc.podbean.com/2007/07/07/the-alleged-oath-of-vengeance/> [accessed 7/15/2008]). See also Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley, Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 14.

¹²⁶ David Lewis, May 14, 1854, quoted in Juanita Brooks, "Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 12 (January-April 1944): 21. Lewis' statement also indicated that Native Americans would help the Mormons bring vengeance on their persecutors (see Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* [2002; repr., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004], 23-37).

and prayed that God would send them along, for he wanted to have a chance at them.”¹²⁷

In addition, some contemporary patriarchal blessings promised individuals that they would be instruments in God’s hands in bringing vengeance upon the church’s enemies.¹²⁸ These statements imply that at least some Latter-day Saints believed that they themselves would bring vengeance on their enemies.

There is also some indication that Mormon leaders believed that God had authorized them to help any of Smith’s murderers that desired to repent to receive God’s forgiveness by voluntarily allowing Mormon leaders to shed their blood in a procedure known as “blood atonement.” For example, Brigham Young asked in 1853 if Smith’s blood was atoned. “Has his blood been atoned for? No! And why? A martyr’s blood to true religion was never atoned for on our earth. No man, or nation of men, *without the Priesthood*, has power to make atonement for such sins.”¹²⁹ Two years later, Young continued this theme:

I will take the Government of the United States, and the laws of Missouri and Illinois, from the year 1833 to 1845, and if they had been carried out according to their letter and spirit, they would have strung up the murderers and mobocrats who illegally and unrighteously killed, plundered, harassed, and expelled us. I will tell you how much I love those characters. If they had any respect to their own welfare, they would come forth and say, whether Joseph Smith was a Prophet or not, “We shed his blood, and now let us atone for it;” and they would be willing to have their heads chopped off, that their blood might run upon the ground, and the smoke of it rise before the Lord as an incense for their sins. I love them that much. But if the Lord wishes them to live and foam out their sins before all men and women, it is all right, I care not where they go, or what they do.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ George A. Smith, September 13, 1857, *Deseret News*, 23 September 1857, 227.

¹²⁸ See Elisha R. Groves, blessing given to William Dames, 1854, William Horne Dames Papers, Church Archives, Department of Church History, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹²⁹ Brigham Young, “Necessity of Building Temples—The Endowment,” April 6, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:32. Emphasis added.

¹³⁰ Young, “The Priesthood and Satan,” 2:186.

There is no reliable evidence that any of the murderers of Joseph Smith sought this procedure, but these statements do suggest that Young believed that in some instances Mormon leaders themselves would enact vengeance against their persecutors.

There is also an abundance of evidence that Mormon leaders preached patience and forbearance in the aftermath of persecution and enjoined the Latter-day Saints to allow God to bring vengeance. Shortly after the expulsion from Missouri Brigham Young wrote to the scattered Latter-day Saints to acknowledge their sufferings while encouraging them to wait for God to bring vengeance rather than seeking it themselves.¹³¹ Following the murder of Joseph Smith, church leaders again publicly admonished the Latter-day Saints not to seek vengeance. Less than a month after the murder, Parley Pratt wrote that “[a]s to our country and nation, we have more reason to weep for them, than for those they have murdered; for they are destroying themselves and their institutions and there is no remedy; and as to feelings of revenge, let them not have place for one moment in our bosoms, for God’s vengeance will speedily consume to that degree that we would fain be hid away and not endure the sight.”¹³² In later narratives, Latter-day Saint authors pointed to Mormon forbearance immediately following Smith’s death as evidence that the Latter-day Saints did not believe in taking vengeance into their own

¹³¹ Young and others to the Elders, *Times and Seasons*, November 1839, 12. See also “Persecution,” 887-88.

¹³² Pratt and others to the Saints Abroad, *Times and Seasons*, July 15, 1844, 586. See also Nauvoo City Council minutes, *Times and Seasons*, July 1, 1844, 566; Hyde, discourse, 1004-1005; George A. Smith, “Report of a Visit to the Southern Country,” September 13, 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, 5:223-24.

hands.¹³³ What accounts for these seemingly contradictory impulses in Mormon thought remains unknown and deserves further attention by historians.

There was also a sense in Mormon writings of the time that even if God did not intervene in this life to give the Latter-day Saints the ability to take the kingdom, that in the next life the Mormons would have power over their enemies. Mormon writers yearned for a future home where mobs would not be able to torment the Latter-day Saints. An unnamed poet, for example, wrote not long after Joseph Smith's death that

He is where he will ever be,
Beyond the reach of mobs and strife,
He rests unharm'd in endless life,
His home's in the sky;—he dwells with the Gods,
Far from the furious rage of mobs.¹³⁴

While the Latter-day Saints resided in this heavenly bliss and peace, their persecutors would face punishment and judgment in the world to come.¹³⁵ But perhaps most tellingly, Latter-day Saint authors and orators envisioned a time when Joseph Smith would rule over the Mormons' tormentors. Orson Hyde, referring to the second chapter of the Revelation of John, argued in 1845 that “[b]y his [Smith's] death has he become the ruler over the nations of the earth, and he will break them to pieces, as the vessels of a potter;

¹³³ See Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 89-90 and Brigham Young, “The Constitution and Government of the United States—Rights and Policy of the Latter-Day Saints,” February 18, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:173.

¹³⁴ “The Seer,” *Times and Seasons*, January 1, 1845, 767. See also P.H. Young, “The Infant's Grave,” *Times and Seasons*, December 1, 1841, 622; Parley P. Pratt, “Directions for my Funeral and Epitaph,” Parley P. Pratt Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

¹³⁵ Parley P. Pratt, ““One Hundred Years Hence,” in Parley P. Pratt, *The Essential Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 143; Editorial Note, *Times and Seasons*, September 1840, 169; Young, “The Infant's Grave,” 622.

and he will so order the events to bring it about.”¹³⁶ Parley Pratt likewise foresaw a time when the Prophet’s persecutors would beg Smith for forgiveness and be condemned to be his servants for eternity.¹³⁷ In these fantasies of the afterlife, Latter-day Saint authors were therefore able to imagine a future world where they would have power to take the kingdom and rule over their enemies, yearnings that eluded the Mormons in this life.

Conclusion

In 1854, three years prior to his death, Parley P. Pratt was living in California directing the church’s missionary efforts in the Pacific Basin. While there, he engaged in several polemical exchanges in California newspapers with Protestant ministers that attacked Mormonism and the church’s practice of polygamy. In a public debate held at the Mercantile Library Debating Society of San Francisco in December 1854, Pratt responded to an accusation made by Methodist minister M. C. Briggs that the Mormons have committed “theft, robbery, murder, etc., being considered no crime by me [Pratt] and the ‘Mormons,’ provided these crimes were committed on the Gentiles, and in favor of the Church treasury, etc.”¹³⁸ Pratt compared Briggs’s allegations to a Quaker man that wanted a dog to be killed. The Quaker told the dog that he (the Quaker) would not kill

¹³⁶ “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations” (Revelation 2:26). Hyde, discourse, 1003.

¹³⁷ Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 78-79.

¹³⁸ These allegations were perhaps first articulated in Missouri during the 1830s. In the November 1838 hearing, witnesses testified that during the October 1838 offensive in Daviess County, Mormon soldiers took goods from the non-Mormon dwellings and “consecrated” them to the Church. For example, witness George M. Hinckle testified that “It was taught, that the time had come when the riches of the Gentiles were to be consecrated to the true Israel[.]” perhaps referring to Isaiah 60:16, Isaiah 61:6, and *Doctrine and Covenants* 42:39 (*Document*, 128, see also 113, 115).

him, but he would give him a bad name. By crying out that the dog was mad, “the people soon despatched the poor animal.”¹³⁹

Pratt concluded that Briggs was attempting to do the same thing by falsely accusing the Mormons. “Perhaps my friend [Reverend Briggs] thinks to get the Mormons killed off in the same pious and Christian-like manner. Even should he succeed in his peaceful, pious purposes, it would not be the first time that the blood of martyrs has stained our soil through the influence of such Christian benevolence.”¹⁴⁰ This exchange illustrates many of the themes introduced in this chapter. It shows that Latter-day Saint essayists were engaged in a contest with other Americans over how the past was to be understood and remembered. In Pratt’s response, the Mormons were not criminals, as Briggs contended, but rather they were being maligned, persecuted, and martyred in the same manner as those Latter-day Saints that had passed through Missouri and Illinois. Just as in those states, Pratt saw his enemy primarily as Protestant ministers, and by identifying them as such, he discursively constructed cultural distance between himself as a true disciple of Christ and American Protestants as hypocritical opponents of God’s people. Such exchanges illustrate that Latter-day Saint writers realized that how the past was remembered mattered. Although they resided on the margins of the American religious landscape, and therefore lacked access to the power structures available to their opponents, they were able to resist oppression by shaping how the past was understood, and therefore claim religious legitimacy.

¹³⁹ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 466.

¹⁴⁰ Pratt, *Autobiography*, 466. On Pratt’s debate with Briggs, see Matthew J. Grow, “‘A Providential Means of Agitating Mormonism’: Parley P. Pratt and the San Francisco Press in the 1850s,” *Journal of Mormon History* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 173-74.

The cultural distance that resulted from remembering the Missouri and Illinois persecutions in martyrological terms also influenced how Mormons saw themselves as American citizens. As children and grandchildren of the American Revolution, the first generation of Latter-day Saints saw their country as divinely-established to guarantee religious freedom. The persecutions that Mormons experienced in Missouri and Illinois were therefore, at least in a rhetorical sense, unexpected. Mormon thinkers from 1838 to 1858 probed the meaning of religious persecution within the asylum of the oppressed, eventually concluding that America as a nation had fallen and that true patriots would only find freedom in the American West. The following chapter explores how the memory of persecution shaped how Mormons formed their identities as a persecuted people in the United States.

CHAPTER III

“WE ARE NOW ROCKING IN THE CRADLE OF LIBERTY”:

IMAGINING THE MOUNTAIN WEST

AS A RELIGIOUS REFUGE

“The history of our persecutions is unparalleled in the history of past ages.”¹ So argued George A. Smith on July 24, 1852, in Utah Territory, five years after the Latter-day Saints left their homes in the Midwest and settled in the Great Basin. Smith, like most other Americans, ignored the history of oppression of Native Americans and slaves of African descent. When Smith spoke of the persecutions of past ages, he thought of the biblical prophets, the early Christians, and all true followers of Christ. What made the nineteenth-century persecutions of the Latter-day Saints “unparalleled” in Smith’s argument was that they had occurred in a free government, with laws designed to protect religious freedom. Reflecting on the fact that none of the Mormons’ tormentors had been convicted of a crime, Smith rhetorically asked his audience: “Ought we not, then, to rejoice, that there is a spot upon the footstool of God, where law is respected; where the Constitution for which our fathers bled is revered; where the people who dwell here can enjoy liberty, and worship God in three or in twenty different ways, and no man be

¹ George A. Smith, “Liberty and Persecution—Conduct of the U.S. Government, etc.,” July 24, 1852, *Journal of Discourses of Brigham Young, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, His Two Counselors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards and S. W. Richards, 1854-1886), 1:43.

permitted to plague his head about it?”² This place where law was respected, according to Smith, was Utah territory in the Rocky Mountain West.

Smith constructed this West against an image of the East as a place of lawlessness. This image was one of several that circulated in the nineteenth century. The academic study of ways that Americans have imagined the West as a region can be partly traced to Henry Nash Smith’s 1950 *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. In this path-breaking work, Smith argued that “one of the most persistent generalizations concerning American life and character is the notion that our society has been shaped by the pull of a vacant continent drawing population westward through the passes of the Alleghenies, across the Mississippi Valley, over the high plains and mountains to the Pacific Coast.”³ Other scholars have followed Smith’s lead in examining alternative images of the West that were constructed by women and other minorities in the region.⁴ Scholar of religion Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp has argued that aside from gender and ethnicity, religion is another means by which space in the West is mapped.⁵

As George A. Smith’s speech illustrates, religious violence shaped the Latter-day Saints as a people, and defined how they saw themselves, other Americans, and the states and nation where the violence against them occurred. Remembering persecution led

² Smith, “Liberty and Persecution,” 1:44.

³ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Myth and Symbol* (1950; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

⁴ See Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Blake Allmendinger, *Imagining the African American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

⁵ Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, “Eastward Ho! American Religion from the Perspective of the Pacific Rim,” in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 127-48.

Mormon authors to meditate on what Paul Harvey has called the “fundamental paradox and tension of American religious history . . . the fault line between religious freedom and democracy on the one hand, and religiously-sanctioned intolerance and repression on the other.” Harvey mentions Native American and African American writers who noted this paradox, but, as I seek to show below, Mormon authors also examined it.⁶ In this chapter I argue that memories of a violent past shaped not only Mormon images of Missouri and Illinois, where the most violent persecutions occurred, but also Latter-day Saint images of the Rocky Mountain West as a place of refuge.

The United States as a Land of Liberty

Any discussion of how Latter-day Saint essayists envisioned and mapped the Rocky Mountain West as a place of refuge should be informed by ways in which Mormons imagined the United States as a whole. Like many antebellum Americans, early Mormons constructed a narrative of world history that progressed from a time of tyranny to the divinely-inspired founding of the American republic. Parley P. Pratt described the pre-founding era in his poem “The Triumph of Truth” as a time when

Proud tyrants in their glee
Filled the world with mystery,
Satan reigned—his priests and kings
Poured with bloody offerings,
Trampled down each human right,
Blood and tears and dying groans,
Widows’ cries and orphans’ moans.⁷

⁶ Paul Harvey, review of Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, *Fides et Historia* 37 (Summer/Fall 2007), as quoted on Religion in American History, <http://usreligion.blogspot.com/2007/11/moneyball-history-some-thoughts-on-mark.html> (accessed November 27, 2007).

⁷ Parley P. Pratt, Hymn #26, in *The Millennial Hymns of Parley Parker Pratt*, Samuel Russell, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913).

Pratt also spoke of “the long reign of mystic tyranny[,]” a period when humankind could not enjoy the benefits of liberty and religious freedom.⁸

The demise of the reign of “mystic tyranny” would commence with the arrival of the “Pilgrim Fathers” in the new world. In his 1844 pamphlet “Appeal to the Inhabitants of New York,” Parley Pratt invoked the memory of his ancestors, “[t]he venerable *pilgrim fathers* who preferred the hardships, toils and dangers of a howling wilderness [*sic*] to tyranny and oppression, and who planted the first germs of an Empire of freedom in this western world.”⁹ Americans had referred to their nation as “an empire of freedom” or liberty since at least the founding of the republic and it continued to be a popular designator through the nineteenth century.¹⁰ For example, Pratt’s contemporary James Lyon conveyed a nearly identical idea, but one tinged with historical providentialism, in 1851. “Thus the very effort made by the British King, to crush civil and religious liberty, in the germ, was overruled by the providence of God, in establishing the grandest Empire of freedom the world ever saw; and which is morally certain, by its reverse influence, to

⁸ Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology: Designed as an Introduction to the First Principles of Spiritual Philosophy; Religion; Law and Government; As Delivered by the Ancients, and as Restored in this Age, for the Final Development of Universal Peace, Truth and Knowledge* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855), 76.

⁹ Parley P. Pratt, *An Appeal to the Inhabitants of the State of New York, Letter to Queen Victoria, The Fountain of Knowledge; Immortality of the Body, and Intelligence and Affection* (Nauvoo: John Taylor, 1844), 1. Pratt’s reference to the “toils and dangers of a howling wilderness” likely appealed to the image of the pre-conquest American landscape first described in Michael Wigglesworth’s 1662 poem: “A waste and howling wilderness/ Where none inhabited/ But hellish fiends, and brutish men/ That devils worshiped” (Michael Wigglesworth, “Devil’s Den,” 1662, quoted in Smith, *Virgin Land*, 4).

¹⁰ “Whilst we were offering up vows at the shrine of Liberty, and sacrificing hecatombs upon her altars; whilst we swore irreconcilable hostility to her enemies, and hurled defiance in their faces; whilst we adjured the God of Hosts to witness our resolution to live free, or die, and imprecated curses on their heads who refused to unite with us in establishing the empire of freedom” (St. George Tucker, *A Dissertation on Slavery: With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of it in the State of Virginia* [Philadelphia: Matthew Carey Pub., 1796], 8; see also George Lippard, *Washington and his Generals: or, Legends of the Revolution* [Philadelphia: G. B. Zieber & Co., 1847, 524] and Dr. Houston, “Memorial of Covenanting,” *The Original Secession Magazine*, September 1856, 358).

undermine every despots throne, crumbling every galling sceptre, and dash every tyrants crown to the dust.”¹¹ Imagining the United States as an empire of liberty allowed thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson to distinguish between monarchical empires of Europe and the freedom-loving yet powerful American empire.¹²

In keeping with this providential view, Latter-day Saint authors and orators held that God had inspired the Founding Fathers to establish the United States. For Pratt, it was “God’s decree” that “made a mighty nation free.”¹³ In an 1855 speech, Brigham Young argued that God had inspired the Founding Fathers “to throw off the shackles of the mother government” and establish a new nation. “It was the voice of the Lord inspiring all those worthy men who bore influence in those trying times, not only to go forth in battle, but to exercise wisdom in council, fortitude, courage, and endurance in the tented field, as well as subsequently to form and adopt those wise and efficient measures which secured to themselves and succeeding generations, the blessing of a free and *independent government*.”¹⁴ In addition, Joseph Smith saw the United States Constitution as a “heavenly banner[,]” designed by God to protect the rights of American citizens.¹⁵

Religious freedom was at the core of Mormon imaginings of the geographic boundaries of the American nation. In the same speech, Young employed the image of an

¹¹ James A. Lyon, “On the Missionary Aspect of African Colonization,” *The African Repository*, January 1851, 11.

¹² Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 7.

¹³ Pratt, Hymn #26.

¹⁴ Brigham Young, “The Constitution and Government of the United States—Rights and Policy of the Latter-Day Saints,” February 18, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:170. See also George A. Smith, “Celebration of the Fourth of July,” July 4, 1854, *Journal of Discourses*, 6:365.

¹⁵ Joseph Smith and others to Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839, *Times and Seasons*, June 1840, 134.

asylum to construct the United States in contradistinction to Europe. “Under its benign influence the poor, down trodden masses of the old world can find an asylum where they can enjoy the blessings of peace and freedom, no matter to what caste or religious sect they belong, or are disposed to favor, or whether they are disposed to favor any or none at all.”¹⁶ This sense of protection for religious diversity was the precise condition required for the establishment of the Mormon church in antebellum America. Young claimed that the nation had been thus established so that “there might be a place upon His footstool where sufficient liberty of conscience should exist, that His Saints might dwell in peace under the broad panoply of constitutional law and equal rights.”¹⁷ Although Americans normally portrayed the United States as an asylum when speaking in general terms about the immigration of the poor and economically oppressed from Europe,¹⁸ Young was not unique in pointing to America as an asylum for the religiously oppressed. Massachusetts minister Samuel West contended in sermons given during 1776 and 1777 “that God intended America to be ‘the asylum of liberty and true religion[.]’”¹⁹ American Baptists,

¹⁶ Young, “The Constitution and Government of the United States,” 2:171.

¹⁷ Young, “The Constitution and Government of the United States,” 2:170.

¹⁸ For example, “Gen. Cochrane referred to his early belief that America was the light-house of the world—the asylum of the oppressed. He had heard that the light had been extinguished. He demanded that America should remain the sanctuary of freedom, the asylum of the oppressed throughout the world.” (Edward McPherson, *The Political History of the United States during the Great Rebellion*, 2d ed. [Washington, D.C.: Philp and Solomons, 1865], 412) and “Foreign immigration, which in the past has added so much to the wealth, development, and resources, and increase of power to this republic, the asylum of the oppressed of all nations, should be fostered and encouraged by a liberal and just policy” (Republican Party National Platform, 1868, in *The American Year-Book and National Register for 1869*, ed. David N. Camp [Hartford: Office of the *American Journal of Education*, 1869], 265).

¹⁹ Quoted in Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 99.

perhaps due to their early marginalized status in the nation, likewise saw God's hand in the founding the country in terms of religious liberty.²⁰

For early Mormon authors the founding of the American republic as a free nation was ultimately not an end in and of itself. It was rather a preliminary step that created an atmosphere in which God could "restore" the true Gospel and church. Like other nineteenth-century Restorationist groups, Mormons believed that after the death of Christ's apostles, Christianity suffered a long period of corruption and apostasy, necessitating a divine restoration of truth. By establishing a nation based on principles of religious freedom, God prepared the way for this restoration, which Mormons believe commenced when Joseph Smith began receiving divine and angelic visitations and revelations in the 1820s and 1830s.²¹ In his 1853 *Key to the Science of Theology* Parley Pratt argued that

Of course in the land of free institutions, where such an organization could be legally developed, and claim constitutional protection, until sufficiently matured to defend itself against the convulsion, the death struggles, the agonizing throes, which precede the dissolution of the long reign of mystic tyranny: and at a time when modern freedom had been consolidated, nationalized, and its standard recognized among the nations . . . The United States of America was the favored nation raised up, with institutions adapted to the protection and free development of the necessary truths, and their practical results.²²

²⁰ For example, Baptist Richard Montague wrote after reading Isaac Backus' *History of New England* that God's plan for the Baptists in America "was not so evident because the Baptists lived in bondage to the Standing Order: 'But now liberty is gained for all the Sects and denominations of Christians by ye constitution we live under'" (quoted in William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1883: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, 2 vols. [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971], 2:742).

²¹ On Mormon and Campbellite beliefs in apostasy/restoration, see Richard T. Hughes, "Two Restoration Traditions: Mormons and Churches of Christ in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Mormon History Association's Tanner Lectures: The First Twenty Years*, ed. Dean L. May and Reid L. Neilson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 29-44.

²² Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 76.

The United States was therefore for early Mormon writers a divinely established nation, an asylum for all religions, and the place divinely prepared for the protection of the fledgling Latter-day Saint movement.

Missouri and Illinois as “land[s] of tyranny and oppression”

The Missouri persecutions of the 1830s complicated this view that the United States was the asylum of religious liberty. Mormon authors argued that the oppressions had more in common with suppression of dissent under monarchical regimes of ancient times than any other example of violence in the American nation’s short history. Parley Pratt contended that while monarchs had previously banished opponents from their realms, the expulsion “of innocent women and children from house and home and country, to wander in a land of strangers, unprotected and unprovided for, while their husbands and fathers are retained in dungeons” was “an act unknown in history, except in this single instance, in the nineteenth century, when it has actually transpired in a Republican State[.]”²³ Joseph Smith argued that “[s]uch a transaction cannot be found where Kings and Tyrants reign, or among the savages of the wilderness, or even among the ferocious beasts of the forest[.]” and that the face of the Red man, apparently the standard nineteenth-century measure of savagery, would turn pale upon hearing the details of Missouri’s crimes.²⁴

²³ Parley P. Pratt, *History of the Late Persecution Inflicted By the State of Missouri Upon the Mormons, In which Ten Thousand American Citizens were Robbed, Plundered, and Driven from the State, and Many Others Murdered, Martyred, &c. for Their Religion, and All This By Military Force, By Order of the Executive* (Detroit: Dawson and Bates, 1839), 82.

²⁴ Joseph Smith, “Extract from the Private Journal of Joseph Smith, Jr.,” *Times and Seasons*, November 1839, 9; Joseph Smith to Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839, *Times and Seasons*, May 1840, 100. See also Alanson Ripley to the Editors, *Times and Seasons*, January 1840, 37.

Latter-day Saint essayists and orators were quick to contrast the criminal nature of their opponents with Mormon commitment to republican rights. Central to this self-portrayal was the insistence that the Mormons had broken no laws or committed any deed that would have justified the persecutions.²⁵ Joseph Smith explained to Mormon benefactor Isaac Galland that the Latter-day Saints had only sought to live in peace with their neighbors in Missouri and that the Mormons had broken no laws.²⁶ Writing from prison Smith dismissed the charges against him and other Mormon leaders (treason, murder, arson, larceny, among others) as the result of false accusations and the lies of false brethren.²⁷ After his arrest, Smith asked the reason for his detention. “I inquired of him [a militiaman/persecutor] the cause why I was thus treated, I told him I was not sensible of having done any thing worthy of such treatment; that I had always been a supporter of the constitution and of Democracy. His answer was ‘I know it, and that is the reason why I want to kill you or have you killed.’”²⁸ Referring to the persecutions in both Missouri and Illinois, Brigham Young argued in 1855 that the Mormons had broken no laws, but that it was their opponents that had trampled on the Constitution.²⁹

Aside from representing themselves as innocent of any crime, Latter-day Saint writers also portrayed themselves as the epitome of republican industry. In Kenneth Winn’s words, the Mormons “celebrated the industrious worker who devoted his blessed

²⁵ On the Mormons’ “myth of innocence,” see John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, eds., *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), 6.

²⁶ Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, *Times and Seasons*, February 1840, 52, 53.

²⁷ Joseph Smith to the Church in Caldwell County, Missouri, 16 December 1838, *Times and Seasons*, April 1840, 82-86.

²⁸ Smith, “Extract,” 6-7.

²⁹ Young, “The Constitution and Government of the United States,” 2:171.

freedom to creating a civilization of comfortable homes, productive farms, and benevolent government.”³⁰ For example, Parley Pratt wrote in his autobiography that after the Mormons settled in northwestern Missouri, “they exercised the utmost industry and enterprise, and these wild regions soon presented a more flourishing aspect than the oldest counties of the state.”³¹ One non-Mormon visiting Missouri in 1838 was inclined to agree, and even argued that “any body of people, accustomed only to the manners and sentiments of the Free States, and rather, pacific and yielding in their disposition, however industrious, thrifty and intelligent—would, if they attempted a settlement on choice lands in Missouri, fare, as have the Mormons.”³² Latter-day Saint essayists therefore situated themselves in their narratives as true republicans, heirs to the traditions of their fathers.

It was crucial for Mormon authors to portray themselves as children of the Revolution. The history of the persecutions printed in the *Times and Seasons* argued that among the persecuted Latter-day Saints were Revolutionary War veterans.³³ The *Times and Seasons* history described one of the victims of the Haun’s Mill massacre, Thomas McBride, as “a soldier and Patriot of the revolution[.]” a curious designator considering

³⁰ Kenneth H. Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830-1844* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 146.

³¹ Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt, One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Embracing his Life, Ministry, and Travels, with Extracts, in Prose and Verse, from his Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. Parley P. Pratt, Jr. (New York: Russell Brothers, 1874), 112. See also Robinson and Smith, “Address,” *Times and Seasons*, November 1839, 2 and “A History, of the Persecution, of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter Day Saints in Missouri” *Times and Seasons*, March 1840, 65-66.

³² “Missouri and the Mormons: Letter from a gentlemen at the West to his friend in Boston,” *Village Record* (West Chester, PA), May 7, 1839. I am indebted to Stephen J. Fleming for this reference.

³³ “A History, of the Persecution, of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter Day Saints in Missouri,” *Times and Seasons*, January 1840, 36.

that McBride was born in 1776.³⁴ But having a Revolutionary War hero die at the hands of the Missourians would certainly bolster Mormon claims that they were the true Americans being slaughtered by the corrupt Missourians. Joseph Smith wrote in an 1844 pamphlet that “[f]rom the old ‘French War’ to the final consummation of American Independence, my fathers, heart to heart, and shoulder to shoulder, with the noble fathers of our liberty, fought and bled[,]” thereby claiming a revolutionary pedigree.³⁵

Mormon essayists skillfully used this rhetorical technique to explain Latter-day Saint militia activities in Missouri. They did not deny arming themselves, but cast this activity in terms of self-defense against mobs. In addition, these authors claimed that sympathetic Missouri militia officers had authorized the Mormon Caldwell County militia to carry out expeditions as a means to combat anti-Mormon vigilantes.³⁶ Parley Pratt described Latter-day Saint military movements as being within the venerated American revolutionary tradition of fighting against tyranny and oppression. “But if self-defence and opposition to tyranny and oppression amounts to treason, then I for one, am a traitor with every feeling of my heart Mark the saying, I am opposed to the unlawful proceedings of the highest authorities of Missouri, and would glory in laying down my life in opposing such abominations.”³⁷ Pratt himself though was only willing to

³⁴ “A History, of the Persecution, of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter Day Saints in Missouri,” *Times and Seasons*, August 1840, 149. On McBride’s biography, see Beth Shumway Moore, *Bones in the Well: The Haun’s Mill Massacre, 1838: A Documentary History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 117.

³⁵ Joseph Smith, “An Appeal to the Freemen of the State of Vermont, The ‘Brave Green Mountain Boys,’ and Honest Men,” in *The Voice of Truth, Containing the Public Writings, Portrait, and Last Sermon of President Joseph Smith* (Nauvoo: John Taylor, 1845), 15. See also Pratt, “An Appeal to the Inhabitants of New York,” 1-2.

³⁶ Smith, “Extract,” 5; Parley P. Pratt, “Pratt’s Defence,” *Times and Seasons*, January 1840, 48.

³⁷ Pratt, *History*, 54. See also Parley P. Pratt, “The Mormon Prisoners,” Parley P. Pratt Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

go so far in his revolutionary rhetoric, as he was also quick to point to times when Latter-day Saints submitted to state-sanctioned militia rather than be perceived as violating law and order.³⁸

Self-defense was one thing; preemptive strikes and seizing property another. Latter-day Saint authors rarely acknowledged in published accounts that Mormons had indeed stolen property and burned the homes of their enemies during military engagements during the late summer of 1838. Parley Pratt in his 1839 history provided one of the only justifications of these actions, a justification that he later omitted from his autobiography: “It is said that some of our troops, exasperated to the highest degree, retaliated in some instances by plundering and burning houses, and bringing the spoil to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, whose provisions and clothing had been robbed from them; and upon the whole, I am rather inclined to believe it is the case; for human nature cannot endure all things.”³⁹ Pratt’s explanation sought to rationalize criminal activities by defining them as the result of “human nature” and assigning charity as motivation. Most Mormon authors during the 1840s and 1850s were inclined to forget these preemptive actions, preferring to define them as purely self-defense.⁴⁰

Anti-Mormons subtly contested Mormon identifications as American citizens. When the Missouri Legislature printed documents in 1841 relating to the conflict, it described the outbreak of violence as “the recent difficulties between the people called

³⁸ Parley P. Pratt and others, “‘The Mormons’, So Called,” Extra, *The Evening and the Morning Star*, February 1834; Pratt, *History*, 36; Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 86.

³⁹ Pratt, *History*, 32-33.

⁴⁰ Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 390.

Mormons, and a portion of the people of this State.”⁴¹ Whatever the intent of this type of language, Parley Pratt interpreted it as creating two categories that essentially set the Mormons apart as “other” and implicitly excluded them from the category of “citizen.” “This murderous gang when assembled and painted like Indian warriors, and when openly committing murder, robbery, and house burning, were denominated citizens, white people, etc., and in most of the papers of the State, while our society who stood firm in the cause of liberty and law, were denominated ‘Mormons,’ in contradistinction to the appellation of ‘citizens,’ ‘whites,’ &c, as if we had been some savage tribe, or some colored race of foreigners.”⁴² Pratt therefore viewed this construction as robbing the Mormons of not only their whiteness but also their Americanness.⁴³

Mormon authors challenged these representations by highlighting underlying ironies. In Pratt’s view, the vigilantes, dressed as non-white and non-citizen Indians, were guilty of committing murder, robbery, and house burning, while the Saints “stood firm in the cause of liberty and law.” Pratt was not the only Latter-day Saint to note the tendency of the vigilantes to dress as Indians, as well as describe vigilante actions with adjectives that played on American fears of Indian attacks and captivity. The author of the *Times*

⁴¹ *Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &C. in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons; and the Evidence Given Before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the State of Missouri, At the Court-House in Richmond, In a Criminal Court of Inquiry, Begun November 12, 1838, On the Trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and Others, for High Treason and Other Crimes Against the State* (Fayette, Missouri: Boon’s Lick Democrat, 1841), 2.

⁴² Pratt, *History*, 28.

⁴³ The relationship between whiteness and minorities has received considerable attention in recent decades. David R. Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991; rev. ed., London: Verso, 1999) is generally seen as a seminal work in whiteness studies. Whiteness has been applied to studies of Irish, Italians, Mexicans, among other minorities (see Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* [New York: Routledge, 1995]; Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003]; Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997]).

and Seasons' history of the persecutions wrote that "[m]obs, well lined with whiskey, as these were, looking and acting worse than savages, were well calculated to frighten women and children[.]"⁴⁴ One Mormon author, identified simply as J. L., wrote to a non-Mormon newspaper that the "the plan of the *white savages* of Missouri" functioned as the only authority that anti-Mormons had "to wage your war upon the Mormons[.]"⁴⁵ With the Missourians dressing like Indians and committing violence, it was not difficult for Mormon authors like Pratt to conflate Indian bodies with vigilante bodies and argue that "the neighboring tribes of Indians in time of war, let loose upon women and children, could not have appeared more hideous and terrific, than did the company of ruffians."⁴⁶

Aside from representing the vigilantes as "savage" Native Americans, Mormon authors also portrayed themselves as industrious republicans by constructing the vigilantes as lazy and motivated by greed. Sidney Rigdon, in his narrative history of the persecutions, argued that

The saints being once more settled; they commenced improving the country, which was so great a contrast to the general idleness and lazy habits of the Missourians. . . This soon began to excite the jealousies of the surrounding Counties; for nothing can so much excite the jealousy of that people, nor awaken their indignation so much, as to have an intelligent, industrious, and enterprising people, settle any where in the State, where they live It was the property of the saints, they wanted, and what they were determined to have . . . they might as well drive them off and take their property as not; for they could not help themselves.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ "A History," *Times and Seasons*, January 1840, 36.

⁴⁵ J. L., to the Editors of the *Ledger*, reprinted in *Times and Seasons*, October 1, 1841, 559.

⁴⁶ Pratt and others, "'Mormons,' So Called[.]"

⁴⁷ Sidney Rigdon, *An Appeal to the American People: Being An Account of the Persecutions of the Church of Latter Day Saints; and of the Barbarities Inflicted on them by the Inhabitants of the State of Missouri* (Cincinnati: Glezen and Shephard, 1840), 16, 22.

Referring to the vigilantes as the “land pirates of the upper Missouri” was not uncommon in Latter-day Saint narratives.⁴⁸ In his 1839 history, Parley Pratt consistently portrayed the Mormons as “citizens” while designating the vigilantes as “Robbers,” a possible use of the Book of Mormon image of the Gadianton Robbers, which perhaps denied anti-Mormons their identity as citizens and Americans.⁴⁹ Pratt likewise argued that Mormon dissenters were “far more false, hardened and blood-thirsty” than those that remained in the faith, and that a desire for power and gain provided their motivation for leaving the church.⁵⁰

Although Mormon authors dedicated a great deal more ink to describe the persecutions in Missouri, the few narratives dedicated to the Illinois persecutions also describe the anti-Mormon vigilantes in Illinois as “land pirates” that were moved primarily by greed to expel the Latter-day Saints.⁵¹ An unidentified author of an editorial in the *Times and Seasons* entitled “Great Persecution of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Illinois” described the Latter-day Saints as just beginning to “realize the abundance of one of the most fruitful seasons” when the anti-Mormon vigilantes began to burn and pillage Latter-day Saint dwellings.⁵² Parley Pratt in his *Key to the Science of Theology* portrayed Illinois anti-Mormons as continuing the goals of their

⁴⁸ Ripley to the Editors, 36-37. See also “Prospectus for the Second Volume of the *Times & Seasons*,” *Times and Seasons*, October 1840, 192.

⁴⁹ Pratt, *History*, 30. See also P.P. Pratt to Sidney Rigdon, January 8, 1841, *Times and Seasons*, April 1, 1841, 365. On the Gadianton Robbers in early Mormon discourse, see W. Paul Reeve, “‘As Ugly as Evil’ and ‘As Wicked as Hell’: Gadianton Robbers and the Legend Process among the Mormons,” *Journal of Mormon History* 27 (Fall 2001): 125-49.

⁵⁰ Pratt, *History*, 37.

⁵¹ See “Great Persecution of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Illinois,” *Times and Seasons*, November 1, 1845, 1017 and Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 85.

⁵² “Great Persecution,” 1017.

allies in Missouri. “Several counties of Illinois combined with the former enemies, who had robbed and destroyed the Saints in Missouri, and, calling public meetings, passed resolutions to destroy the city of Nauvoo, and to force the Saints, once more, to abandon their homes and farms to the possession of the land pirates. They also entered into a covenant, to take the life of the young Joseph.”⁵³ These persecutions, including the 1844 murder of Joseph Smith, combined to make Illinois a place of tyranny in Mormon memory.

But during the 1840s it was Missouri that held primacy for producers of Latter-day Saint memory as a place of suffering and corruption. Joseph Smith described Missouri as “that land of tyranny and oppression[.]”⁵⁴ Eliza R. Snow also described the decline of freedom and the rule of law in the state.

But in Missouri, Freedom’s cause
Is ting’d with purple woe!
And *there* our country’s sacred laws
Have been prostrated low
And *there* the widow’s flowing tear—
The parent a sympathy,
And orphan’s moan have strew’d the bier
Of shrouded Liberty!⁵⁵

In his poem “O Missouri, How Art Thou Fallen!” Parley Pratt lauded the valiance of the revolutionary generation and then accused Missouri of trampling on “the banner of

⁵³ Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 85. See also p. 87.

⁵⁴ Smith, “Extract,” 7.

⁵⁵ Eliza R. Snow, “Response—To Shawnee Bard,” *Times and Seasons*, October 1, 1841, 581-82.

freedom[.]” and decried the great fall of the “queen of the west[.]” inflicted with incurable wounds.⁵⁶

Although there is evidence that some Latter-day Saints were able to remain in Missouri following the 1839 removal, rhetorically Mormon authors and orators portrayed the state as being Mormon-less.⁵⁷ When travelling during the early 1840s, Parley Pratt, “having a dislike to the out-laws who govern Missouri[.]” bypassed the state altogether when he could and when he could not avoid the state he went incognito.⁵⁸ While the Latter-day Saints camped at Winter Quarters during the mid-1840s, Mary Richards recorded Wilford Woodruff saying that when the “servants of God” returned for the dead during the Resurrection, “he did not know who would b to the truble to go there [Missouri] and hunt them [the dead] up for the[y] [the servants] would never once think that a Saint of God would be buried [there].”⁵⁹ In 1853, Brigham Young berated those that “lived in peace with those who sought to kill us[.]” referring to Latter-day Saints who remained in Missouri after the main body of the church left the state. Young believed that “there was not a man who would say that Joseph Smith was a Prophet, could stay there;

⁵⁶ Parley P. Pratt, “O, Missouri, How Art Thou Fallen!” in Parley P. Pratt, *The Millennium and Other Poems: To Which is Annexed A Treatise on the Regeneration and Eternal Duration of Matter* (New York: W. Molineux, 1840), 80-81.

⁵⁷ See for example the obituary of Mrs. Amelia Phearson, who is described as dying firm in the faith in Caldwell County in 1841 (Obituary of Mrs. Amelia Phearson, *Times and Seasons*, October 1, 1841, 581). Also, during the trek from Illinois to the Great Basin, Latter-day Saints worked in Missouri to earn money for the exodus (Richard E. Bennett, “‘We had everything to procure from Missouri’: The Missouri Lifeline to the Mormon Exodus, 1846-1850,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 7, no. 1-2 [Spring/ Fall 2006]: 91-106).

⁵⁸ Parley P. Pratt to Dear Brethren, March 19, 1843, *Times and Seasons*, April 15, 1843, 163; Pratt, *Autobiography*, 397.

⁵⁹ Maurine Carr Ward, ed., *Winter Quarters: The 1846-1848 Life Writings of Mary Haskin Parker Richards* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), 105-106. I am indebted to Jonathan Stapley for the reference.

they had all to leave the State” and therefore doubted the sincerity of those that later came to Utah territory from Missouri claiming to be “first-rate Latter-day Saints.”⁶⁰ Missouri was therefore remembered by many as a place where faithful Mormons could not live in peace and was therefore a stain on the America that was supposed to be a land of liberty.

The United States as a Place of Tyranny

Given their views of America as a refuge for religiously diversity, early Mormon essayists decried what they saw as an abandonment of the founding ideals of the nation. Parley Pratt in his 1839 history asked if he was really describing the history of a religious persecution “in the midst of the most renowned Republic” on the earth. “Alas! It is too true. Would to God it were a dream. Would to God it were a novel, a romance, that had no existence, save in the wild regions of fancy These and ten thousand other things, cause me to think that my almost incredible narrative is no fiction but an awful reality. A fact more truly distressing than my feeble pen can find words to set forth”⁶¹ Joseph Smith explored the tension between being living in a nation that guaranteed religious freedom and allowed religiously-motivated persecution to occur by stating that “in this land, a mob, regardless of those laws, for which so much blood had been spilled, dead to every feeling of virtue and patriotism, which animated the bosom of freemen; fell upon a people whose religious faith was different from their own.”⁶² Place was important to Mormon authors, but so was time. Pratt for example emphasized that the persecutions had occurred “in the broad light of the nineteenth century[,]” implying that persecution

⁶⁰ Brigham Young, “The Gospel—Growing in Knowledge—The Lord's Supper—Blessings of Faithfulness—Utility of Persecution—Creation of Adam—Experience,” October 23, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:6.

⁶¹ Pratt, *History*, 69.

⁶² Smith, “Extract,” 9.

should have been a thing of the unenlightened past.⁶³ As Mormon writers constructed their identities as citizens of a divinely-inspired republic founded on religious toleration, they were required to confront the reality that they had been persecuted in that free republic.

Latter-day Saint poets and authors sought to influence the American public rhetorically by playing on anxieties that the republican experiment had failed. The oppressions that marked the religious history of Europe under tyranny and monarchical forms of government were now manifesting themselves much closer to home. Eliza R. Snow, in her poem describing the Haun's Mill massacre, concluded that

In a land that freemen call their home,
Far from the influence of papal Rome;
Yes, in a "mild and tolerating age"
The saints have fall'n beneath the barb'rous rage."⁶⁴

This rhetorical device allowed Latter-day Saint writers to ask what it meant for American national identity that the persecutions occurred here rather than in Europe, which, according to Parley Pratt, was still struggling under the weight of "Monarchal Tyranny and oppression."⁶⁵ The oppressed of the world looked to the United States for inspiration and protection, while "the daughters of monarchy" were waiting for any indication that "the ensign to the nations" would be furled and surrendered.⁶⁶ Pratt even asked the Founders

⁶³ Pratt, *History*, 69; Pratt, *Autobiography*, 235.

⁶⁴ Eliza R. Snow, "The Slaughter on Shoal Creek, Caldwell County, Missouri," *Times and Seasons*, December 1839, 32.

⁶⁵ Parley P. Pratt to Mary Ann Pratt, April 12, 1839, Parley P. Pratt Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁶⁶ Pratt, *History*, 69; Pratt, "An Appeal to the Freemen," 3.

rhetorically, if “it [was] for this, you resisted British oppression and invasion; burst your chains and declared yourselves free?”⁶⁷

Similar statements filled the pages of the hundreds of redress petitions and narratives written by Latter-day Saints during the months and years following the 1839 expulsion from Missouri.⁶⁸ Parley P. Pratt believed that such writings would bring attention to the plight of the Latter-day Saints and prove to be a potent weapon against their Missouri enemies. “The fact is, a goose-quill in our fingers was more terror to the guilty authorities of Missouri, than the sling-stone of the stripling son of Jesse, or the jaw bone in the hands of the mighty Nazarene, were to the sons of Anack, or the hosts of Philistia. A smooth stone from the brook, hurled by a shepherd boy, decided the fortune of war between two mighty empires.”⁶⁹ Pratt contended that Missouri officials sought to stop him while imprisoned during 1838-1839 from writing on the persecutions and sending his work to the outside world. “Yet here it comes, in blazing torrents, bursting forth like a flame which had been for a moment smothered under the weight of its own fuel Would the people of Missouri smother the truth under a bushel—hush the impulse of freedom in the bosoms of Americans—silence the voice of Liberty in the free born sons of Columbia?”⁷⁰ Pratt argued that if his writings could see the light of day the American people would condemn the illegal proceedings of the Missourians.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Pratt, “An Appeal to the Freeman,” 2.

⁶⁸ Clark V. Johnson, ed., *Mormon Redress Petitions: Documents from the Missouri Conflict, 1833-1838* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1992).

⁶⁹ Pratt, *History*, iii-iv.

⁷⁰ Pratt, *History*, iii-iv.

⁷¹ Parley P. Pratt, letter, 20 March 1839, Parley P. Pratt Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Mormon authors aimed the redress effort directly at American republican sensibilities. They argued that if Americans did not come to the aid of the Latter-day Saints that the republic would lose its glory. Ebenezer Robinson and Don Carlos Smith, the founding editors of the *Times and Seasons*, wrote that to “[d]eprive her citizens of this heavenly boon, which is so freely granted to all, by the Author of our existence, and all her hopes of future prosperity are blasted forever; she can stand no longer, as a free Republican Government, but must fall to rise no more.”⁷² Joseph Smith likewise argued that denying the Latter-day Saints their rights would strike a deadly blow to the nation’s republican institutions.⁷³ Parley Pratt invited the readers of his *History* to

Awake, O Americans—Arise, O sons and daughters of freedom, restore a persecuted and injured people to their rights as citizens of a free Republic. Down with tyranny and oppression, and rescue your liberties from the brink of ruin. Redeem your much injured country from the awful stain upon its honor; and let the cries of helpless orphans and the tears of the sorrowing widow cease to ascend up before the Lord for vengeance upon the heads of those who have slain, plundered, imprisoned and driven the Saints. And let the news go forth to the wondering and astonished nations, that Columbia still is free. . . .⁷⁴

Americans could therefore redeem the nation’s tarnished self-image by helping the Latter-day Saints regain their rights.

But the early 1840s did not witness the massive outpouring of sympathy that the Mormons hoped for. The United States Congress declined to intervene and restore the Latter-day Saints to their lands in Missouri. The editors of the *Times and Seasons* responded to this news by exclaiming, “Oh Liberty! whether hast thou fled? Oh Patriotism! whether hast thou gone? surely the balances are fallen from the hands of

⁷² Robinson and Smith, “Address,” 2.

⁷³ Smith, “Extract,” 9.

⁷⁴ Pratt, *History*, 69.

Justice; the wreath no longer encircles the head of Liberty; and Republicanism has bowed at the shrine of despotism and tyranny.”⁷⁵ By 1844, many Latter-day Saints began to despair that the nation would recover its republican spirit. An editorial in *The Prophet* pointed not only to the corruption that had caused the Mormons’ persecutions, but also to that which allowed for the oppression of Catholics, abolitionists, and African Americans.⁷⁶ This, combined with the murder of Joseph Smith in 1844, led the Latter-day Saints to believe that the United States was no longer the asylum of the oppressed.⁷⁷

In his 1844 pamphlet “The Angel of the Prairies,” Parley Pratt gave a fictionalized account of the future downfall of the United States. The account illustrated Pratt’s view that while the Constitution was inspired, the citizens of the republic could corrupt and even destroy the American system of government. “Thus the spirit of freedom had withdrawn from the mass and they were abandoned, like king Saul of old, to destruction. Divisions and contentions arose, and multiplied to that degree that they soon destroyed each other, deluged the country in blood, and thus ended the confederation under the title of E Pluribus Unum.”⁷⁸ Despite the fall of America, Pratt believed that the spirit of liberty and the inspiration of the Constitution would soon be transferred to the American West as a region. In this way, as historian Kenneth Winn has argued, the spirit of liberty could be

⁷⁵ “Important from Washington,” *Times and Seasons*, March 1840, 74.

⁷⁶ *The Prophet*, June 8, 1844, quoted in Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, 200.

⁷⁷ See “Another Mormon Expose,” *Times and Seasons*, January 15, 1845, 777; E. M. Webb to the Editor, *Times and Seasons*, May 1, 1845, 894-95.

⁷⁸ Parley P. Pratt, “Angel of the Prairies: A Dream of the Future” (Salt Lake City: A. Pratt, 1880), 17.

carried by the Mormons to the West at the same time that they decried the fall of the nation of their birth.⁷⁹

The West as a Place of Refuge

Mormons began yearning for a place of refuge as early as the late 1830s after they were expelled from Missouri. For a time during the early 1840s, Latter-day Saints found this refuge in the state of Illinois. This desired refuge was as much a product of Latter-day Saint discourse and image-making as it was a literal haven, as seeing Illinois as a refuge allowed Mormons to attack Missouri by portraying the state as everything that Illinois was not. For example, Parley Pratt's poem "O, Missouri, How Art Thou Fallen!" employed a paean of Illinois as a means to portray Missouri as a land of tyranny.

Let us fly, let us fly to the land where the light
Of Liberty's stars still illumine each spot,
Where the cottager's smile for ever is bright,
And the chains of a tyrant encircle us not.
In the fair Illinois the eagle's bold wing
Is stretched o'er a people determined and free,
And the shouts of her sons in melody ring
O'er her bower covered groves and fine prairie.⁸⁰

Mormon writers further used this technique to represent Illinoisans in contradistinction to Missourians. Joseph Smith described his escape from Missouri as stemming from a desire to "take our stand among a people in whose bosoms dwell those feelings of republicanism and liberty which gave rise to our nation[.]" qualities that Smith attested Missourians did not possess.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, 187-93.

⁸⁰ Pratt, "O, Missouri, How Art Thou Fallen!" in Pratt, *The Millennium*, 81-82.

⁸¹ Smith, "Extract," 7. See also Henry G. Sherwood to the Editors, *Times and Seasons*, February 1840, 57.

Although Nauvoo served for a time as this refuge, the murder of Joseph Smith and continuing opposition convinced Mormon leaders that the perceived isolation of the Rocky Mountain West would be the best option for future security.⁸² In 1845 Parley Pratt expressed this desire to leave the United States if conditions did not improve.

I do exceedingly long for the time to come either we can get out from under such a bondage and out of a country and government where we cannot enjoy the smallest degree of protection from the laws and where we must at the same time be oppressed by them. Is there no deliverance? Must we never be free? Must we never enjoy peace, quite [*sic*] and our political rights in common with other men? Let us . . . either seek the Lord for power to break our yoke [*sic*], and restore the supremacy of the laws; or else entreat him to lead us out of Egypt into some Canaan, some land of rest where we can enjoy his laws and have time and peace enough to “swallow down our spittle.”⁸³

Anti-Mormons and government officials presented the Latter-day Saints with the same choice that was offered to Native Americans—either assimilate into mainstream society or move beyond the Mississippi to areas not occupied by whites.⁸⁴ Most Mormons chose the latter option.⁸⁵ Heber C. Kimball concluded in 1845 that “[w]e are not accounted as white people, and we don't want to live among them [that is, other Anglo Americans]. I had rather live with the buffalo in the wilderness; and I mean to go if the Lord will let me,

⁸² See Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 321-40, 508-50 and Lewis Clark Christian, “A Study of Mormon Foreknowledge of the Far West Prior to the Exodus (1830-February 1846),” M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972.

⁸³ Parley P. Pratt to Elias Smith, February 15, 1845, Parley P. Pratt Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁸⁴ James P. Ronda, “‘We Have a Country’: Race, Geography, and the Invention of Indian Territory,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 739-55. See also *Circular to the Whole Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, in *Times and Seasons*, November 1, 1845, 1018.

⁸⁵ For descriptions of Mormon groups that did not go west, see Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer, eds., *Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism* (Independence: John Whitmer Books, 2007).

and spare my life.”⁸⁶ If only animals lived in the wilderness, Kimball at least was willing to join them rather than remain in civilization.

Although Kimball articulated the divide he and many Latter-day Saints felt between themselves and their fellow citizens in racial terms, in most cases Mormons used religious images to define the United States and its inhabitants. In the months leading to the departure of the Latter-day Saints from Nauvoo, editorials appeared in the *Times and Seasons* that described the West as a place “beyond the power of Christianity.”⁸⁷ Orson Pratt bid farewell to his friends by describing the West as he imagined it:

If our heavenly father will preserve us, and deliver us out of the hands of the blood-thirsty Christians of these United States, and not suffer any more of us to be martyred to gratify their holy piety, I for one shall be very thankful. Perhaps we may have to suffer much in the land of our exile, but our sufferings will be from another cause—there will be no Christian banditti to afflict us all the day long—no pious priests to murder us by scores . . . Liberty in a solitary place, and in a desert, is far more preferable than martyrdom in these pious states.⁸⁸

For Mormons such as Pratt, the memory of their sufferings at the hands of Protestants in the United States therefore played a crucial role in how they envisioned the West as an isolated region.

The Mormons commenced their migration to the Great Basin in early 1846.⁸⁹ Like other Americans, Mormons saw in the West an empty land, waiting to be cultivated by civilization.⁹⁰ But the West that Latter-day Saints envisioned was not the agrarian Garden of the World that drew settlers during the 1830s and 1840s to Texas, Oregon, and

⁸⁶ Heber C. Kimball, discourse, October 7, 1845, *Times and Seasons*, November 1, 1845, 1012.

⁸⁷ *Times and Seasons*, February 1, 1846, 1114. See also “Great Persecution,” 1017.

⁸⁸ “Farewell Message of Orson Pratt,” *Times and Seasons*, December 1, 1845, 1042.

⁸⁹ See Richard E. Bennett, *This is the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846-1848* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1997).

⁹⁰ See Smith, *Virgin Land*.

California.⁹¹ Rather, Mormons wanted territory that no one else desired, and the mountains and deserts of the Great Basin fit that description perfectly. In 1855, for example, Brigham Young explained that when the Latter-day Saints entered the Salt Lake Valley

there was nothing, either in soil, climate, or productions, to attract the notice of even the adventurous and enterprising; in a country which offered no inducements worthy of consideration to any people but us. And why to us as a people? Because here, far distant from any white settlements, upon a piece of earth not valuable for its facilities either for cultivation, navigation, or commerce, where the whole face of the country presented the most barren and forbidding aspect, we considered we might live and enjoy our religion unmolested, and be free from the meddlesome interference of any person. If our principles and religion were obnoxious to any, they were relieved from our presence, unless they chose to follow us.⁹²

In 1853 Parley Pratt described the Mormon decision to go to the West as stemming from a desire “to seek peace for the Saints amid the far-off and almost unexplored deserts and mountains of the interior.”⁹³ Young and Pratt’s descriptions followed published accounts of the Rocky Mountains and the Great Basin then available in the East, which portrayed the region as a desert, barren, desolate, and inhospitable.⁹⁴ But it was in this place “where fortified by mountain fortresses, and thousands of miles of desert, uninhabited save by

⁹¹ On the settlement of these territories, see Richard White, “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*”: *A New History of the American West* (1991; repr., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 61-84.

⁹² Brigham Young, “The Constitution and Government of the United States,” 2:177.

⁹³ Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 90.

⁹⁴ Anne Farrar Hyde, *An American Vision: Far West Landscapes and National Culture, 1820-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 24-27. But in reality the Salt Lake Valley was not as dreary as the Mormons described it. Instead, it contained sufficiently fertile land and water to sustain the Latter-day Saint population (see Jared Farmer, *On Zion’s Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008], 105-40), suggesting that the Mormons were adept at using the image of the desert to their advantage. See also Richard H. Jackson, “Righteousness and Environmental Change: The Mormons and the Environment,” in *Essays on the American West, 1973-1974*, ed. Thomas G. Alexander, Charles Redd Monographs in Western History, No. 5 (Provo: BYU Press, 1975), 21-42.

wild tribes of Indians, they [the Mormons] live in peace.”⁹⁵ It was thus the region’s lack of white people that drew the Mormons to the Rocky Mountain West.

During the decade following the move west, Latter-day Saints continued to describe their new mountain home in terms of its isolation and its lack of persecution and mobs.⁹⁶ Such was the power of this image of the West as isolated and far from other white settlements that Ezra T. Benson recalled in 1853 that as soon as the Latter-day Saints crossed the Mississippi in 1847, “the cloud began to disperse, and the light in the west began to break forth,” as the mobs dispersed and let the Mormons pass unmolested.⁹⁷ In addition, the memory of persecution led Brigham Young to also believe that isolation would allow the Mormons to fill up the region as a means to prevent future persecutions, since in all places the Latter-day Saints would form a majority. This vision created a Mormon corridor of settlements from Idaho to California but ultimately did not result in complete Mormon control of the region.⁹⁸

This isolation however was not absolute, as Mormons essayists and orators acknowledged that they shared the region with “wild tribes of Indians.” Mormons had

⁹⁵ Parley P. Pratt, “Proclamation Extraordinary,” in *Writings of Parley Parker Pratt: One of the First Missionaries and a Member of the First Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. Parker Pratt Robison (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1952), 158. See also Young, “The Constitution and Government of the United States,” 2:177.

⁹⁶ See Parley P. Pratt, “Persecutions of the Church—Apostates—Freedom—Self-Defence,” March 27, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:85.

⁹⁷ Ezra Taft Benson, “Necessity of Opposition,” February 16, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:350-51.

⁹⁸ See Eugene E. Campbell, *Establishing Zion: The Mormon Church in the American West, 1847-1869* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 73-92. As Paul Reeve has shown, a hierarchy of Americanness emerged during the 1860s that privileged mining interests, in which the Mormons were not actively involved, over the interests of Mormons and Paiutes in southern Utah. This resulted in the federal government reorganizing territorial boundaries to favor Nevadans rather than the Mormons of Utah territory (W. Paul Reeve, *Making Space on the Western Frontier: Mormons, Miners, and Southern Paiutes* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006]).

been fascinated with Native Americans since the publication of *The Book of Mormon* in 1830. The work portrayed the Native Americans as Israelites and that they were destined to join with the Mormons and be instruments in God's hands during in the apocalyptic destruction of the United States. Ronald Walker, a leading historian of Mormon-Native American relations, suggests that from the early 1830s Joseph Smith envisioned his missionaries going among the natives in the West, teaching them the Gospel, and preparing them for the Apocalypse. Walker suggests that the persecutions in Missouri and Illinois prompted Brigham Young to revise this plan by sending not only missionaries to Indian Country in the West, but also to settle the entire Mormon people, including women and children, in the Great Basin.⁹⁹ Some Latter-day Saints believed that the Lamanites, as the Mormons at times called the Native Americans, were destined to become the "Battleaxe of the Lord" and be instruments of vengeance upon the Saints' enemies during the coming Apocalypse.¹⁰⁰

As Anne Hyde has argued, individuals in the nineteenth century that went to the West would fit their descriptions of the landscape within preconceived frameworks.¹⁰¹ In other words, these individuals would come to the region already prepared or "programmed" with expectations of what they would see, and they would often use the

⁹⁹ "These promises [i.e., that the Indians would convert to Mormonism] did not necessarily mean that Zion's center place would be moved to the Rocky Mountains. As Orson Pratt later explained, the early Church leaders understood that 'revolutions' regarding the Lamanites would take place. But these could be achieved by traveling missionaries, while their families remained in the eastern United States among the 'strongholds of the gentiles.'" (Ronald W. Walker, "Seeking the 'Remnant': The Native American During the Joseph Smith Period," *The Journal of Mormon History* 19, no. 1 [Spring 1993]: 21, quoting Remarks, 1 August 1847, in George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Diaries of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991, 372).

¹⁰⁰ See Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (2002; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 23-37.

¹⁰¹ See Hyde, *An American Vision*.

same language to describe the land that they had used previous to their arrival. Likewise, Mormon authors viewed their new settlements in the Rocky Mountains through frameworks that were developed previously. This manifested itself most readily in the application of images to the West that had previously been used to describe the East.

For example, Latter-day Saint authors and orators compared their migration and settlement in the Rocky Mountain West to that of the Pilgrims. Mormon leader George A. Smith argued in an 1854 speech that

like the pilgrim fathers who first landed upon Plymouth Rock, we are here pilgrims, and exiles from *liberty*; and instead of being driven into the wilderness to perish, as our enemies had designed, we find ourselves in the middle of the floor, or on the top of the heap. Right in the country that scientific men and other travellers had declared worthless, we are becoming rich in the comforts and blessings of life, we are now rocking in the cradle of liberty, in which we are daily growing.¹⁰²

Referring to the Great Basin as a “cradle of liberty” was likely deliberate on Smith’s part, since the appellation was a common designator for the city of Boston during the early years of the Republic.¹⁰³ Likewise, Parley P. Pratt referred to the Great Basin as both an “Ensign to the Nations” and an “Empire of Liberty,” terms that he had in earlier writings used to describe the American Republic.¹⁰⁴

Latter-day Saint writers and orators went so far as to say that the blessings of heaven as well as the spirit of the Constitution had left America behind and gone to the

¹⁰² George A. Smith, “Reminiscences of the Jackson County Mob, the Evacuation of Nauvoo, and the Settlement of Great Salt Lake City,” July 24, 1854, *Journal of Discourses* 2:24.

¹⁰³ *Proceedings and Debates of the Third National Quarantine and Sanitary Convention, Held in the City of New York* (New York: Edmund Jones, 1859), 698; “Peter Faneuil and the Cradle of Liberty,” *Boston Transcript*, in James Spear Loring, *The Hundred Boston Orators* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Co., 1852), 678-82; “Perilous Times,” *Times and Seasons*, August 1, 1844, 600.

¹⁰⁴ For Pratt’s descriptions of the Great Basin, see Pratt, “The Angel of the Prairies,” 17-18 and Pratt, “Proclamation Extraordinary,” in *Writings*, 158. For his descriptions of the United States, see Pratt, *An Appeal to the Inhabitants*, 1, 3.

Great Basin with the Mormons. These authors and orators had been careful to lay the blame for their persecutions at the feet of corrupt men and government officials, thereby maintaining the integrity of the Constitution.¹⁰⁵ Mormon leader Orson Hyde concluded in 1855 that although the Latter-day Saints had brought little with them to the Rocky Mountains, they had carried “the good-will and blessing of our God, even the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob[,]” which would not return to the United States until the murderers of Joseph Smith were punished.¹⁰⁶ Pratt explained in his pamphlet, “The Angel of the Prairies,” a fictional account of his travelling one hundred years into the future, that after the United States had fallen into decline because of corruption, the Mormons had “retired to the plains of the West, carrying with them the pure spirit of freedom. There, in the midst of a more extensive, a richer and a better country, they had established a government more permanent, strong and lasting, and vastly more extensive and glorious, combining strength and solidity, with the most perfect liberty and freedom.”¹⁰⁷ Mormon authors therefore concluded that the Constitution was in a sense transferable from the United States to whatever part of the earth where a people carried its spirit, in this case, the Rocky Mountain West.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the memory of atrocity not only shapes how victims of violence construct images of the place where the violence occurred (in the case of the Mormons, Missouri and Illinois), but also other locations where the victims live subsequently (the

¹⁰⁵ See Pratt, “Proclamation Extraordinary,” in *Writings*, 158.

¹⁰⁶ Orson Hyde, “The Judgments of God on the United States—The Saints and the World,” March 18, 1855, *Journal of Discourses* 2:203-204.

¹⁰⁷ Pratt, “Angel of the Prairies,” 19-20.

Great Basin for the Mormons). The way that Mormon writers imagined the western landscape was therefore a construction based on earlier experience. In imagining the Rocky Mountain West as a refuge, the Latter-day Saints were participating in wider discourses about the American West. As Patricia Limerick has observed, “Whether in Indian removal or Mormon migration, the theory was the same: the West is remote and vast; its isolation and distance will release us from conflict; this is where we get away from each other.”¹⁰⁸ Limerick further observed that this idea of isolation was ultimately a façade. The West is not where we get away from each other, but rather where we come together.¹⁰⁹ Understanding how Mormons imagined the Rocky Mountains is therefore a crucial step in comprehending the history of contact and convergence in the region, as others with different conceptions of the region came to challenge the Mormon belief that the Great Basin was their “cradle of liberty.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1987; repr., New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 291.

¹⁰⁹ Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 291.

¹¹⁰ On the importance of “mapping” in shaping contact in the West, see Maffly-Kipp, “Eastward Ho!” 128, 131-32.

CHAPTER IV

“I CONSIDER IT A DISGRACE TO THE PRIESTHOOD FOR THE SAINTS OF
LIGHT TO MINGLE WITH THE CHILDREN OF DARKNESS”:

MORMON-GENTILE CONTACT IN THE WEST

The preceding pages have largely been dedicated to describing the language of Mormon collective memory of persecution from 1838 to 1858. Understanding the language of memory is a crucial element in comprehending how it functions in a society. But the question always remains, how does memory shape behavior? While the memory of past wrongs no doubt influences how people interact with others, especially interactions between victims and perpetrators, it would be simplistic to suppose that memory determines the outcome in histories of contact. The same is true of the Latter-day Saints and “others” that interacted in the American West during the 1840s and 1850s. Memory certainly shaped how Mormons interacted with non-Mormons during the period, but the contacts between individuals in each group were not fixed by the past. The concluding pages will use examples of memory-shaped contacts in the Mormon West as a means of summarizing the themes introduced in this study.

In Chapter II I argued that Latter-day Saint essayists and orators used the Missouri and Illinois persecutions as a means to construct a communal identity based on the shared memory of suffering. Narratives employed by anti-Mormons contended that the Mormons were dangerous fanatics, outside the realm of religious legitimacy and

prone to criminal activities, and therefore deserved their persecutions. Latter-day Saint orators and authors responded that the persecutions served as evidence that they were God's chosen people and that they were part of the community of Saints that included biblical prophets and the early Christians. The persecutors of the Mormons, comprised primarily of Protestants, Mormon dissenters, and government officials, were likewise heirs of the persecutors of the ancient Saints. Mormon writers, knowing that they might not gain power over their persecutors in this life, argued that God would at a future date reverse the prevailing power relations by bringing vengeance upon their enemies, whether in this life or the next. In extreme articulations, some Mormons used the memory of past violence to justify vigilantism and violence.

This memory influenced how many Mormons interacted with individuals from Missouri and Illinois in the American West. For example, in 1846 Mormon Battalion member John D. Lee described being invited to a social engagement in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Lee refused the invitation "on the grounds that our covenants in the House of the Lord prohibited me at least from associating with unbelievers, much more to take the Daughters of Zion in among prostitutes—& to mingle in recreation with men whose hands & garments are stained with the blood of martyred Saints in Mo. I consider it a disgrace to the Priesthood for the Saints of light to mingle with the children of darkness..."¹ Much to the dismay of both Mormons and non-Mormons, the Latter-day Saints were not alone on the trail when they left Nauvoo in 1846. Other emigrants, some from Missouri and Illinois, also left their homes in order to find new fortunes in Oregon. As Richard Bennett has shown, some non-Mormon emigrants, relying on anti-Mormon

¹ David L. Bigler and Will Bagley, eds., *Army of Israel: Mormon Battalion Narratives* (Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2000), 138.

narratives that originated in Missouri during the 1830s, viewed the Latter-day Saints as dangerous fanatics and thieves that were allied with Native Americans.² Mormons likewise viewed Missourians on the trail with suspicion and attributed unfavorable actions toward the Latter-day Saints as continued persecution.³ As described in Chapter II, Latter-day Saints often retroactively assigned God's vengeance as the cause of death of a perceived enemy, as illustrated by Mormon reactions to the gruesome deaths of the Donner-Reed party. Norton Jacob, for example, described the party's demise and concluded that "[t]hese are the men that have mobbed and killed the Saints!"⁴ Some Latter-day Saints also noted approvingly when emigrants from Missouri were stricken with cholera, and that wolves targeted the graves of deceased persecutors rather than those of Mormons.⁵

Although the two groups distrusted and often disliked each other, survival demanded that they interact to some degree. Access to water and resources on occasion necessitated that Mormons and non-Mormons camp near each other. Latter-day Saints defined their companies as models of orderliness by contrasting themselves against the uncouth Missourians.⁶ Latter-day Saints that left records of interactions on the trail with non-Mormons were explicit in their dislike of Missourians, indicating that the memory of persecution did indeed shape contacts. However, in Wallace Stegner's words, "[f]or all

² Richard Bennett, *We'll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846-1848* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1997), 103-108.

³ Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (1964; Lincoln: Bison Books, 1992).

⁴ Quoted in Bennett, *We'll Find the Place*, 195.

⁵ Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion*, 206, 210.

⁶ Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion*, 147, 150.

their mutual suspicion, there was some hobnobbing.”⁷ Latter-day Saint Stephen Markham even spoke with one Missourian whose son apparently had been killed by the Mormons’ persecutors for helping Joseph Smith escape from prison.⁸ Interactions such as this indicate that the totalizing discourse used by many Latter-day Saints to portray all Missourians as vile persecutors served as more of a rhetorical device than a guide to actual behavior. This point is also illustrated by the number of Mormons that worked with Missourians in Missouri during the late 1840s to earn money and purchase supplies and the fact that St. Louis was an “oasis of toleration and security” for Latter-day Saints in the decades after the Missouri expulsion.⁹ The cooperation on the trail that marked relations between the two groups during rest times later turned to competition, as Mormon wagon trains sought to beat Missourian trains to the best campsites and waterholes.¹⁰

As outlined in Chapter III, the memory of past persecutions shaped Mormon images of place. Although the Latter-day Saints imagined the American nation as being divinely-established on principles of religious freedom, Mormon authors interpreted the persecutions in Missouri and Illinois as evidence that there were places in the nation that were in reality sites of tyranny. Mormon views of the nation as a place of liberty changed after the Latter-day Saints failed to convince the national government and the American people to help the Mormons get redress for their losses in Missouri and the murder of

⁷ Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion*, 145.

⁸ Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion*, 147.

⁹ Richard E. Bennett, “‘We had everything to procure from Missouri’: The Missouri Lifeline to the Mormon Exodus, 1846-1850,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 7, no. 1-2 (Spring/ Fall 2006): 91-106; Stanley B. Kimball, “The Saints and St. Louis, 1831-1857: An Oasis of Toleration and Security,” *BYU Studies* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1973): 489-519.

¹⁰ Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion*, 152, 154, 157. See also Bennett, *We’ll Find the Place*, 179.

Joseph Smith went unpunished. Latter-day Saint authors and orators, citing past persecutions, described the American West as a place of refuge, where the Latter-day Saints could carry the spirit of the Constitution. In an 1853 sermon, Brigham Young argued that in Utah Territory, non-Mormons could live and worship as they pleased. But Young stopped short of guaranteeing full liberty for non-Mormons. “I am not willing you should drive me and my brethren from our houses and farms, as has been the case in former times . . . the measure that has been meted to this people [that is, the Mormons], will be measured to that people [that is, persecutors]; and it will be heaped up, pressed down, and running over; and then as much again thrown in[.]”¹¹ The Mormon West as a refuge therefore had its limits, which were demarcated by the memory of persecution.

During the early 1850s overland travelers and Mormons continued to interact in the Salt Lake Valley. As John Unruh documents in his classic study of the overland trail, the Latter-day Saints’ desire for physical and economic isolation was overpowered by their need for Gentile goods and money.¹² Like interactions on the trail during the late 1840s, contact between Mormons and overlanders from Missouri and Illinois in the Great Basin in the early 1850s was shaped by the memory of the violence between the groups in the 1830s and 1840s. Rhetorically, Mormon leaders met their visitors in contradictory ways. On the one hand, *Deseret News* editorials encouraged Latter-day Saints to treat their former persecutors that travelled through Utah with kindness, in hopes that they

¹¹ Brigham Young, “Weaknesses of Man—Loyalty of the Saints—Corruption of the World—True Liberty—Conduct of the American People,” August 1, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:363.

¹² John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 302.

might convert to Mormonism.¹³ But on the other hand, some emigrants reported that Mormon leaders publicly cursed and called for the deaths of former persecutors that passed through the territory.¹⁴ Whether threats were rhetorical, real, or simply perceived on the part of Missouri and Illinois emigrants, many overlanders preferred to avoid the Salt Lake Valley altogether.¹⁵

Accounts of contacts in the late 1840s and early 1850s in Utah between the Mormons and emigrants from Missouri and Illinois suggest that Latter-day Saints did visit some hardships on those perceived to be former persecutors. As Unruh concludes, “The rhetoric and incidents so disturbing to overland emigrants during the 1850s had been molded by memories of murderous Missouri and Illinois mobs. The desire to avenge past wrongs was important to most Mormons and is central to an understanding of the difficulties they visited upon the overlanders.”¹⁶ Unruh documents incidents of economic and judicial injustice against overlanders, relates an example of a Mormon woman that desecrated graves of Missourians that died along the trail, and describes harassment of Missourian wagon trains.¹⁷ In addition, a Latter-day Saint leader in Kaneshville, Iowa, recognized W.B. Burns, an opponent of the Mormons in Illinois. The leader sent word to the Mormon outpost on the Green River, apparently in hopes of further harassing Burns.

¹³ Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 307. See also David L. Bigler, ed., *A Winter with the Mormons: The 1852 Letters of Jotham Goodell* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, 2001), 46, 70.

¹⁴ Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 335.

¹⁵ Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 335. See also Bigler, ed., *A Winter with the Mormons*, 79 n12, 82 n16.

¹⁶ Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 334.

¹⁷ Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 315, 332, 334.

Burns, however, was able to slip through to Oregon without detection.¹⁸ Jotham Goodell, himself an emigrant, later claimed that the Mormons themselves bragged of killing emigrants from Missouri and Illinois.¹⁹ In addition, the memory of past persecutions in part led Mormon militiamen to murder 120 emigrants at Mountain Meadows in 1857, although the source material describing the role of memory for the massacre is problematic, due to that fact that much of it was recorded many years after the massacre.²⁰

Conclusion

The study of Mormon collective memory of violence is a broad and important topic. This thesis raises more questions than it can answer and therefore leaves ample room for further study. For example, more work needs to be done to understand Mormon martyrological discourse prior to 1838. There is also the question of how Mormons framed the memory of their sufferings when presenting narratives to audiences in Great Britain and other international proselytizing arenas. How did the memory of past persecutions shape how Latter-day Saints represented the Mormon Battalion, a Latter-day Saint military unit that served in the Mexican American War? What role did being victims of past violence play in Mormons later becoming perpetrators themselves and why have Mormons been unable to reconcile the relationship in their collective memory? How did race, in particular Mormon whiteness, influence how Latter-day Saints remembered their persecutions, and, in turn, treated other oppressed groups? How did

¹⁸ Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 335.

¹⁹ Bigler, *A Winter with the Mormons*, 79-82.

²⁰ Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

gender shape Mormon narratives of past violence? These questions and others can illuminate the place of memory in Mormon thought during this period.

Although this thesis is delimited to a twenty-year period from 1838 to 1858, Latter-day Saint memory of persecution continued to shape Mormon identities, images of places, and histories of contact throughout the nineteenth century and even into the present. Memories of persecution influenced how the Latter-day Saints understood the American Civil War, the polygamy raids of the 1880s, and the Manifesto of 1890 that ended polygamy.²¹ During the twentieth century, Latter-day Saints purchased sites in Missouri and Illinois such as Liberty Jail, Haun's Mill, and Carthage Jail, where the persecutions occurred, and these places are today sites of pilgrimage.²² In 1976, in honor of the nation's bicentennial, Missouri governor Christopher Bond rescinded Lilburn W. Boggs' Extermination Order, and in 2004 Illinois officials apologized for the treatment of the Mormons during the 1840s.²³ In 2007 PBS produced a four-hour documentary entitled "The Mormons," which some Latter-day Saints interpreted as continued persecution against them due to the film's emphases on the Mountain Meadows Massacre and

²¹ On the role of memory during the 1880s and in the interpretation of the Manifesto, see my "The Prophecy So Far Has Been Fulfilled": Remembering the Missouri Persecutions in the 1880s," paper delivered at the Annual Conference of the Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, October 2007.

²² See Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 135.

²³ On Bond, see "The Extermination Order and How it was Rescinded," <http://www.jwha.info/mmff/exorder.htm> (accessed 8/5/08). On the Illinois apology, see Carrie A. Moore, "Regrets given to LDS – in person: Illinois officials in S. L. with statement about persecution," *Deseret News*, April 8, 2004, B01, http://deseretnews.com/cgi-bin/cqcggi_plus/@plus.env?CO_SESSION_KEY=RRKYCARCSCFM&CO_CUR_DOCUMENT=4&CO_TEXT_MAIN=YES (accessed 8/5/08).

polygamy.²⁴ Even a century and a half after the Mormons left Illinois memories of the blood of their brethren continue to mark the pages of the memoirs of the persecuted.

²⁴ For example, one viewer in Las Vegas wrote that “[t]he program was built upon the same controversy and scandal that the Church has received publicity for in the past. Viewers of this program, the vast majority of which who will not refer themselves to the ‘Interviews’ section of your site, came away thinking about polygamy and bitterness. Our religion was not a part this show, but perhaps it doesn’t sell as well as polygamy and Mountain Meadows” (<http://www.pbs.org/mormons/talk/index4.html> [accessed 8/5/08]). Another viewer complained that “You had two hours and you did not get it right. I hope your next two hours repairs some of the damage. I did not expect a pro-mormon propaganda piece but giving 70% or more to pure anti-mormon topics is not balance. On the other hand I should be surprised you didn’t just turn it over to the “former mormon scholars”. (or did you?) The anti-mormons are dancing with joy tonight. You might notice the anti-mormons are the only happy ones on your blog. Persecution continues. But I have it really easy compared to my ancestors. That you did briefly portray” (<http://www.pbs.org/mormons/talk/index11.html> [accessed 8/6/08]). And another stated that “[h]aving lived for a time in Nauvoo, IL, and having ancestors who were murdered at the Haun’s Mill Massacre, and also watching my father on the steps of the Missouri capitol as they finally rescinded Gov. Boggs’ Extermination Order in 1976, I feel your quick, glossed-over portrayal of the dire, difficult, and bloody times of the Saints in the early 1800s demeans their sacrifices, even the giving of their lives, for the close-held beliefs, rather than renounce their faith in God. This same faith I have today, because their sacrifices live in me today. I still know what I know” (<http://www.pbs.org/mormons/talk/index13.html> [accessed 8/6/08]). In addition to the PBS documentary, the appearance of *September Dawn*, a commercial film depicting the Mountain Meadows Massacre, led one online commenter to ask, “Why hasn’t anyone ‘researched’ and made a movie about the Haun’s Mill Massacre? What church or organization should we be holding accountable for that? Or what about all the other incidents, like the one where a mobber tore an infant from its mother’s arms and bashed its head against a tree? Or where another mobber shot a Mormon child, sneering that ‘nits become lice?’ The list of blood and atrocities committed against Mormons goes on and on but somehow the Mountain Meadow Massacre is the only injustice some people can see” (<http://mormonwasp.wordpress.com/2007/04/04/will-september-dawn-provoke-the-lds-church-to-come-clean-/#comment-1256> [accessed 8/5/07]). All of the above quotes were copied directly from the websites, with original spelling and capitalization preserved.

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