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# THE MORMON INFLUENCE ON THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE WEST

by

Michael Madsen

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

Department of Geography

Brigham Young University

July 1999

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

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

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FINAL READING APPROVAL

I have read the thesis by Michael Madsen 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

## THE MORMON INFLUENCE ON THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE WEST

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Department of Geography

Master of Science

The vast colonization efforts of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons, in the nineteenth century had a profound impact on the population, culture, economy, and environment of much of the American West. This thesis examines the political geographic influence of the Mormons in the West and, more specifically, in the lands ceded by Mexico to the United States in 1848. This land comprises all or portions of the following states: California, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico.

The original organization of the Mexican Cession at the hands of Congress in 1850 was drastically influenced by the fact that the Mormons had decided to settle in the Great Basin. From this initial territorial organization in 1850 to the early years of the twentieth century, the boundaries of each of the aforementioned states were significantly

influenced by two key factors: the Mormon presence in certain areas and the strained relationship between Congress and the Mormon Church. In many instances, state and territorial boundaries were drawn, modified, or even left alone as a direct result of one or often both of these factors. This thesis identifies and examines all of these boundary-making decisions.

In order to better illustrate the actual impact of the Mormons on the political geography of the West, two hypothetical scenarios are presented in the final chapter. In the first scenario, the author hypothesizes as to how the West might look today if the Mormons had not come West and settled there. In the second, a West is envisioned in which the relationship between the Mormons and Congress was not adversarial.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express appreciation and gratitude to my committee members and particularly to Dr. Chad Emmet for his careful evaluation of my work. To the many scholars who have written on this and related subjects and from whom I have learned so much, I am indebted. I wish to acknowledge my daughter Eliza who, throughout this process, has always managed to brighten her daddy's day. Finally, I would like to thank my wife who has been unfailing in her support. Thank you, Jennifer, for your patience and love.

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# PREFACE

As I sat in my fourth grade social studies class studying about Utah, my native state, a question continually burned inside me. *Why was Utah the **45th** state?!* I had enough understanding of western history, even at that young age, to know that the Mormon pioneers had established hundreds of well-organized, thriving, cultured, and educated communities throughout a vast region of the West well before comparable communities of any substantial size developed in much of the surrounding areas. Yet these surrounding areas, for some unknown reason, were admitted to the Union long before Utah was. Being the 45th state, in my mind, carried with it a negative connotation. I knew that millions of fellow grade-schoolers who were also studying the states would take one glance at Utah's date of admission and assume that it must have been undesirable and unproductive territory. "They'll never know," I lamented, "that thousands of acres had been cultivated here long before any substantial crops had been planted in Wyoming or that Shakespeare had been performed in town theaters all over present-day Utah before a saloon was ever erected in Nevada." I felt determined then, at the age of 10, to educate the world as to the true meaning behind Utah's belated statehood. Little did I know that the seeds of an academic pursuit had been planted.

I was a little dismayed in my early college career to find that someone, actually several people, had beat me to the punch in explaining why it had taken so long for Utah to gain statehood. As a graduate student in Geography, though, I couldn't help but

wonder if there might not be something related that I could investigate. I have always been interested in political geography and I naturally began to consider the geographic configuration of the state of Utah and her neighbors. I knew that the "shrinking" of the original Mormon-proposed State of Deseret to the current state of Utah was an interesting geographic study but I also knew that, here too, the subject had already been examined. I then began looking at a bigger picture. What if, I wondered, the Mormons had never come West at all? How would the West look today? I knew enough at that point to realize that it would certainly not look the same. After being informed that an attempt to answer this question alone would probably not produce an acceptable thesis but could possibly constitute a chapter within a work addressing a larger question, I took another step toward my eventual hypothesis. What influence *did* the Mormons have on the political geography of the West?

As a Mormon and a native of the state of Utah, I bring to the table an obvious bias. I have studied the history and geography of the West through the eyes of a Mormon and with an eye for the Mormon influence. I strive to be objective, of course, but I may have a subconscious tendency to overstate or exaggerate the Mormon influence. With the perspective that I have, though, I may also be able to provide additional insight into the history and geography of the West that has hitherto gone unnoticed. That is my hope as well as the purpose of this thesis.

The question of the formation of new states and their admission to the Union,

has always been regarded, and ever must be, as often as it arises,

one of grave importance. Few questions upon which Congress is called to act

can exact a more vital and abiding influence upon the confederacy.....

It is a proceeding that gives a new identity to the Republic and cannot fail

to have a greater or less influence upon the ultimate destiny and stability

of the Union itself.

Congressman Samuel Vinton of Ohio

February 11, 1845

(Congressional Globe 28th Congress, 2nd Session, 330 - appendix)

# Chapter 1

# Introduction

## Hypothesis

The political geography of the United States, and particularly that of the western United States with its large political units and geometric shapes, has become very familiar to us. So familiar is this image, perhaps, that we may take the boundaries we see for granted and fail to consider the geographic and historical factors behind their creation. By analyzing the factors that influenced boundary-making decisions, we can begin to appreciate and understand the driving historical forces behind them. Some of these historical forces, like slavery, are obvious and well-documented. But what of the Mormons? Did their colonization of much of the West influence boundary-making decisions there? If so, what was the extent of the Mormon impact on the political geography of the American West?

It is my hypothesis that the Mormon settlement of the West and Congress' subsequent antagonism towards them are both principle factors in the development of current western state boundaries. This is not to say that the Mormon people themselves were the driving force behind the creation of boundaries. Indeed, most Mormon petitions

for statehood, along with their proposed state boundaries, were flatly rejected by Congress. Rather, it is the *presence* of the Mormons in the West, coupled with Congress' attitude towards them, that dramatically influenced the creation of our current western state boundaries and it is my contention that without Mormon settlement, the configuration of our western states would be very different. In the course of the West's history we find abundant evidence of how the presence of Mormons in a particular area influenced boundary-making decisions for that area. These decisions will, of course, be examined in much detail later on. Also, the Mormon domination of a core area in present-day Utah, coupled with a Congress reluctant and often unwilling to grant statehood to them, presents an interesting geographic phenomenon. States were literally created around this "Mormon island" despite the fact that Utah's neighbors were, in the words of Utah delegate and non-Mormon John F. Kinney, "infants in age and population compared to Utah" (Congressional Globe 38th Congress 1st Session, 1173). Bucking historical precedent, a large, well-organized and eager-for-admission to the Union populace was denied its petitions for statehood in favor of less developed, less populated, and more poorly organized areas. Indeed, the Mormon core area of settlement in the West served as an axis around which other states were created. Through careful examination of the Mormon influence on the creation of western state boundaries, we can better appreciate the lasting and dramatic impact that this American-born religious movement has had on the geography of United States.

Existing state boundaries stand as sign posts of historical forces at play. By reading and interpreting these sign posts from a geographic perspective, we can better

grasp the history that served as a backdrop for their creation. Conversely, the political geography of our country that is so much taken for granted is the result of very real and dynamic historical forces. By examining these forces, we can better grasp the geographic principles behind the lines that emerged on our maps. D.W. Meinig, a noted historical geographer, stated that: "the topic [of state boundary formation] merits a closer geographic examination than it has generally received" (Meinig 1993, 432). Also, noted geographer Charles C. Colby stated that: "In America these two types of problems, namely evolution of political areas and the demarcation of political boundaries, long have been considered appropriate questions for geographic inquiry" (Colby 1936, 24). This thesis examines both of these "problems" as they relate to the American West in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

My approach to this study of the Mormon influence on the political geography of the western United States will be to first review the related literature. This will be followed by a consideration of the precedents that had been established for state boundaries in the United States. Next, in order to set the stage for this work and put it into its historical context, a summary of Mormon migration and settlement, as well as the Mormon quest for statehood, will be presented. Following that, I will examine the geographic evolution of the states that emerged from the Mexican Cession, namely, California, Nevada, Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico, and how the Mormon presence in the West influenced their creation and their boundaries. To accomplish this I have made a qualitative assessment of various types of primary and secondary sources that relate to boundary making in the western United States between

1848 and 1919. The *Congressional Globe*, in particular, has proven to be an invaluable resource and the author has quoted often from its pages. This record clearly demonstrates that numerous factors, namely slavery, settlement patterns, politics, and economics, played a role in western boundary-making decisions. However, imbedded within many of these decisions is the Mormon factor. Indeed, as shall be seen, in some instances the Mormons played a vital role in these deliberations. The Congressional record regarding western state and territorial boundaries during this period is quite extensive but, while acknowledging that a host of other factors were involved in these various decisions, the author, in order to lend support to his hypothesis and for the sake of space, has emphasized the Mormon factor. Also, along with primary sources such as the *Congressional Globe*, I have utilized a variety of secondary sources, most notably in the form of historical and geographic analyses of the aforementioned western states. Although the Mormons assume a tertiary role in such works, there is much evidence in support of my hypothesis found within their pages.

Finally, in order to better illustrate the Mormon influence on western state boundaries, I will hypothesize as to how the West might look if (1) the Mormons had not come West, and (2) Congress had not objected to Mormon appeals for statehood.

## Literature Review

In 1950 Richard Hartshorne observed that from geography's central core - the "study of places" - the discipline radiates outward toward the cores of many other disciplines (Hartshorne 1950, 97). Two "outside" disciplines that have consistently attracted the attention of many geographers are history and political science. Geographers have long been interested in the interrelationships of various regions and lands but Friedrich Ratzel is generally credited with instigating the first systematic study of political geography around the turn of the century. Although many of Ratzel's controversial theories have since been dismissed, he succeeded in creating a foundation upon which the sub-field of political geography could build.

A natural source of interest and inquiry for political geographers has always been boundaries and "a substantial part of the literature in political geography is centered on the study of boundaries and their associated regions" (Minghi 1963, 407). One of the most noticed and emphasized features on many maps, boundaries are a relatively new geographic phenomenon. Frontiers, between everything from clans to empires, have existed for thousands of years but clear-cut, demarcated boundaries are a more recent development. "The rulers and writers of Rome's imperial days, for example, had no conception of the modern boundary as a negotiated line" (Boggs 1940, v - quote by Isaiah Bowman). The social, political, economic, and environmental ramifications of these

imaginary, and sometimes not so imaginary, lines have long been a source of study and research and many generalizations, theories, and hypotheses regarding their formation and subsequent impact have been proposed. In 1911 Ellen Churchill Semple, heavily influenced by Ratzel's organismic state theory, made one of the earliest systematic studies of boundaries (Minghi 1963, 407). For a time, most political geographers distinguished only between "natural" and "artificial" boundaries (Bogs 1940, 22). During the world wars geographers argued over what constituted "good" or "bad" boundaries from military and cultural perspectives. Some, like Thomas Holdich, viewed boundaries as defensive barriers and he cited mountains and deserts as examples of "good" boundaries. Others, like Lionel William Lyde, viewed boundaries as potential bonds and he felt that boundaries that encouraged assimilation, such as rivers, should be encouraged (Minghi 1963, 408). During the 1930s, some studied the economic implications of various types of boundaries and others began to question the effectiveness of existing boundaries and even proposed means of reorganizing them so as to make more physical and cultural sense.

New terminology for various boundary types was beginning to take shape by this time and in 1936 Richard Hartshorne made great strides in codifying what would later become an accepted vocabulary for political geographers. Rather than relying on the standard "natural versus artificial" classification for boundaries, Hartshorne emphasized the various cultural and historical forces behind their creation. His boundary definitions included the following: *antecedent*: boundaries which precede the development of most features of the cultural landscape, *pioneer*: boundaries drawn prior to any settlement,

*relict*: antecedent boundaries abandoned for political purposes but maintaining a cultural imprint, *subsequent*: boundaries drawn after settlement in order to conform to natural and cultural regions, and *superimposed*: subsequent boundaries that are lacking in conformity to natural and cultural regions (Hartshorne 1936, 56-57).

In 1945 S.B. Jones similarly contributed to political geography by codifying the theoretic processes of boundary formation which had evolved over the years. According to Jones, boundary making consists of four steps, *allocation* (or definition): in which the location of the boundary is identified, *delimination*: in which the line is plotted on a map, *demarcation*: in which the boundary is literally marked on the ground, and *administration*: in which the boundary is regulated (Prescott 1965, 64). The influence of both Hartshorne and Jones is reflected in the fact that their terminology is now widely accepted within the field and is an integral part of most, if not all, political geography textbooks (Glassner 1993, 80).

Along with these contributions, Hartshorne also emphasized the vital role of history in political geography and declared that the historical approach was one of four that political geographers could employ. The amount of historical research required for any particular work, he argued, was at the discretion of the student (Hartshorne 1950, 97-100). Also, one of the inherent dangers of political geographic studies, particularly of those that delve deeply into history, is that of subjectivity. Indeed, "the danger of subjectivity is probably greater in political geography than in any other branch of the subject" (Prescott 1965, 9). For this particular study, the author has found it necessary to include abundant historical references. Too, as stated in the preface to this work, my

background makes complete objectivity with regard to this study virtually impossible but every effort has been made to qualify all my assumptions and conclusions.

Returning to the subject of boundaries, it must be noted that the majority of related work has focused on international, as opposed to intra-national, boundaries. (Jones 1945, 152, Minghi 1963, 428, and Hartshorne 1950, 95). While it has been observed that some similarities do exist between boundaries *within* sovereign states and those that separate them from each other, it has also been noted that the two are fundamentally different and a coherent theoretical framework for intra-national boundaries has yet to evolve. Indeed, given the dearth of work specifically relating to intra-national boundaries, it would be unwise to attempt at this point to make sweeping generalizations about them. Most agree that more descriptive studies about these distinctive boundaries are needed so that accurate theories and models can evolve. "It is regrettable that some geographers have persisted in their efforts to classify boundaries instead of making detailed studies of particular cases" (Prescott 1965, 24). S.B. Jones noted that "there is a great need to develop a classification of internal boundaries which will facilitate the correlation of different studies and allow clarification of ideas related to internal boundaries" (Jones 1945, 178). Hopefully, this thesis will contribute to the growing body of work on "internal" boundaries and will prove helpful in the evolution of an accepted theoretical framework for them.

Increasingly, geographers have turned their attention to the question of internal boundaries, focusing during this century on such places as Australia, South Africa, Nigeria, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the former Soviet Union (Minghi 1963, 424-

427). A few have turned their attention to the United States and some have focused on the western half of that country. In 1949 Benjamin E. Thomas wrote of the evolution of Idaho's interesting boundaries and in 1934 Stephen B. Jones analyzed Oregon's boundaries and hypothesized as to how a realignment could effect greater economic and political efficiency (Jones 1934, 105-106). In the 1980s, Malcolm Comeaux studied the establishment of Arizona's northern boundary and its resistence to change. These studies are representative of the type of academic work on internal boundaries that have focused on the western United States. There are not many studies, however, that investigate the subject of internal boundaries in the larger context of the West as a whole. Glen Leonard's excellent 1970 dissertation, "Western Boundary Making: Texas and the Mexican Cession," examined those factors that influenced the creation of western boundaries but only for the period between 1848 and 1850. Few scholars have tackled the question of western boundary making with a broad temporal and spatial perspective and it appears that none have taken the Mormon influence on the political geography of the West as their primary topic of study.

Neither Mormons in the West nor the development of western state boundaries, as noted, are virgin areas in regard to academic work. Much has been written on the Mormon migration and the subsequent quest for Mormon statehood. Likewise, the factors that influenced the eventual size and shape of every state in the Union has been investigated, often in relation to a work on that particular state's history. What appears to be lacking, however, is a geographic interpretation of how the one relates to the other in a larger temporal and spatial framework. The academic niche I am attempting to fill is to

provide a geographic synthesis between these two themes: The presence of the Mormons in the West and the development of the Western states' boundaries.

The history of the Mormon church in this country, its beginnings, growth, trials, and exodus to the West, is well-documented. The geographic impact of the Mormons in the West, both cultural and environmental, has also been the source of study as has been the 50 year Mormon struggle for statehood with a Congress reluctant to grant it. The consequences of that enmity between the Mormons and the Federal government, though, while explored in the context of Utah or "Deseret", have not been adequately explored in the context of the West that existed *outside* the Mormon core region. In other words, how did the shaping of the state of Utah influence the shaping states around her?

Each individual state has a story to tell about its creation and admission to the Union. The geographic dimensions of each state, and the factors that contributed to them, have also been examined but most of these historical and geographical studies have stood alone, or, in other words, not considered those same factors in a larger context. For example, the factors that contributed to the creation of boundaries for neighboring states A and B may be examined in detail. However, the common factors that influenced the boundaries of both states are often overlooked. This work attempts to follow one theme, the Mormon presence in the West, and determine the impact that it had on the boundaries of all the states previously mentioned.

The author has identified two scholars who have written previously on the evolution of western state boundaries within a large temporal and spatial framework. George F. Brightman and the aforementioned D.W. Meinig have observed that the

Western states are a reflection of the distinctive populations and economies that developed within their boundaries. They contend, in other words, that the boundaries of the Western states are the natural and sensible results of the historical development of distinct population bases. Brightman wrote in 1940 of the economic basis behind the metamorphosis of Western state boundaries, particularly those of Utah. While the author does demonstrate that the Mormon economic core region is encompassed to a large degree by Utah's borders, he fails to adequately account for certain key anomalies. For example, many Mormon settlements were established outside the boundaries of the Territory of Utah with the realization that these settlements would fall outside the political and economic influence of the core area. Also, the abandonment of many far-flung settlements, as shall be seen, had less to do with economics and more to do with politics.

D. W. Meinig is the most well known scholar who has tackled the question of overlying factors behind the creation of Western state boundaries and his monumental work, The Shaping of America, offers a geographic analysis of the country as a whole. Volume III, Transcontinental America (currently at press), will undoubtedly examine the factors that he feels are most important in regards to the shaping of the Western states. An earlier work, "American Wests: Preface to a Geographical Interpretation" (Meinig 1972, 170-72), offers a glimpse of Meinig's views. In a nutshell, Meinig proposes that the states that emerged in the West are reflections of the distinct pockets of population that sprung up there. The largely symmetrical boundaries serve as "frontiers of separation" that divide these core areas into roughly equal areas of jurisdiction. Meinig is

quick to point out that several anomalies relative to this interpretation do exist (For example, southeastern Idaho, eastern Washington, and southern California). Meinig's hypothesis is clear and logical but in my estimation this interpretation does not fully appreciate the unique Mormon impact on the political geography of the West. Meinig himself states that "no single [historical-geographic] approach can hope to yield equally significant answers to all possible major questions" (Meinig 1972, 136).

Only by taking the Mormons as our primary subject of study within a wide geographic framework can we begin to fully appreciate their true geographic impact. Before moving into the Mormon influence on western state boundaries, it will be useful to examine the state boundary precedents that had been established prior to the Mormon exodus West.

## State Boundary Precedents

The European colonization of North America coincided with a time of great advances in the field of surveying and consequently many parallels and meridians were used to define and deliminate British royal grants there. In fact, many charters included parallels that stretched from an Atlantic seacoast landmark all the way to the Pacific Ocean (Leonard 1970, 14). For the most part, though, natural features of the land, most often rivers, were used to demarcate boundaries and straight lines were used to "complete

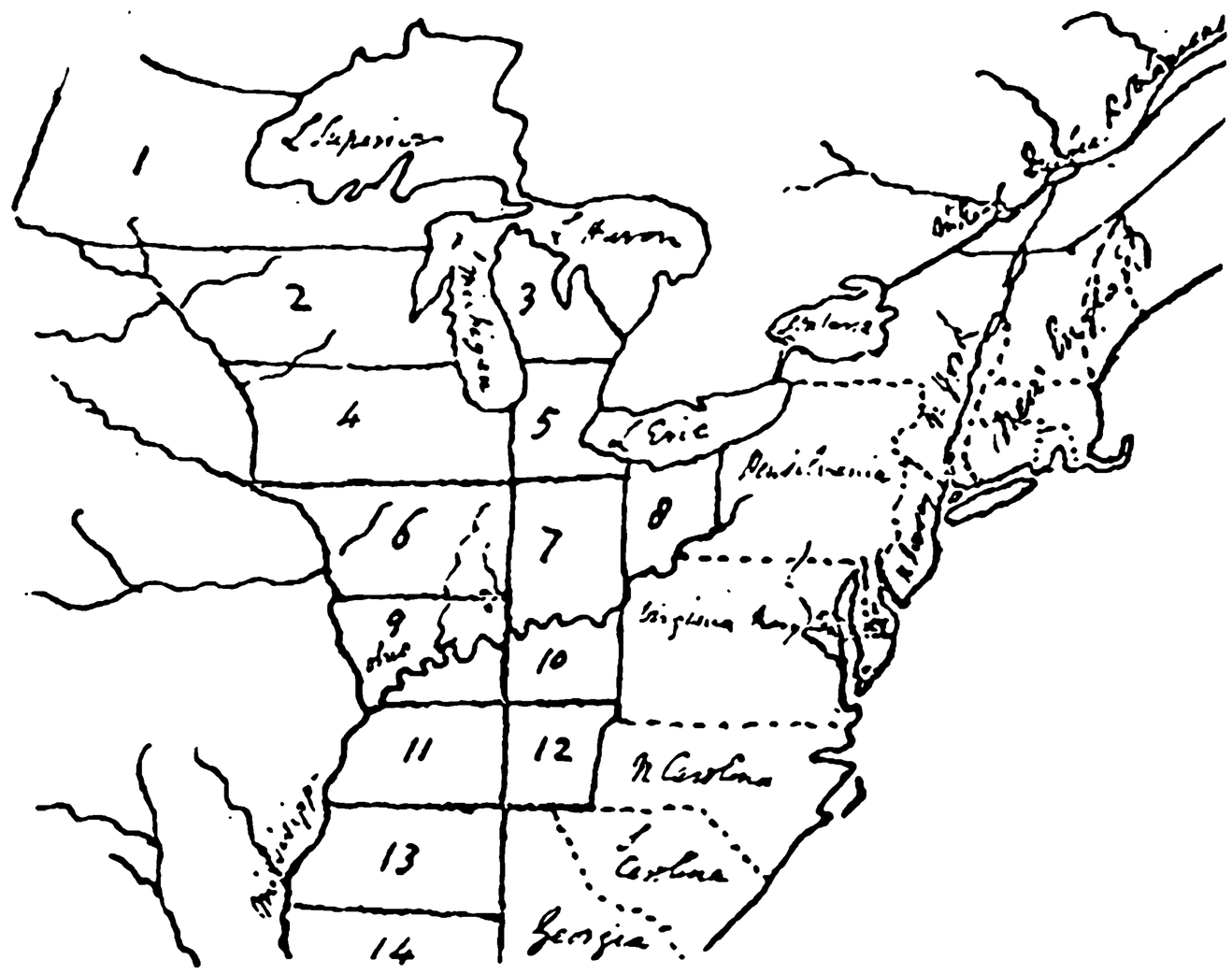
the gaps or extend the limits of the grant westward" (Leonard 1970, 14). Parallels of latitude were sometimes used in colonial grants as well. With a limited knowledge of the interior it is easy to see why parallels and straight lines would be preferred. Their continued use, however, in the face of a steadily increasing geographic knowledge of the interior, is presumed to be a reflection of their usefulness. Again, though, at this early stage, a clear preference was shown for natural features such as rivers and mountains when boundaries were created. Many of these early grants had overlapping claims and at least 13 major disputes over conflicting grants and "other problems of definition" arose (Leonard 1970, 16). This wrangling over boundaries proved to be a foreshadowing of things to come for the yet unborn nation and taught its early leaders a lesson in the importance of clear and precise boundaries.

The Proclamation of 1763, which was intended to curb colonial frontier growth so as to avoid further conflict with the indigenous peoples, returned to English sovereignty all the land claimed by the colonies west of the Appalachians. This now unorganized land was, in turn, ceded back to the United States by Britain following the War for Independence. The fledgling country was thus presented with its first, but not last, opportunity to organize unsettled and boundary-less territory. Thomas Jefferson is recognized as the most influential person in regards to the organization of the ceded lands and the precedents he established had far reaching impacts. For example, Jefferson could have continued on with the preference for physical boundaries connected by straight lines but:

> as chairman of a committee assigned by Congress under the Articles of Confederation to suggest subdivisions for the Federal domain between the Appalachians and the Mississippi, Jefferson exhibited a preference for the technically precise boundaries of parallels and meridians which his scientific background as geographer and surveyor favored (Leonard 1970, 26).

As a result of Jefferson's preferences, we undoubtedly find more straight lines employed in our state boundaries than we otherwise would. Jefferson's plan for the unorganized territory appears to have changed some over time but by 1784 he, and the committee he chaired, presented their unique plan to Congress. The plan took into consideration such things as the former colonial claims, Jefferson's preference for straight lines, optimal size, and a concern over the balance of power between the Atlantic Coast states and those sure to emerge further inland. Jefferson's plan called for a tier of eight states bounded by the Mississippi on the west and a meridian corresponding with the Ohio River's lowest rapids on the east. A tier of five smaller states between those and the existing 13 states would also be created to "form a balance betwixt the two more powerful ones" (Leonard 1970, 30) plus one more state located approximately where the state of Ohio now exists [see map 1]. All straight lines were employed in this proposed boundary plan except for the Mississippi River, which served as an international boundary, and the Ohio River at one point as the northern boundary for the proposed state of "Saratoga" (state #10) but only because that river corresponded roughly with the 39th parallel. Jefferson was consciously creating a "grid pattern" that he envisioned would continue on indefinitely should the country continue to expand Westward.

The size of the new states to be created was also a major concern for Jefferson. Many in the East at that time were calling for the organization of only two or three very




Map 1 - Jefferson Plan for New States

from Jefferson, Papers, VI, 593

large states in the Western territory so as to diminish that regions' potential power in the Senate. Jefferson, however, was more interested in the long term and had very strong feelings on the subject of state size. He worried, for instance, that large states would prove difficult to manage and govern and that any state containing more than 160,000 square miles would "soon crumble into little ones" (Leonard 1970, 36). Jefferson felt that in order for a state and its government to succeed, it should be of small to moderate size which, in his mind, meant approximately 30,000 square miles. The states proposed by Jefferson encompassed an area approximately two degrees latitude from north to south and roughly three degrees longitude from east to west, depending on the location of the Mississippi River and the existing states to the East. These proposed states fit in nicely

with Jefferson's concept of ideal state size. Any state over 93,000 square miles, Jefferson wrote, would be "unacceptably large." (Today there are 11 states with areas that exceed 93,000 square miles.) While desiring a uniform, checkerboard pattern, Jefferson acknowledged the need to make sure that the states were servants of a "regular society," inferring his support for the idea that "population centers would always be considered in drawing boundaries" (Leonard 1970, 39).

Obviously, Jefferson's vision for the future states did not become a reality.

> The states actually created in the West followed only the general outlines of the uniform crosshatch pattern imagined for the area by the Great Architect of Statehood. Jefferson's vision for a checkerboard pattern from the Appalachians to the Rockies, with the Ohio and Mississippi as possible digressions from that pattern, became in reality a somewhat desultory hodgepodge (Leonard 1970, 44).

His influence, however, was still felt. In general, the states that eventually emerged were fewer and larger than Jefferson would have liked. (Indiana, for example, was the smallest of the new states and it exceeded 36,000 square miles.) Nine states, as opposed to 14 were created and the first few to be admitted varied widely from Jefferson's plan. For example, rather than being divided north and south, states 13 and 14 were divided east and west to create Alabama and Mississippi. Also, we find that old habits die hard as physical boundaries, most often rivers, were used far more often than Jefferson would have preferred. Some semblance of Jefferson's plan, however, was realized, particularly as states further west were added. Jefferson's concept of "tiers" emerged somewhat in the states just east of the Mississippi River. Jefferson's stack of eight states turned into only five, but these states, from Louisiana to Minnesota, "more nearly approximates the

kind of uniform boundary Jefferson envisioned for all new states" (Leonard 1970, 44). The states that emerged just west of the Mississippi, from Oklahoma to North Dakota, maintained the idea of a "row" of states but their boundaries did not coincide with the boundaries of the states east of the river so "the influence of the checkerboard was felt only vaguely" (Leonard 1970, 44). Still, a pattern of rows and tiers had been established based on Jefferson's plan. Too, these states tended to utilize more straight, geometric lines in their boundaries. Even though there is a significant difference between the states in Jefferson's plan and those that eventually emerged, his lasting influence cannot be overlooked. Straight lines were employed much more often as a result of Jefferson's influence than they otherwise would have been and even though the states that emerged were larger than he would have liked, without him they likely would have been much larger. A precedent for straight lines, small, compact size, and consideration of centers of population for new states was established.

An analysis of the type of boundaries used indicates that "as the state-making process worked its way towards the Pacific, the assumptions of the eastern ocean lost their value, and scientific preciseness became a national hobby" (Leonard 1970, 54). In other words, Jefferson's preference for geometric lines became an increasing reality as time went on and, correspondingly, as the country moved westward. The drier and flatter territory acquired through the Louisiana Purchase came to reflect Jefferson's preference for straight lines, if not size, more than those east of the Mississippi. "The shift to geometric boundaries appears to be a characteristic of the trans-Mississippi west" (Leonard 1970, 50).

As state-making moved into the far West, as shall be seen, Congress appeared to focus more attention on the need to encompass distinct populations. Also, due in part to the assumption at the time that the West had little arable land, Congress worried less about the need to establish states with "general standards of size and shape" (Meinig 1993, 447).

The Oregon Country had been effectively claimed by the United States as early as 1818 (although the final boundary with Canada was not finalized until 1846) assuring access to the Pacific Ocean. Then, with the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico to the east and south and Canada to the north, Americans focused on the next most logical area of expansion; Mexico. With these historical precedents in mind, we can now turn our attention to the Mormon influence on the political organization of the Mexican Cession.

# Chapter 2

# The Mormons

## Origins and Westward Migration

An exhaustive review of the origins and westward migration of the Mormon Church is not necessary as the focus of this thesis is the geographic impact of that religion on the West. [1] A brief overview, however, of these historical events will help to set the stage for the Mormon influence on the West. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was officially organized in 1830 by the required minimum of six men, ten years after a poor, generally uneducated 14-year-old farm boy named Joseph Smith claimed to have seen a vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ.[2] Adherents of the new faith were unabashed as to their belief that theirs' was the "only true and living" church upon the earth, the very same church that was originally organized by Jesus Christ himself, and that all other churches, while possessing a measure of truth, were

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[1] For an excellent history of the Mormons, see *The Story of the Latter Day Saints* by James B. Allen and Glen Leonard, 1976, Deseret Book Company.

[2] In 1999 LDS church membership exceeded 10,000,000. There are now more members living outside the United States than there are within.

nonetheless essentially in error and did not have the "fulness." This position attracted a large number of converts and, not surprisingly, an even larger number of antagonists.

From its earliest years the Church, as a result of persecution from its enemies, was a migratory entity. Shortly after the organization of the Church in upstate New York, Joseph Smith removed to Harmony, Pennsylvania. Eventually the main body of members (hereafter referred to as Saints or Mormons) moved to Kirtland, Ohio where their missionaries had found much success. Internal strife necessitated another general exodus to what at the time was the very edge of the American frontier at Independence, Missouri. Severe persecution, however, forced the Saints to move yet again, this time to the eastern bank of the Mississippi River in northwestern Illinois. By 1845 the Mormon settlement of Nauvoo, with a population well over 10,000, had become the largest city in the state (Linn 1902, 227). Shortly after the martyrdom of Joseph Smith at the hands of a mob in 1844, the main body of Saints prepared for their now famous exodus westward to the valley of the Great Salt Lake.

Contrary to popular belief, the Saints, now under the direction of Brigham Young, had a fairly good idea of where they wanted to go before they crossed the Mississippi into Iowa Territory. In 1842, Joseph Smith had prophesied that the Saints would "be driven to the Rocky Mountains . . . and would become a mighty people in the tops of the Rocky Mountains" (Cannon 1986, 402-3). From that time until 1845, the year the first Mormon pioneers set out, Church leaders learned as much as they could about the vast frontier that lay between the Missouri River and the settlements along the California coast. Some prominent politicians such as Henry Clay even recommended that the Mormons be

allowed to create their own state somewhere in the vast lands between the Missouri and the Pacific. As early as 1843, a small party of Mormons explored potential routes in the western part of Iowa Territory and in 1844 "Joseph Smith instructed the Twelve [a major governing body of the Church] to prepare another group of volunteers to examine sites in California, which in that day extended eastward to the Rockies" (Allen and Leonard 1976, 184). In that same year the Nauvoo general council petitioned Congress for a "secure resting place in the mountains, or some uninhabited region, where we can enjoy the liberty of conscience guaranteed to us by the Constitution" (Allen and Leonard 1976, 185). Church leaders also began to study the published reports of explorer John C. Fremont and the author of an immigrant guidebook, Lansford Hastings, "personally visited the Mormon city and spent several days discussing the Rocky Mountains and points west with Young and other Church leaders" (Jackson "Mormon Perception" 1978, 320). Again in 1845, following the death of Joseph Smith, a search party was sent west to scout out a settlement site and by early 1845, due in part to the glowing reports of Hastings and Fremont, "Mormon leaders were privately favoring a central location somewhere in the middle of the Rockies or along the eastern rim of the Great Basin" (Allen and Leonard 1976, 208, 209).

Throughout this period Brigham Young carefully studied Fremont's map of the west and "three other maps hung from the walls of the [Nauvoo] temple" (Allen and Leonard 1976, 214). In September of that year Church leaders formally announced their intention to leave Nauvoo and the orderly organization of pioneer companies commenced. Hundreds of wagons were constructed during the next several months as

thousands of Saints, many forced from their homes by marauding, hostile bands, gathered to Nauvoo. On August 23, 1845, Church leaders "approved a pioneer expedition of 3,000 men to leave for the Great Salt Lake Valley in the spring" (Allen and Leonard 1976, 211, 213). Intensified persecutions, however, forced many to leave Nauvoo prematurely, crossing the icy Mississippi into Iowa Territory on February 4, 1846. As an epistle from Church leaders had declared five months earlier, "[this trek] forms a new epoch, not only in the history of the church, but of this nation" (Allen and Leonard 1976, 215).

This earlier than anticipated departure forced a year delay in the trek to the valley of the Great Salt Lake. The main body if emigrants, after an extremely difficult trek across Iowa, settled in for the winter of 1846 on the western boundary of that territory in a place that came to be known as Winter Quarters. During this time of preparation the plans for the mass exodus further west were carefully made and Young wrote President James K. Polk, informing him of their intentions.

> The cause of our exile we need not repeat; it is already with you, suffice it to say that a combination of fortuitous, illegal and unconstitutional circumstances have placed us in our present situation, on a journey which we design shall end in a location west of the Rocky Mountains, and within the basin of the Great Salt Lake, or Bear River Valley, as soon as circumstances shall permit, believing that to be a point where a good living will require hard labor, and consequently shall be coveted by no other people, while it is surrounded by so unpopulous but fertile country (*Journal History of the Church* (MS), Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, 9 August 1846, np).

Finally, in mid April 1847, the vanguard company of 149 people, including Brigham Young, set out. The Oregon Trail took its course along the south side of the Platte River so the Mormons, wary of potential conflicts that may arise over grazing rights and water,

chose to travel on the north side. From Fort Laramie to Fort Bridger the company followed the Oregon Trail and then they followed the route taken by the ill-fated Donner-Reed party of the previous year through the mountain passes of the Wasatch. On July 21, 1847, members of the advance party entered the Salt Lake Valley and three days later, Brigham Young, upon catching his first glimpse, is reputed to have uttered the now famous words, "this is the right place, drive on" (Allen and Leonard 1976, 247). On July 28, one week after the first Mormons entered the valley, a temple site was selected by Brigham Young and a city plan was unanimously approved by the Saints. By December of that year more than 2,000 Mormons had entered the Salt Lake Valley and by 1850 well over 10,000 were living there and in outlying settlements to the north and south. Captain Howard Stansbury, who made extensive explorations of the Great Basin for the United States Government, described the conditions he found in the valley about four years after the Mormons first set foot there:

> Nothing can exceed the appearance of prosperity, peaceful harmony, and cheerful contentment that pervade the whole community. Ever since the first year of privations, provisions have been abundant, and want of the necessities and even comforts of life is a thing unknown . . .
>
> This happy state of universally diffused prosperity, is commented on by themselves, as an evidence of the smiles of Heaven and of the special favor of the Deity; but I think it may be most clearly accounted for in the admirable discipline and ready obedience of a large body of industrious and intelligent men, and the wise councils of prudent and sagacious leaders, producing a oneness and concentration of action, the result of which has astonished even those by whom it has been effected (Harris and Butt 1925, 44-45).

Brigham Young had no intention, however, of creating a single, isolated place of refuge. He was more interested, some would say, in empire building. Shortly after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young declared that he intended "to have every hole and corner from San Francisco to the Hudson Bay known to us" (Jackson 197-?, 9). It must be remembered that the Mormon migration West was not a one-time event. Not only were the vast majority of Saints left waiting in Illinois and Iowa, but the proselytizing efforts of the Church continued. The result was a steady stream of converts from the East, Canada, and Europe, who, in heading the call to "gather to Zion," also made their way to the Salt Lake Valley. " . . . The growth of the Mormon population in the Salt Lake Valley was phenomenal. With the exception of gold, nothing attracted such an ethnic variety of peoples in such large numbers to the arid West as this new millennial religion, with its doctrine of 'the gathering'" (Jackson 1978, 107). From 1847 to 1869, over 60,000 Mormons made the trek to the Great Basin (Jackson "Mormon Perception" 1978, 326). Of these, over 42,000 were non-US citizens (Jackson 1978, 115). By 1870, the official US census recorded a population of 86,786 for the Territory of Utah. By 1880 that number would reach 143,963 (Linn 1902, 609-610).

Brigham Young determined that what the growing church needed was not an isolated city, but a broad, self-sufficient empire. Shortly after their arrival, Brigham

Young declared:

> We have been kicked out of the frying pan and into the fire, out of the fire and into the middle of the floor, and here we are and here we will stay. God has shown me that this is the spot to locate his people and here is where they will prosper . . . we will extend our settlements to the east and to the west, to the north and to the south, and we will build towns and cities by the hundreds and thousands, and the Saints will gather in from the nations of the earth (Hafen, Hollon, and Rister 1970, 252).

Several valleys to the north and south of Salt Lake had already been explored within just a month of their arrival (Morgan 1940, 68).

In order to understand the efficient and effective manner in which the Mormons were able to colonize a vast region, one must consider again the religious convictions of the Mormon colonizers. Brigham Young was revered as God's mouthpiece on earth and a "calling" from him or other high church officials was commensurate with a call from God. It was not unusual at this time for a recently arrived Mormon to attend church meetings in Salt Lake and, from the pulpit, be informed that he and his family had been "called" to settle in some remote area of "Zion." If the Salt Lake Valley itself, headquarters of the Mormon empire, was viewed by many as inhospitable, the condition of some of the places many were called to settle - almost invariably the even more arid valleys to the south - can only be imagined.[3] However, when the faith and zeal of the colonizers is considered, it is not surprising that for the most part these colonizing efforts bore fruit. Noted a non-Mormon historian in 1925, "These settlements, or colonies, were

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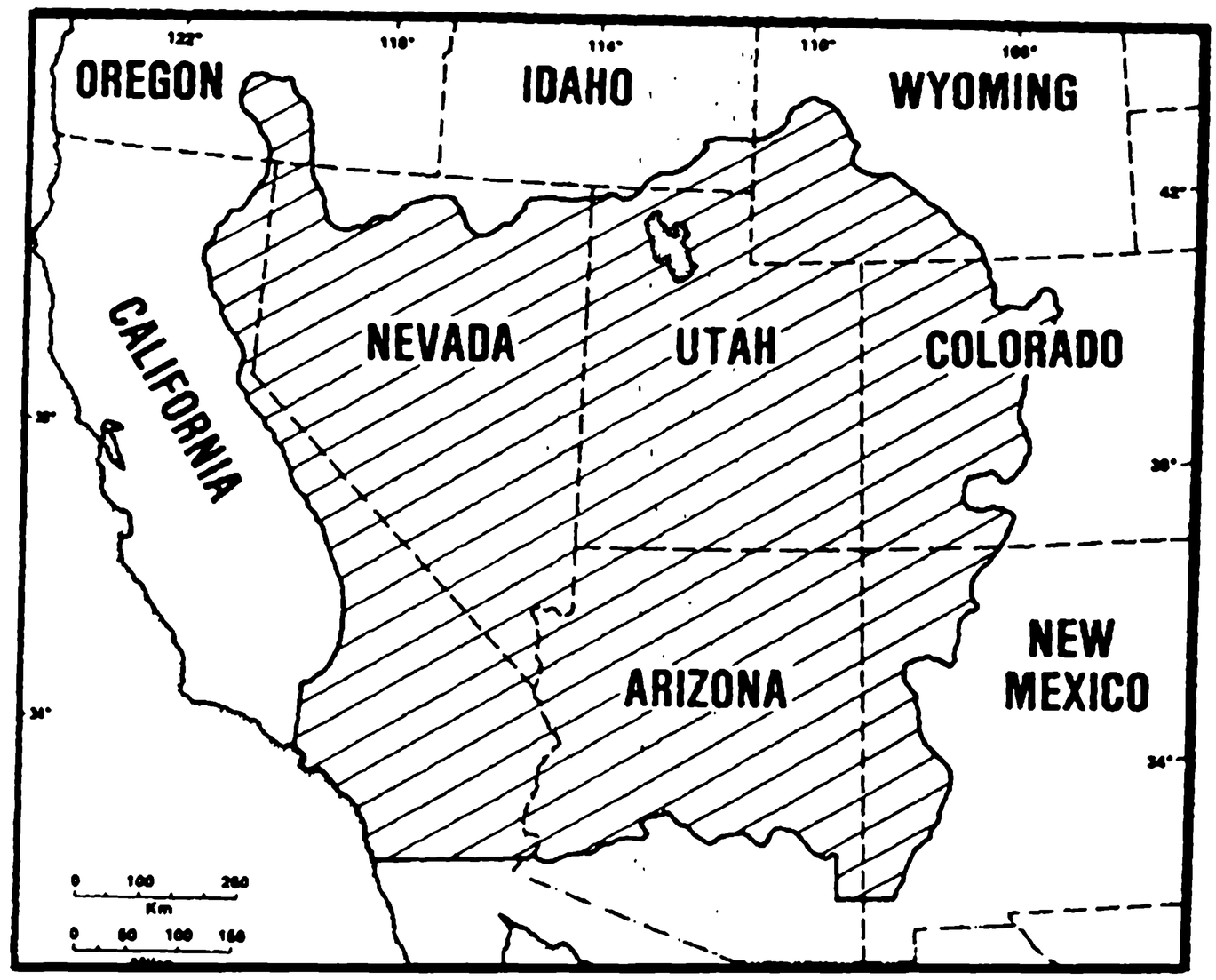
[3] Richard H. Jackson's article, Mormon Perception and Settlement, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 68: 317-334, offers excellent insights into Young's negative perception of the lands to the north as well as the mental "desertification" of the Salt Lake Valley that took place following settlement.

practically always successful. It is doubtful if in all the history of the colonization there was ever such a high percentage of successes as among the Mormon pioneers of the West" (Harris and Butt 1925, 54-55). Remarkably, of 537 settlements founded by the Mormons, only 46 failed, and of those, only three failed within the first year (Jackson 1978, 69). Also, most of these failed settlements were small, with populations averaging only about 100. All told, fewer than 5000 people were ever affected by a failed settlement (Jackson 1978, 69). "The significant factor is not that 46 settlements failed, but that the marginal nature of the areas colonized by the Mormons did not lead to a much higher failure rate" (Jackson 1978, 70).

Over 100 towns were established by the Mormons within the first 10 years of the initial migration and nearly 400 within the first 30 (Hafen, Hollon, and Rister 1970, 256). By 1854, just seven years after the arrival of the first group, the Mormons "had founded San Bernardino....Genoa [Carson Valley] and Las Vegas in [present-day] Nevada, and had settlements on the Salmon River....and on the Green River..." (Hafen, Hollon, and Rister 1970, 256). The steady influx of willing and obedient Mormons into the Great Basin, combined with Brigham Young's grandiose vision of a Mormon empire, resulted in a remarkable period of settlement.

> Established in the center of a vast, unoccupied area, with a steady stream of immigrants and a devoted body of coreligionists eager to obey his every order, Brigham Young was in an admirable position to build up the empire he envisioned. And the Mormon leader was no visionary; he was, above all, a man of practical affairs with a genius for mobilizing men and resources towards the accomplishment of his purposes. His achievements in the Great Basin mark him as the West's greatest colonizer (Hafen, Hollon, and Rister 1970, 254).




Map 2 - The State of Deseret

from Comeaux 1982, 257

Mormon leaders were quick to realize that there existed a great need for an organized government and the State of Deseret was the outgrowth of this desire [see map 2]. Already by 1848 Mormon Church leaders devoted much time and energy to the question of government. Early in that year, previous to Mexico's formal recognition of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, one prominent Mormon leader explained their intentions should the Great Basin not fall into American hands. "As we are yet in possession of the soil, our destiny would be independence should Mexico maintain her old lines" (Morgan 1940, 80). Once it became clear that the area settled by the Mormons was firmly established as American territory, the question of statehood was broached.

Some at this time called for a cooperative effort with the people of California in order to create a mammoth-sized state which could be divided appropriately after admission to the Union. This would ensure, they argued, some measure of self-government for the Saints and avoid the unsavory possibility of federally appointed officials that territorial status would bring. This question of statehood *with* California will be examined in detail in the following chapter. Initially, however, most felt that attempts at statehood might be too ambitious and so by December, 1848, a memorial for the "Territory of Deseret"[4] was agreed upon and by the following May a representative was sent back to Washington DC to present the proposal.[5] Meanwhile, Brigham Young continued to tighten his grip on the lands he intended to govern.

> Around the periphery of the proposed state the Mormons soon established a number of outposts which were physical evidences of their intention to dominate the area. The most important of these outposts was San Bernardino. In 1855 it was a thriving town of 1,400 Mormons and the seat of the Mormon county of San Bernardino. Its main purpose was to establish a foothold upon the Pacific Coast as a portal of immigration for converts from Europe (Hodson 1971, 113).

A highly effective self-government organization soon began to take shape within the settled lands. By March of 1849 local governments with elected officials were organized (Morgan 1940, 82) and on March 8, a constitution was accepted by an assembly in Salt Lake City that was very similar in most respects to other state constitutions but included,

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[4] Deseret is a word from the Book of Mormon and means "honey bee," signifying hard work and industry. Hence, the "Beehive State."

[5] Eventually, due to advice received from politicians friendly to the Mormons, this initial petition was altered previous to its formal presentation before Congress so as to become a petition for statehood.

not surprisingly, an explicit guarantee of religious liberty (Morgan 1940, 87). By July of that year, a House of Representatives and Senate for the fledgling state was functioning.

That this disparate group of people, now widely scattered throughout thousands of square miles, could so easily and effectively come together to create a viable government should not be too surprising. First of all, it must be remembered that the Mormon Church is essentially a theocracy with a very organized hierarchal structure built into the Church's doctrine. It was a relatively simple matter for Church leaders to extend this religious organization into a secular realm. "The Mormons very simply had elaborated their ecclesiastical machinery into a political government" (Morgan 1940, 87). Also, many Mormons were not too far removed from their places of origin which, for many, meant New England and the British Isles. Thus, most Mormons, as opposed to their fellow westward moving settlers (many of whom had been raised on the frontier), had been born and educated in lands with a long history of law and order. This fact was reflected in the government they established among themselves. "The ordinances of the State of Deseret fully indicate the political and social maturity of the people who created them" (Morgan 1940, 68). Indeed, the Mormons stand out as an anomaly in the helter-skelter migrations of various peoples with various motives to the vast lands of the West. "The Mormons came as a closely integrated group. . . . they came to the Rocky Mountains with a motive nowhere else displayed in the history of the Western frontier" (Morgan 1940, 68). Mormon colonization was deliberate and methodical. This group had every intention of culturally, economically, and politically dominating a vast region of the American West.

With the acquisition of the Mexican Cession, the concept of "Manifest Destiny" had reached its climax. Under these circumstances, one would think that Congress would be eager to admit into the Union areas that met the desired qualifications. However, despite boasting a functional government, a well-educated and highly organized populace, and a sincere and strong desire to become a state, Deseret was not granted statehood. Indeed, the majority of Mormons would not enjoy the full rights of citizenship for another 50 years.

## Quest For Statehood

Between 1848 and 1896 there were at least eight official attempts to gain statehood (Lyman 1986, 10-13). The first attempt at statehood in 1848 was rejected primarily for three reasons. First, the proposed state of Deseret did not have the 60,000 eligible voters which was usually required for admission as a state (exceptions to this standard, however, were made previous to this time as well as subsequent to it), second, Congress had concerns over the tremendous size of the proposed state (although, again, exceptions had been and would continue to be made), and finally, and most important, the Mormons had the misfortune of applying for statehood at a time when the issue of slavery and its expansion was at its peak. Southerners were demanding that slavery be allowed to expand into new states and territories and Northerners just as adamantly insisted that it

not. Given this tense situation it is not surprising that the vast lands of the Mexican Cession remained unorganized for several months until the famous Compromise of 1850. Under this compromise, California was admitted as a free state and the territories of Utah and New Mexico were established with the understanding that "popular sovereignty" would dictate whether or not slavery would be allowed there. Much more on the Compromise of 1850 and the momentous geographical decisions made by Congress at that time will be examined in the next chapter.

It is worth noting that Mormon religious practices, specifically that of polygamy, appear to have had little to do with the fact that the Mormons were initially denied statehood. Deseret's petition just happened to coincide with a time of extreme political tension. After missing out on this first attempt, however, the practice of polygamy, coupled with a concern that Mormons, as a result of their zealous adherence to their leaders' wills, could not function effectively in the American system of politics, would prove to be major factors that would keep statehood from them for a long time.

After six mostly unhappy years as a territory, Utah again made an appeal for statehood. During these six years many federally-appointed officials had made several unflattering, exaggerated, and inflammatory reports to Congress about Mormon political solidarity and the practice of polygamy. The timing of this second attempt, therefore, could not have come at a worse time. It was during the election of 1856 that the official Republican platform promised to do away with "the twin relics of barbarism - polygamy and slavery" (Lyman 1986, 9). The presence of Utah Mormons in Washington DC petitioning for statehood only served to whip up a frenzy of unfavorable newspaper

reports and agitate the population in general. This second attempt at statehood did not have a chance. Indeed, it was only a matter of months before President Buchanan, "acting without good information or judgement" (Lyman 1986, 9), sent 3,000 US Army troops to Utah in order to put down an alleged rebellion. The "Utah War" and its impact will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters. In 1861 Mormon leaders thought that they finally had the fortune of good timing. The Southern states were seceding en mass and Brigham Young thought that certainly now the Union would eagerly welcome new states sympathetic to their cause. Unfortunately, by the time the Utah admission bill was ready in 1862, an anti-polygamy bill had been ratified and hopes of statehood were dashed. Ironically, it was the southern states who, while still part of the Union, had consistently blocked attempts to enact anti-polygamy legislation, fearing such action would set a precedent for anti-slavery legislation. Equally unsuccessful attempts at statehood followed in 1864 and 1867. At the time of the 1864 attempt, Utah's territorial delegate - and non-Mormon - John F. Kinney made an impassioned plea for Utah statehood in the halls of Congress. After relating the history of the Mormon migration and colonization and extolling at great length the virtues of the citizens of Utah Territory, Kinney questioned the logic of withholding statehood from Utah while granting it to her neighbors.

> Mr Chairman, in forming your new western states is it proposed to jump over Utah, and take Nevada, that is but an offshoot of Utah, once belonged to her western boundary, has had a territorial existence of only about three years, and has far less population than Utah? Is it proposed to take in Nebraska, lying immediately west of the Missouri River, Colorado west of it, and then take in Nevada, and leave out the most valuable and important link in your chain of States to the Pacific? Why, sir, these Territories are

> infants in age and population when compared with Utah. Fourteen years has Utah had a territorial existence, and at no period since her organization has she not had a larger resident population than either Nebraska or Colorado.
>
> In behalf of near one hundred thousand people I must protest against this unjust discrimination. . . . I ask that you do not turn them coldly away and for the third [fourth] time reject their petition and prayer. We come to you in friendship and love. We offer you our devotion, our industry, our enterprise, our wealth. . . . We present to you for a State your deserts reclaimed and fertilized by preserving industry and the sweat of uncomplaining toil. We offer you one hundred thousand people who can truthfully boast that in all their settlements is not to be found a drinking saloon, a billiard table, or a bowling alley, and who with pride point you to their cities, their churches, their school houses, their many factories, their farms, and possessions as evidences of their achievements and the results of their industry. Will you accept the offering? The Constitution invests you with the power; exercise it charitably, deal justly, and decide wisely (Congressional Globe 38th Congress 1st Session, 1173).

Utah's offering, though, as already mentioned, was rejected yet again.

By 1872, the time of the sixth attempt, a large number of "Gentiles" (the Mormon term for a non-member) had settled in the territory due in large measure to the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the discovery of mineral wealth, and the stationing of federal troops in the area (ostensibly to keep an eye on the rebellious Mormons). It was the Gentiles who played a key role in sinking subsequent attempts at statehood by insisting that the Mormons, should Utah obtain statehood, would vote as a block and deny them any real voice in the government. Despite attempts by church leaders to divide the membership along party lines, the next three attempts (1872, 1882, 1887) also failed. During this period those few Mormons who did practice polygamy faced intense harassment from federal officials and many served time in jail. That the membership of the Church at this time was still more loyal politically to their

ecclesiastical leadership than they were to the party to which they had been "called" to join is evidenced by the promises made by Mormon officials to leaders of both parties that, if they would help Utah become a state, she would reward them by becoming either a solid Democratic or Republican state respectively. Nevertheless, it was not until, faced with the loss of all their property and the imprisonment of all their leaders, the church finally disavowed polygamy that Utah was admitted as a state in 1896. Almost 30 years prior to this momentous occasion, an editorial in the Church-controlled Deseret News, while admitting a preference for statehood, stoically voiced the defiant feelings that the Mormons had developed under territorial rule.

> Utah has been settled upwards of twenty-one years, she has been in a condition of Territorial vassalage about eighteen years, and though the yoke has galled us a little occasionally, it has not hurt us. We have steadily increased in wealth; the comforts of life have multiplied around us; our growth has been continuous. Of course no people, as numerous as we are, with any spirit would prefer being in a state of tutelage to having their rights as a State. We would have been gratified to have had them. Not having them has not deprived us of happiness. The rays of the sun have gladdened and warmed the earth, the snows and the rains have fed our mountain streams and fertilized our fields and gardens, the seasons have come as regularly to us - spring, summer, autumn, and winter in their course - in our Territorial condition as if we had been a State (Deseret News editorial, July 28, 1868).

On the one hand, we can see how the *efforts* to prevent Mormons from achieving statehood had an influence on the political geography of the West. While the people of a general core region were isolated politically, other states were created around it. This in and of itself left a lasting geographic imprint on the political geography of the West. Had this pocket of politically incorrect people not existed there, it is extremely doubtful that

the western states would have taken their present shape. Also, the continued animosity between Mormons and the federal government contributed to the shaping of the West in that it influenced, as shall be seen, boundary changes that did *not* occur. On the other hand, as subsequent chapters will attest, the physical *presence* of Mormons throughout the West, even those living outside the boundaries of present day Utah, had a very real and significant influence on several western boundary-making decisions. In other words, *who* the Mormons were and *where* they settled proved to be critical factors in the shaping of the West. With this background we can now begin to piece together the full impact that the Mormon migration and settlement had on the political geography of the western states beginning with Congress' organization in 1850 of the Mexican Cession.

# Chapter 3

# The Mormon Influence on the Mexican Cession and the Boundaries of California

## The Initial Organization of the Mexican Cession

It should be kept in mind that when the first wave of Mormon pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley they were settling in an area *outside* the boundaries of the United States. As already mentioned, Mormon leaders had expressed a willingness to pursue independence from Mexico should that country "maintain her old lines" (Morgan 1940, 80), but less than a year after their arrival the Mexican Cession was obtained and the Mormons found themselves within the boundaries of the United States, albeit in the form of a vast, unorganized territory. For the next three years the hotly debated question of how to organize this land dominated a Congress seething with sectional strife. This tense period culminated with the Compromise of 1850 in which California was admitted as a free state and the Territories of Utah and New Mexico were organized under the banner of "popular sovereignty." As shall be seen, the presence of the Mormons in the Great Basin was a *pivotal* factor in this initial organization of the Mexican Cession which, of course, had a deep impact on all subsequent political organizations within that region. Indeed, it is in this famous compromise that the Mormons, barely established in their new

Zion, played their most influential and long-lasting role in the organization of the political geography of the western United States.

Before delving too deeply into the war with Mexico and its territorial impact, it seems appropriate to set the stage by briefly mentioning the organization of the Oregon Country. The United States had challenged Spain's claims to the Pacific Northwest as early as 1792 and by 1819 representatives from Spain and the United States agreed on a boundary at 42° N latitude which became "the West's longest-lived geodesic boundary" (Leonard 1970, 227). Hence, the line separating Mexico and the United States (upon independence Mexico accepted Spain's old boundary agreement) and which would become the boundary between Oregon and Idaho on the north and California, Nevada, and Utah on the south was in place *before* the Mormons reached the Great Basin and it was, except for the extreme eastern portion, never modified. Since this antecedent boundary remained largely intact following the settlement of the West, the lands to the north of it will not be considered in this thesis despite the fact that many Mormons ultimately settled there.[6] The boundaries of the states and territories *south* of the 42nd parallel, however, as shall be demonstrated, were heavily influenced by the presence of Mormons.

It should be noted, before leaving the topic of Oregon, that the United States did not necessarily have to keep the 42nd parallel as a boundary after the acquisition of the

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[6] In the final chapter, in which two hypothetical scenarios are explored, the author speculates as to how the West, including that portion north of 42°, might look absent the Mormon influence.

Mexican Cession. All the territory south of 49° to the new border with Mexico was unorganized American soil and Congress could have organized it in any way. Indeed, proposals were made to divide the whole territory into two sections divided by the same line, 36°30', that was established as part of the Missouri Compromise of 1820. This attempt at reorganization, however, as well as all others that ignored the preexisting line drawn at 42°, failed amid the heated arguments over the extension of slavery. Interestingly, if these measures, some of which were very narrowly defeated, *had* been embraced, the Mormon influence on the West would likely have been greatly minimized since their numbers were still relatively small. In the end, however, Congress in 1848 could only agree on territorial recognition for the Oregon Country. After all, the 42nd parallel had been established for nearly 30 years, most of the White settlers north of that line were American citizens, and the entire region was north of the Missouri compromise line, thus eliminating the sticky slavery issue (Leonard 1970, 232-241). Congress' inability, however, to find an acceptable compromise in terms of slavery for the new lands acquired from Mexico meant postponing the organization of that territory for another day, thus allowing the Mormons to play a crucial role in those deliberations.

Despite the "official" justifications given at the time that suggested otherwise, few historians today would argue with the premise that the Mexican War was a war of expansion on the part of the United States. Texas' complicated boundary dispute with Mexico merely served as a justification for President Polk - who had campaigned on the idea of "Manifest Destiny" - to provoke Mexico into a war that would allow America to strip territory from her. As the war progressed it became apparent, to no one's surprise,

that the United States would be in a position to obtain land from Mexico. For months the amount of land to be taken from that country fluctuated at the negotiating table and in Congress from everything to no land at all, to all the land north of Mexico City. In the end, due to a variety of reasons and some interesting quirks of history, the boundary with Mexico as it now exists (except for the Gadson Purchase) was finally agreed upon and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed by President Polk on July 4, 1848.[7] Two days after obtaining this vast, new territory, President Polk addressed Congress and urged them to waste no time in organizing it.

> The immediate establishment of territorial governments, and the extension of our laws over these valuable possessions, are deemed to be not only important, but indispensable to preserve order and the due administration of justice within their limits, to afford protection to the inhabitants, and to facilitate the development of the vast resources and wealth which their acquisition has added to our country. (Congressional Globe 30th Congress, 1st Session, 901)

Polk's instructions were much easier said than done. Congress set out immediately in 1848 to organize all the land west of the Louisiana Purchase but, due to a variety of complex factors, was only able at this time, as previously mentioned, to organize the Oregon Country. The organization of the Mexican Cession proved too troublesome and fraught with too much controversy to lend itself to any simple solution in 1848.

The task Congress faced was certainly very difficult. On the one hand, it was

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[7] For an excellent account of the establishment of this boundary and the subsequent organization of the Mexican Cession, see Glen M. Leonard's unpublished 1970 dissertation from the University of Utah entitled "Western Boundary Making: Texas and the Mexican Cession." See also Leonard's article The Mormon Boundary Question in the 1849-50 Statehood Debates, *The Journal of Mormon History* 18 no. 1 (1992) 114-136.

imperative that the land be organized as quickly as possible. With the discovery of gold, thousands were pouring into California and there was a very real and legitimate concern that, if left unorganized by Washington, this region could go the way of Texas and opt for independence. On the other hand, geographic ignorance of the area made the drawing of boundaries a troublesome task. Too, the many settlers of Spanish descent living on the upper reaches of the Rio Grande in present-day New Mexico represented a foreign population that suddenly found itself within the United States and it was uncertain what course to take with regard to them. Also, the lands of the Mexican Cession, prior to their acquisition by the United States, had been organized by Mexico into the provinces of California and New Mexico and many looked to these preexisting units as the standard by which to go by even as others sought a totally new and unique approach. Finally, the issue of slavery and its expansion into the new territories ensured that the organization of this area would be extremely difficult. Some in Congress even proposed *giving back* to Mexico the ceded lands.

> Mr. Hale said he would be willing to vote now to give back to Mexico all the territory which we have obtained from her, and that would put an end to the question. . . . We can afford to say to Mexico, 'We give you back the land; it has harmed us more than you; it has only been a bone of contention to us.' (Congressional Globe 30th Congress, 1st Session, 928)

After the previously mentioned idea of extending 36°30' across the entire region as a dividing line between slave and non-slave areas was rejected in 1848, the next most popular plan - after hours and hours of bills, amendments, amendments to amendments, resolutions, debates, and votes - to emerge from the fray called for the creation of a super-state, California, which would envelop the entire area. The champion of this proposal

was Stephen A. Douglas who argued that making the whole area a single state would settle the question of slavery (since that state would decide its own fate) and would safely ensure that the area remained part of the United States. A delay, he argued, could result in the loss of California to independence. One objection to this plan, not surprisingly, was the unwieldy size of the proposed state, an objection Douglas answered by providing assurances that future subdivisions could take place. Douglas' idea, however, was doomed to failure for two reasons. First, President Polk himself opposed the idea on the grounds that the proposed state was just too big, encompassing too much land and too many widely dispersed groups, and he encouraged its rejection. Congress, too, fretted over the size of the state and worried that it would be unable to subdivide it later on. Ultimately, though, it came down to a question of Constitutionality. The Senate Judiciary Committee in rejecting this proposal argued that:

> The power conferred by the Constitution on Congress is to admit new states, not to create them. According to the theory of our government, the creation of a state is an act of popular sovereignty, not of ordinary legislation. It is by the will of the people of whom the State is composed, assembled in convention, that it is created (Congressional Globe 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 191).

Congress could not *create* new states. It was bound to wait for the people of a would-be state to request admission and then it could decide whether or not to grant it. Momentum for a one-state organization of the Mexican Cession fizzled and support for the organization of two political units grew.

The Senate Judiciary Committee proposed that Congress "Organize a territorial Government for that portion of the Territory of California which lies west of the Sierra

Nevada, or California Mountains, and for the Territory of New Mexico, lying west of the western boundary of the State of Texas" (Congressional Globe 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 192). The Sierra Nevada were generally recognized as a good physical boundary between the California settlements and those near Santa Fe. This proposal also recognized as separate political units the two provinces that had existed previously under Mexico's rule as well as the two major population groups that were known to exist in the area. For the next several days variations on this theme were debated in Congress. There was a growing sentiment in Washington, a sentiment reflective of historical trends, which felt that centers of population should be considered when proposing new political units and most recognized in California and New Mexico two such distinct populations that were worthy of such consideration. "Arguments for separate jurisdictional units for California and New Mexico were arguments in defense of the concept of a state as a political unit, a group of people, centralized in locality, around whom extended a limited parcel of land" (Leonard 1970, 266).

As support for this sort of territorial recognition grew, the concept of *three* political units, as opposed to just two, in the Mexican Cession began to gain more support. Senator James D. Westcott of Florida was among the first to suggest that the Mexican Cession should be divided up into three political units which reflected three core areas of population. The three population centers Westcott perceived as existing in the region were as follows:

> The upper part of California would make one [region] large enough for one State, of which San Francisco would be the chief port, and the southern boundary of which would extend some miles south of that city.

> Lower California, of which San Diego would be the chief port, extending east to New Mexico, could well be another; and New Mexico west of the Rio Grande a third (Congressional Globe 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 197).

With consensus growing for this sort of territorial recognition of distinct population centers, it was only a matter of time before someone remembered that a growing band of religious zealots, forced from their settlements further east, had established themselves near the Great Salt Lake. The Mormons were first mentioned in the 30th Congress as early as December of 1848 and the political geography of the West was forever changed when Representative William Thompson of Iowa, a state through which thousands of Mormons passed on their way further west, offered a resolution requesting that the Committee on Territories investigate the possibility of "dividing the territory of Upper California, as to organize and extend a distinct territorial government over that portion of said Territory which includes the white settlements in the vicinity of Salt Lake" (Congressional Globe 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 26). The Committee, however, "made an adverse report thereon" (Congressional Globe 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 147) and the matter was dropped. A month later, however, interest in the Mormons was revived when Congressman Henry W. Hilliard of Alabama offered a plan on the House floor which called for the admission of a smaller California west of the Sierra Nevada and north of 34°30', the extension of Texas west to the Pacific Coast and consisting of all the non-California territory south of 36°30', and all the remaining land to be organized into "a territory, bearing the name of Utah" [8] (Congressional Globe 30th Congress, 2nd Session,

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[8] Utah Historian Milton R. Hunter describes the origin of the word "Utah" as follows:
(continued...)

320). Hilliard's idea, however, due in large measure to the opposition generated by his proposed extension of Texas, was doomed to the same fate as that of all the other state and territorial plans to come before the 2nd Session of the 30th Congress: it failed. Washington simply was not able at this time to find an acceptable answer to all the complex questions that accompanied this issue. It would be left, therefore, to the 31st Congress to deal with the difficult task of organizing the Mexican Cession. Although it failed to find an acceptable plan, the 30th Congress was able to clarify somewhat its thinking on boundaries. Most agreed that it would be important to recognize distinct centers of population. "Congress decided that eventually, when it formed governments in the Mexican Cession, it should follow the basic 'rule' of state-making which recognizes a central population core" (Leonard 1970, 272). Also, while only making a brief appearance in the endless debates of the 30th Congress, the Mormons had become a factor that the 31st Congress would be forced to recognize.

In the meantime, both the people of California and the Mormon settlers near the Great Salt Lake had grown impatient with Congress' inability to organize the Mexican Cession. As discussed in the previous chapter, a memorial for statehood for "Deseret" had been agreed upon by the Mormon leadership as early as December 1848 and by May of 1849 a representative had been sent to Washington to present the proposal. In

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[8](...continued)
"Probably the Congressman knew nothing of the word 'Deseret' nor of its meaning; therefore, they named this western region after the Ute Indians who had resided here for ages. The Spaniards had called this region 'Utah (Yuta),' and the trappers had called it 'the land of the Utes.' Congress officially christened it . . . Utah" (Hunter 1946, 290).

September and October of that same year, delegates gathered in Monterey, California for the purpose of creating a State Constitution and petitioning Congress for admission as a state. The 31st Congress now had even more reasons to quickly find a way to organize the Mexican Cession.

California's Boundaries

The 48 delegates representing the ten Mexican provinces of California who convened in Monterey in September of 1849 faced two questions that demanded their immediate attention: first, should California request territorial status or should it seek admission to the Union as a state, and second, should California seek admission as one political unit, or did its size dictate that at least two should be formed? The issue of slavery played a key role in the subsequent debate over these two questions. The delegates almost unanimously agreed that slavery should not be allowed in California. It was therefore successfully argued that statehood was the best course to pursue since that would allow California the right to decide the slave question for herself. Territorial status, on the other hand, would leave the question to Congress. Extending this same issue of slavery to the second question, it was agreed that California should seek recognition as one political unit, as opposed to two, thus ensuring that all of the state, particularly its provinces lying south of 36° 30', would not at some future time become a

slave region. After gaining admission as one whole, free state, it was believed, slavery would never be allowed to exist anywhere in California.[9] Having successfully settled these two questions, it was a relatively simple matter to draw up a constitution for the proposed state using the recently-completed Iowa State Constitution as a model. The real debate started when it came time to define the boundaries of the proposed state of California.

Three general proposals for California's boundaries were offered early on in the convention and the delegates soon became deadlocked. The first proposal called for a California that extended all the way to the crest of the Rocky Mountains with justification for such a boundary being provided by a line Spain had drawn in 1768. (A proposal very similar to this, it will be remembered, had been offered by Stephen A. Douglas in Washington the previous year and it was rejected on the grounds that Congress had no right to *create* a state.) These big-state proponents argued that this was California's historic size and that neither they nor Congress had any right to dismember it. A second camp argued for a medium-sized state with the eastern boundary being drawn through the middle of the "vast desert" that lay between the Sierra Nevada and the Rocky Mountains at approximately the 116th meridian. Their justification for this line stemmed from the Mexican boundary of her two provinces, California and New Mexico, which was understood to be in this vicinity. A final group of delegates called for a smaller

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[9] It is interesting today to note that even California's first delegates realized that in the future California may need to be divided. Said William Gwinn, one of the delegates, "When the population comes, they [Congress] will require that this state shall be divided" (Browne 1850, 198).

California, one consisting only of the territory west of the Sierra Nevada. They pointed out that the ten districts represented by the delegates to the convention were all found west of this mountain range and that it provided an ideal natural boundary. Several days of intense debate over these boundaries followed. Finally, on October 10, the delegates agreed to petition Congress for a state of California that stretched all the way to the Rocky Mountains.

The question suddenly became unsettled and the convention was thrown into a frenzy when someone recognized the fact that the Mormons, newly settled near the Great Salt Lake, had not been represented at the convention. This fact created two problems for the delegates who were desirous to obtain statehood for California as quickly as possible. First, the mere fact that Mormon representatives had not been present at this convention jeopardized its legitimacy. Delegates feared that Congress, upon learning that the Mormons had been left out, would reject California's petition. Early on in the convention the delegates had determined that California would be a free state. Without Mormon participation, the southern states could theoretically argue that the principle of popular sovereignty had been ignored and thereby block California's admittance on those grounds (Leonard 1970, 304). One small-California advocate imagined how Congress might react to a large-California proposal.

> You have no right to include all that territory. It contains a vast population as much entitled to respect as you are, amounting to thirty or forty thousand souls, twelve or fifteen hundred miles remote from your seat of government - out of reach of your laws or authority, and impossible for them to be represented in your legislature. We must consider their rights and interests as well as yours. . . . we are not willing to include the Mormons in the proposition of the State of California. Theirs is a distinct

> proposition, originating from a distinct population, having distinct interests (Browne 1850, 177).

"What could the large-state proponents say to this most basic of American arguments, this recognition of the elementary principle that a state is formed around a distinct population core?" (Leonard 1970, 307)

The second - and apparently more vexing - problem created by the recognition that Mormons were living in the Great Basin was financial. The California delegates believed the Mormon population in Salt Lake in 1849 to be around 30,000 (a great exaggeration), which would have entitled them to approximately 15 state senators and 30 members of the assembly. It was estimated that it would cost California over $10,000 dollars in travel expenses to bring such a delegation across roughly 900 miles of desert. One delegate "decided it would be economically impractical and inconvenient to grant the Mormons their American right to be heard" (Leonard 1970, 306). He exclaimed:

> [Let us] exclude the Mormons whatever we do. Their influence would be most injurious. They would make the taxes of this State burdensome to every man in it; no citizen of California desires that we shall have any social or political connexion [*sic*] with them (Browne 1850, 446).

The delegates to the convention who favored a small California effectively used these dilemmas created by the presence of Mormons in the Great Basin to resurrect their own plans. Accentuating the problems listed above, they effectively weakened support for a large California.

Large-state proponents still clung to their fading hopes by arguing that it would take months to bring Mormon delegates to California and that they really did not need to

be represented at all. The idea that every man within the boundaries of a new state must be represented in the formation of that state, argued William M. Gwinn, a large-state proponent, "is a new doctrine, never known or preached before" (Browne 1850, 428). Worry over Congressional disapproval and burdensome costs, however, succeeded in turning many delegates away from their large-state support. Even Gwinn, in his memoirs, recalled that:

> The question was whether to include within our boundaries the whole of the country acquired from Mexico . . . or whether the boundaries should be restricted somewhat to the population of the country at that time. The objection to the first proposition was that it included an empire within the boundaries of the State, including the whole of the Mormon settlement at Salt Lake, which was not represented in the convention, and it would be impossible for Congress to accept such a boundary (Ellison 1940, 13).

Having successfully used the Mormons in the Great Basin to overturn the convention's large-state decision, the small-staters needed only to weaken support for a medium-sized state in order to obtain their desires. Those who supported a medium-sized state had the benefit of historical precedent on their side. After all, Mexico had divided California from New Mexico with the same line that they proposed running through the middle of the Great Basin. Medium-state advocates also claimed that potentially valuable mining areas existed east of the Sierras (Browne 1850, 187). Small-staters, however, argued the land east of the Sierra Nevada simply was not desirable and that California would be better off without it. Delegates like Convention Chairman Robert Semple espoused the benefits of a border at or at least very close to the impressive Sierra Nevada range.

> It is evidently not desirable that the State of California should extend her territory further east than the Sierra Nevada. That is the great natural boundary; better than military fortifications, to secure us from any danger in the interior. Beyond that we do not desire; . . . It is the limit formed by nature for the State (Browne 1850, 199).

John McDougal eloquently offered the following:

> Nature, sir, has marked out for us the boundary line of California. God has designated her limits, and we ought not to go beyond the line traced by the Omnipotent hand. The snow range of the Sierra Nevada separates communities of this country: one community living upon the eastern side and the other upon the western; they can have no connexion [*sic*], either social or political. I therefore am opposed to any line which proposes to connect the two or bring them under the same government and the same laws. . . . (Browne 1850, 426).

Eventually sentiment was turned in favor of a "small" California. Having overwhelmed the arguments of the medium-staters, all that was left for the small-state proponents was to reach a consensus on whether California's eastern boundary should be a straight line *approximating* the Sierra Nevada, or the crest of the mountains themselves.

Early on in the debates it appeared that the natural boundary would be adopted. Few could argue with the fact that the Sierra Nevada provided a near impenetrable wall between the California settlements on the west and the inhospitable desert on the east and so a boundary at its crest seemed a logical choice. Some argued, however, that such a boundary would exclude from the state potentially valuable land on the eastern slope of the Sierras and that a natural boundary would be an insult to the nature of Americans. Said one golden-tongued delegate:

> I am not particular as to natural boundaries. I do not regard it as indispensable that we should designate the line proposed by some gentlemen here, the summit of the Sierra Nevada. Sir, we know no natural boundaries; the American people know no natural boundaries. They think

> as Napoleon did. When a general of his spoke of the difficulty of crossing the Alps, his reply was, 'Sir, the Alps don't exist.' I say the Sierra Nevada sinks before the genius and enterprise of the American people. I am willing to extend our line to the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada; I am willing to take in that great region of mines which I believe exists there, and which will contribute to the wealth of this country. You will see, sir, what difficulties are to the American people, if you include that region. You will see them creeping up the gulches of the west and meeting with their brothers on the eastern side; and they will be one community, bound by the same social and political contract (Browne 1850, 430).

Another delegate, William E. Shannon, an Irish lawyer, pointed out that the straight lines he proposed were the current boundary-making line of choice for the country. "The manner of fixing the boundaries there [Missouri] is precisely similar to what I have presented to the House - following degrees of latitude and taking meridional lines of longitude" (Browne 1850, 190). Shannon also stressed that California's shape was better served using a line of longitude as well as a straight dog-leg line from there to the Colorado River.

> It brings the state within reasonable limits - very nearly the same limits proposed. . . . - [which] follow the crest of the Sierra Nevada. But it makes a more distinct and perfect boundary line, and possesses the further advantage of giving regularity to the width of the state. If you observe, it follows nearly in a parallel line along the coast. It makes the territory nearly of an equal width at the northern and southern points. It follows the coast in its southeast bend, nearly in a parallel direction (Browne 1850, 170).

Shannon also directed the attention of natural-boundary supporters to the fact that that sort of boundary runs into trouble south of the Sierras.

> However well-determined, however plain and distinct the summit line of the Sierra Nevada may be . . . you will see that it crosses it [the map] only as far south as the 35th degree of N. latitude. It leaves a great stretch of country at the southern boundary . . . below that . . . there is not a chain of

> mountains that could be followed as a distinct line. The whole country there is a region of mountains. . . . There is no regular summit line that could possibly be followed. Then you have there a most indirect line, you have no boundary at all (Browne 1850, 192).

Ultimately, proponents of geometric boundaries won out and the delegates sent to Congress a proposal that was destined to become the boundaries of California as we know them today. That the delegates to this convention would have come up with these boundaries *without* there being a Mormon presence in the Great Basin is highly unlikely. Instead of proposing, as was originally agreed upon, an immense state of California - and we can only speculate as to what Congress would have done with that - the delegates were compelled, because of the Mormons, to come up with an alternative plan. The result is California as she now exists. In an "Address to the People of California" on October 13, 1849, the convention delegates emphasized the point which had led to so much contention and ultimately to the accepted boundaries of California: "No portion of territory is included, the inhabitants of which were not or might not have been legitimately represented in the Convention, under the authority by which it was convened" (Browne 1850, 474).

Almost three months after California's state convention adjourned, and over six months after Deseret's official appeal for statehood, a Mormon delegate from Salt Lake City, Amasa Lyman, arrived in San Francisco and informed the California governor that they, the Mormons, wished to be included in the deliberations over government for the area. Lyman expressed regret over having missed the Monterey meeting of September and October but suggested that perhaps a second meeting could be held. It turns out that

the Church leaders in Salt Lake City had accepted a proposal by President Zachary Taylor, communicated to them via an Indian Agent, to join with the California settlements in the creation of a very large state. Taylor had been elected in 1848 and he, like Douglas, hoped that by combining the two population groups into one super-state, the slave question in the territories could be settled. What was needed, though, was for the two groups to join together in their appeals for statehood since, as noted, Congress was not able to create states but only admit them. Some Mormons had earlier suggested this course of action and viewed this message from President Taylor as an opportunity to gain statehood, thus ensuring self-determination. The proposal brought by Lyman suggested that, after two years, the proposed super-state could divide in two and each could then go their separate ways (Leonard 1970, 319-121).

California governor Peter H. Burnett, however, was not inclined to accept this proposal. After all, California had already exerted a great effort to reach the point they were at, the citizens of the state having already accepted the state constitution, and he did not relish the thought of having to start over. He also worried that California's boundaries, which had been the major sticking point at the state convention, would be greatly disrupted. Lyman made it clear that, in keeping with *Deseret's* proposed configuration, the Mormons favored the *crest* of the Sierra Nevada as the future boundary between the two and they would also push hard for San Bernardino and California's southern coast when the time came for separation. For these reasons Burnett encouraged California's first legislature, then in session, to reject Lyman's proposal. The legislature obliged and much to the chagrin of Presidents Brigham Young and Zachary Taylor, the

plan failed (Leonard 1970, 319-321 and Leonard 1992, 128-129).

California's rejection of this plan was a harsh blow for the Mormons since a prime opportunity for obtaining statehood was lost. Few Mormons then would have dreamed that it would be nearly 50 years before statehood for them would be realized. This rejection, coupled with California's own successful petition for statehood, also spelled doom for the State of Deseret. The Mormons had sought as part of Deseret land to the north of the 42nd parallel, an already well-established boundary. Deseret also sought for a boundary at the crest of the Sierra Nevada, not to mention much of southern California itself. The 31st Congress, upon consideration of California's and Deseret's contradictory claims, ultimately resolved them in California's favor.

## The Compromise of 1850

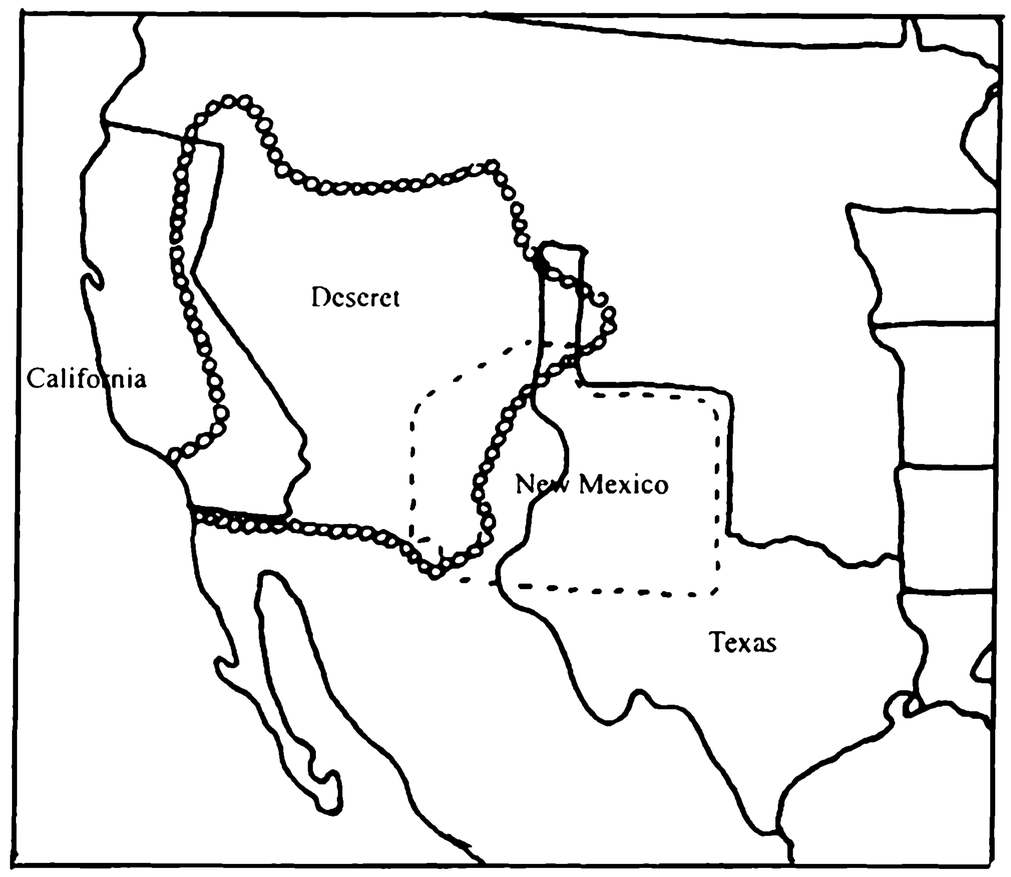
As the 31st Congress convened on December 3, 1849, it immediately set out to tackle the difficult task of organizing the Mexican Cession, a task which the previous two Congress' had been unable to accomplish. The complicating factor in the debates was slavery or, more specifically, representation. How could the acquired lands in the West be organized so as to maintain the sectional balance in the Senate that had existed for so long? Also, how could this be accomplished while still granting political recognition to distinct population groups? Early in the session Representative Fredrick P.

Stanton of Tennessee summarized the task before them:

> There is the question of limits - the question concerning the number, character, and location of the inhabitants - the cognate question of the admission of Deseret and New Mexico, with the unsettled boundary of Texas - and finally, there is the great question of disturbing the present comparative equilibrium of the northern and southern states, and the admission of a principle - the establishment of a precedent - which shrouds the future of one section of this Union in impenetrable darkness. At this delicate and dangerous crisis, while the two sections of the Union are exasperated against each other almost to the point of rupture, all these momentous questions are precipitated upon us (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, 349).

Congress also had to deal with three separate petitions for political recognition that had emerged from the lands of the Mexican Cession. The Mormons were the first to petition for recognition with their proposed State of Deseret being presented in Washington in the Spring of 1849. California followed with her own petition in the Fall of that year and in May of 1850, New Mexico formally appealed for political recognition (Leonard 1992, 117). The boundaries that were proposed by these would-be states, however, greatly conflicted with each other and with Texas' historic claim and so it was left to Congress to sort it all out [see map 3].

Northerners were calling for immediate admission of California as a free state but many Southerners were just as adamant in their opposition to it. In the first place, California, as it had been defined in her convention, included territory south of 36°30' which the Missouri Compromise had declared to be the domain of slavery. Many Southerners, including Jefferson Davis, insisted that this line be maintained. "I here assert that never will I take less than the Missouri Compromise line extended to the Pacific Ocean, with the specific recognition of the right to hold slaves in the territory



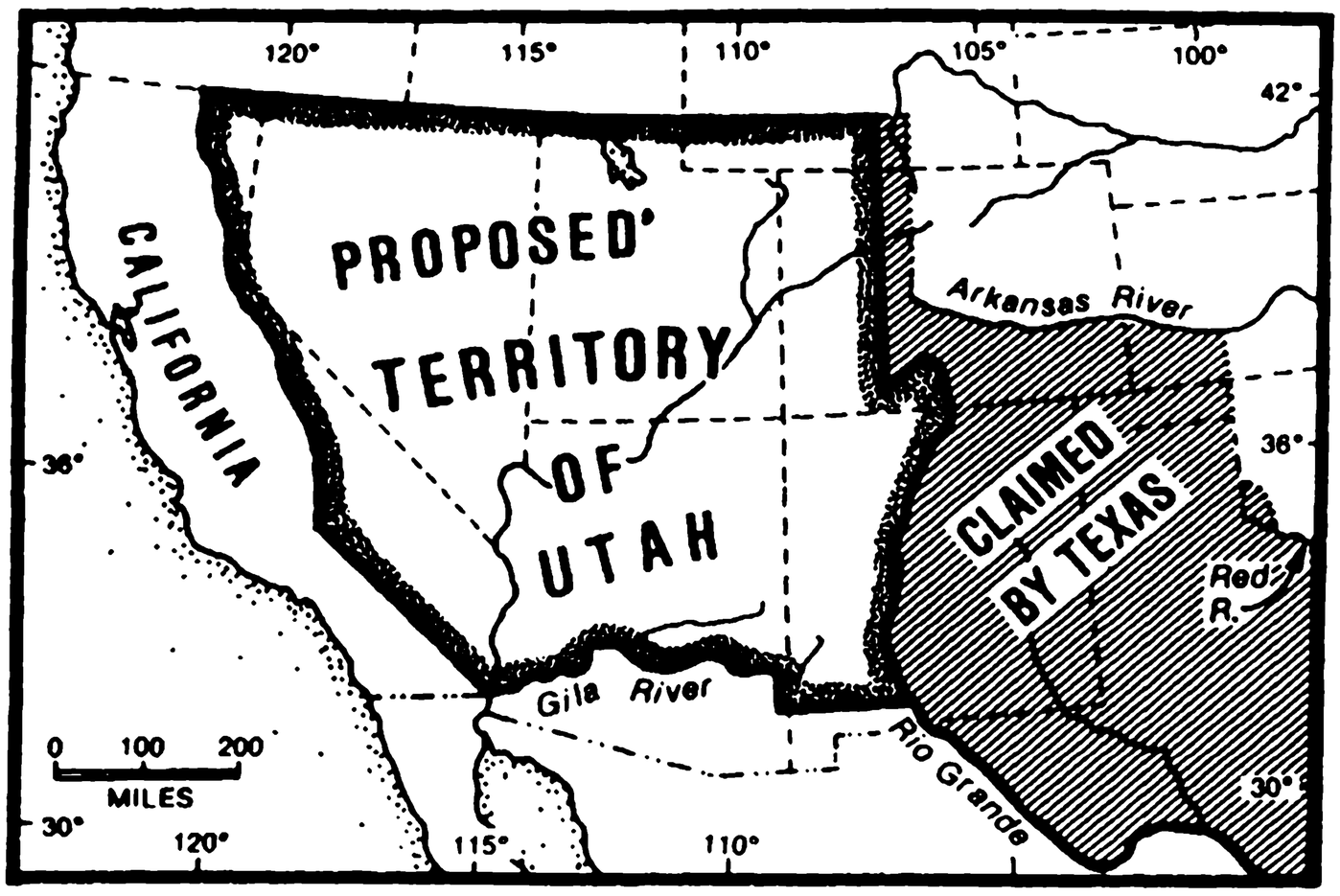

Map 3 - Conflicting Claims of California, Texas, New Mexico, and Deseret: 1848-1850

below that line . . . " (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, 249). The second major objection to California's admittance stemmed from the inevitable upset in the regional balance that would result. The addition of two senators from the free state of California, Southerners feared, would forever turn the balance of power in favor of the North and quash any hopes of additional slave territory.

By the summer of 1850 it had become apparent that plans for the organization of three political units would win out. Alternate plans were proposed, particularly by Southerners who desperately sought for an assurance of slavery expansion, but most agreed that three distinct populations, Californians, Hispanos in New Mexico, and Mormons, existed in the Mexican Cession and that three corresponding political units

should be created. Henry Clay and other compromisers hoped to accomplish this by passing a massive bill a that would have settled all the questions involved: the admittance of California, the organization of Utah and New Mexico, and the Texas boundary question. Passage of this "omnibus bill," however, proved impossible and Congress took up consideration of each bill separately.

Stephen A. Douglas, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories, distinguished himself as the most influential lawmaker in regards to these difficult questions of 1850. Douglas' committee reported bills as early as March which called for the creation of distinct political units for California, New Mexico, and Utah, with popular sovereignty, of which Douglas was a well known proponent, providing the answer to the slavery question. It took six months, however, for Congress to finally reach an agreement. In the interim, several alternate bills and about three dozen amendments were proposed (Leonard 1970, 332). Among the plans debated during this period were calls for, among other things, the creation of two Californias, a New Mexico, and a Utah; three Californias, a New Mexico, and a Utah; one California and the extension of Texas so as to divide the whole territory into two super-states; one California and one New Mexico; and, in conjunction with various proposals for the organization of the Mexican Cession, the splitting up of Texas into two, three, and even four states (Leonard 1970, 333). Jefferson Davis even proposed giving Texas all her historical claim and then designating the rest of the Mexican Cession, with the exception of California, as the Territory of Utah [see map 4]. He may have been interested in seeing Texas obtain all her territorial claims by completely eliminating New Mexico or, perhaps, he foresaw Utah embracing slavery.




Map 4 - Jefferson Davis' Proposed Boundaries of Utah
from Comeaux 1983, 246

Or:

> Possibly Davis was doing nothing more than trying to confuse the issue to kill the compromise. The only objection to Davis' idea that was openly discussed was the fact that California was to lose some land east of the Sierra Nevada, but the unstated objections were quite strong, and the proposal was rejected . . . (Comeaux 1983, 246).

Much of the debate in the Summer of 1850 focused on the complicated question of Texas' boundary with New Mexico. This contentious issue was finally resolved on September 6, 1850 when two Senate bills calling for the organization of a government for New Mexico and a settlement of the boundary question were combined and accepted in the House. Having overcome the first obstacle, lawmakers were left with the question of what to do with the conflicting claims of California, New Mexico, and the Mormons.

This dilemma had already been discussed for weeks but the successful resolution of the Texas boundary question made it possible for the final pieces of the Compromise of 1850 to come together.

The next issue that demanded the most attention from Congress, understandably, was that of California. Her exploding population, fine ports on the Pacific, and proposal for statehood that included territory *south* of 36°30' made it an urgent issue in Washington. Some in Congress feared that failure to act quickly on this question could result in an independent Pacific nation, enveloping Oregon, California, and northern Mexico, that could eventually rival a dis-united Atlantic nation (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, 1171). Southerners immediately took the offensive in combating the proposal to accept California as a free state questioning the legitimacy of the California convention and demanding that slavery be allowed to exist below the Missouri Compromise line. Alternate plans were proposed, many of which called for the extension of 36°30' all the way across the Mexican Cession. Southerners were dismayed at the prospect of forever losing access to the Pacific and even James Buchanan, who would soon be president, came out in favor of extending the line. Northerners, however, would not budge. They insisted that California, with her proposed boundaries, had been properly and legitimately organized by her citizens and Congress was obliged to accept her as is. Objections to California's size were answered by the observations that Texas was still larger than California and, because of vast deserts and mountains, the amount of arable land in California was comparable to that of states like Missouri. Most Congressmen were also enamored with California's boundary request noting that the

proposed state made perfect geographic sense. Said Daniel Webster, "If the question were now before us, and we were ourselves to prescribe boundaries for California, we could not make any boundaries for that State better than are provided for by her own constitution" (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, 517). The decision to admit California - all of California - as a free state was a bitter pill for the South to swallow and did little to bridge the growing rift between the North and the South. Mississippi Senator Henry S. Foote summarized the South's feelings for this action "as a gross, unfeeling, insulting attempt to betray and trample under feet their dearest and most vital interests." He continues:

> I have no hesitation in declaring it as my solemn dispassionate conviction, that if California is dragged into the Union in the mode now proposed, the southern States of the Confederacy will feel that all hope of fraternal compromise has become extinct, and that such intolerable oppression has been already imposed upon them as to justify, nay, to demand secession from the Union . . . (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, 366).

Nevertheless, the decision was made to accept California into the Union. The fact that the California question demanded immediate attention and that it was ultimately decided to accept her, along with her proposed boundaries, meant that the Mormon petition for Deseret, despite reaching Washington *before* California's petition for statehood, was doomed to drastic modification. By default Deseret's proposed western boundary with California and her access to the sea were nullified. Deseret's northern claim which extended into Oregon Country, and across an already well-established boundary, was likewise dismissed. The only boundary question remaining was that of Utah and New Mexico.

It should be noted that there were a few attempts, mostly by Southern Congressmen, to organize the Mexican Cession so as to exclude the Mormons from political recognition altogether. Perhaps this stemmed from a suspicion that the Mormons, who came primarily from New England, the upper Midwest, and Northern Europe, would almost certainly prohibit slavery in any territory granted them. Perhaps some in Congress were prejudiced by the fact that many Mormons were foreign-born. Perhaps, too, there were some early seeds of anti-Mormonism being planted in the 31st Congress. On February 22, 1850, John Wentworth, Representative from Illinois, presented a petition from certain citizens of that state:

> praying Congress to protect the rights of American citizens while traveling through the valley of the Salt Lakes, and setting forth other matters concerning the treasonable designs of the Salt Lake Mormons. Also, representing that some of the prominent movers for the organization of a State Government in Deseret are in favor of a Kingly Government, are robbers and murderers, and that these men are all in favor of polygamy &c., &c.

Wentworth summarized the petition as "a remonstrance from the State of Illinois against the admission into the Union of the Salt Lake Mormons, as a distinct political organization" (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, 413). Note also the following proposals from Congressmen who offered plans which would have prevented the Mormons from procuring any lands to govern. First, William A. Richardson of Illinois proposed that only two units, California and New Mexico, should be organized in the Mexican Cession (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, 1148). He gave no explanation for this blatant disregard for the Mormon presence in the Great Basin. Representative Henry W. Hilliard of Alabama similarly proposed a California which

would extend north of 36°30' across the entire Great Basin to the Rockies. Besides settling the slave question, Hilliard extolled the virtues of his plan because:

> . . . by giving to the new state of California all the territory known as Upper California, north of the line of 36°30', we should escape the difficulty of legislating for the inhabitants of the territory called Utah. He (Hilliard) did not suppose that we could ever consent to admit the Mormons into this Union as the people of a distinct state. Was it to be supposed that we should allow the inhabitants of Utah to organize a State government, and to come into the Union? - to send a Representative to this Hall, and two Senators to the other Chamber, to take part in our deliberations, and sitting side by side with Senators from Massachusetts, from New York, from Virginia, from Georgia, to determine, by their votes, the destiny of this great country? The State of Utah! When could it become a state?" (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, 1185)

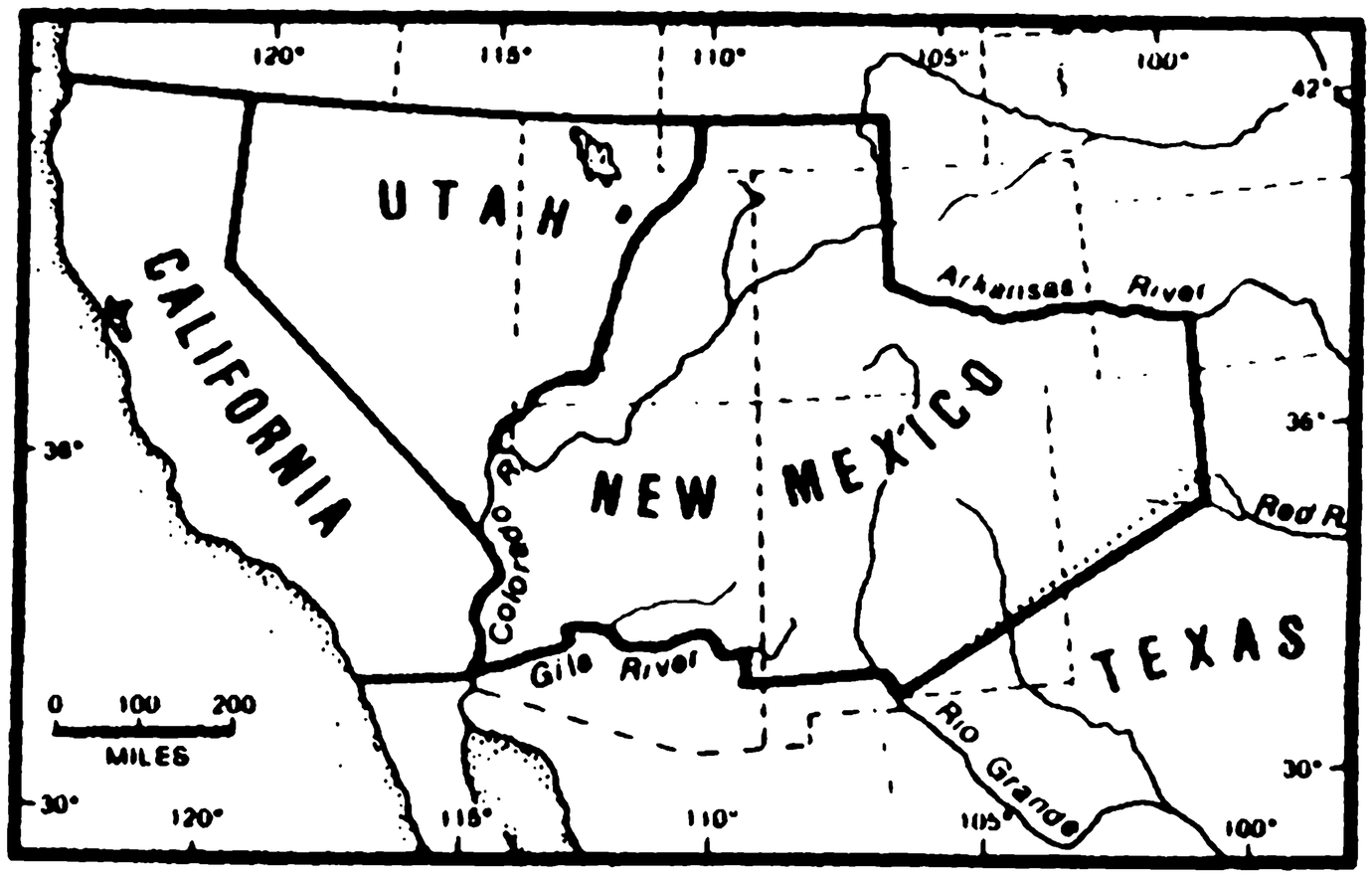
It would appear that Hilliard did not consider the residents of Utah to be his equals. Senator John Bell of Tennessee apparently shared Hilliard's views on the question of allowing the Mormons to govern themselves. He proposed a plan which would have created a California and a New Mexico leaving a vast region between the two to be left for future subdivision. Although the Mormons constituted the only sizeable population in the proposed territory, Bell made it clear that he was not interested in allowing the Mormons to govern it just yet.

> This is proposed, upon the idea that it is not proper or expedient to give any assurance to that peculiar people; the Mormons, by providing a separate territorial government for them, or to hold out any expectation that they will ever be admitted into the Union as a separate State. It may be proper that they should be admitted; but till we know more of their policy, designs, and institutions - I speak not exclusively of religious institutions - I should think that no Senator would be disposed to do more for them than to extend to them an adequate protection" (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, 438).

Bell's intentions, perhaps, as Glen Leonard points out, were accomplished when non-

Mormons were appointed as territorial officials in Utah (Leonard 1970, 382). Despite these attempts to deny Mormons a chunk of the Mexican Cession, Congress, for the most part, was willing to recognize that a distinct group existed in a territory that California had not claimed and that was too distant from the settlements of New Mexico. Since there was much unoccupied territory between the settled portions of Utah and New Mexico, the decision had to be made as to where to draw the line between them.

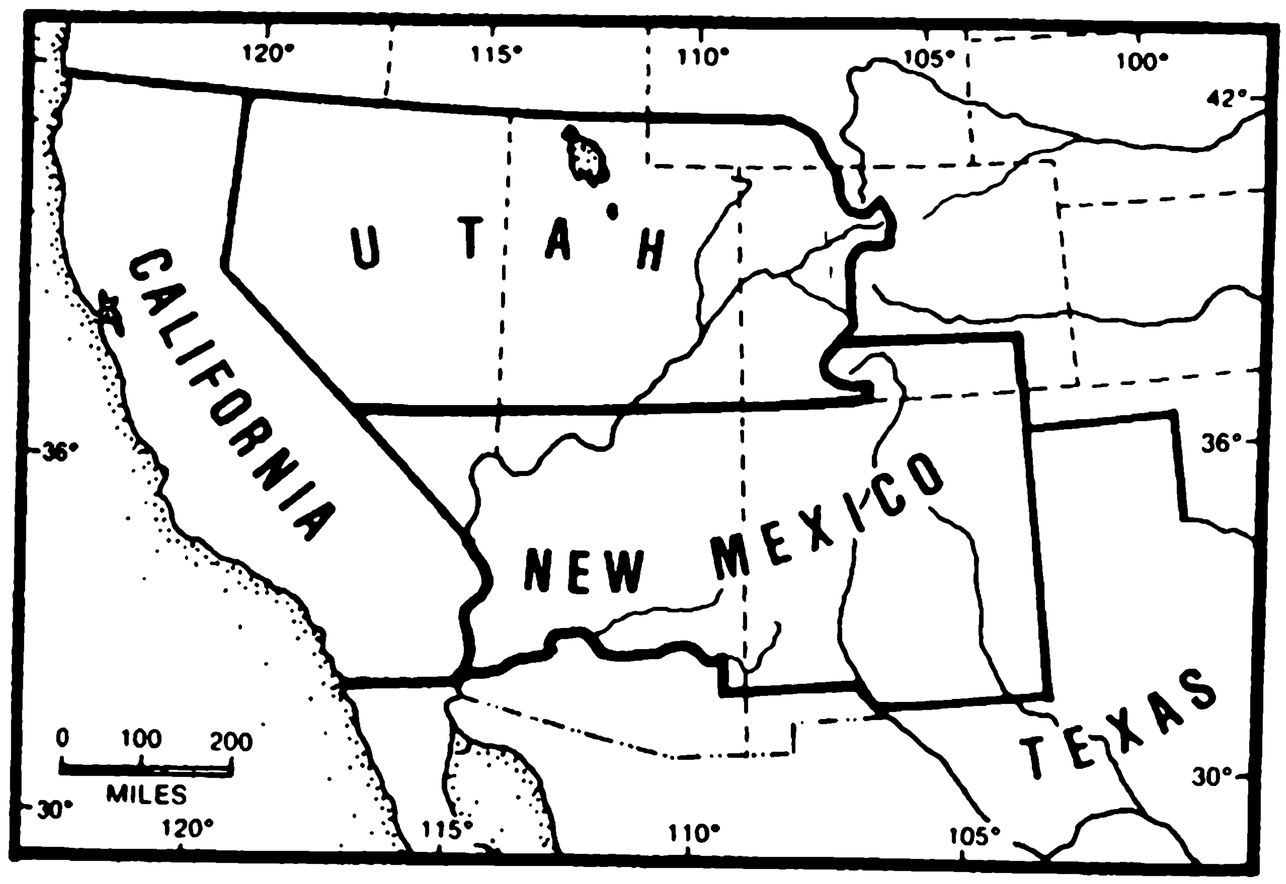
Because the Mormons, in their proposed State of Deseret, had relied so heavily on natural boundaries, many in Congress thought it fitting that at least in her border with New Mexico this type of boundary should be employed. One popular idea proposed by Representative John A. McClernand of Illinois called for the line to be drawn along the Colorado River at 35° N. latitude, then north along that river and its tributary the Virgin to its easternmost branch, then due north to the summit of the ridge which divides the waters flowing westerly into the Great Basin and easterly into the Colorado basin and along this ridge to the 42nd parallel (Congressional Globe 31st Congress 1st Session, 628, 29) [map 5]. Other proposals, including Stephen A. Douglas', called for adoption of the same line McLernand proposed in the north but, rather than following the Virgin and Colorado Rivers, the boundary would remain as the dividing ridge between the Great Basin and the Colorado River Basin which, according to the maps being used at the time, ran in an east-west direction from about 113° W. longitude to the Sierras (Congressional Globe 31st Congress 1st Session, 947). While integrating the Mormon preference for natural boundaries in these proposals, the Congressmen who suggested them were nevertheless disregarding the natural boundaries that the Mormons themselves had




Map 5 - Mclernend's Proposed Boundaries for Utah
modified from Comeaux 1983, 243

requested. The eastern boundary the Mormons had requested for Deseret lay at the summit of the *Rockies*, some four to five degrees of longitude to the east of McLernand and Douglas' proposed dividing ridge. Ultimately this line *was* accepted and at least here a remnant of Deseret's original boundary endured. Hope for a natural boundary in the south, however, was soon dashed.

Douglas eventually recognized that the mountain ridge separating the waters of the Colorado River and the Great Basin was uncertain and so he modified his plan by suggesting that the 38th parallel be used to define Utah's southern border. Douglas wanted a definite and precise line but he also demonstrated his desire to include as many Mormons in the territory as he could. Defending his proposal for 38°N. Latitude, Douglas, referring to the Mormon settlements, noted that the 38th parallel "would include




Map 6 - The Compromise of 1850
from Comeaux 1983, 251

them all" (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, 1482 appendix). Jefferson Davis then pointed out that there were Mormon settlements south of this line and he thought it best to move it further south. By a narrow margin of 26 to 27, a proposal to make Utah's southern boundary 36°30' was rejected. Eventually, a majority agreed on a compromise at 37° N. latitude (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, 1483, 84 appendix) [map 6]. This particular boundary decision will be examined in greater detail in chapter 5.

In the end, California got exactly what it wanted in the Compromise of 1850. New Mexico, who's constitution of 1850 suggested eastern and western boundaries at 100°and at 111° west longitude respectively, ended up losing much territory to Texas on the east but gained lands well beyond 111° in the west, giving her much territory beyond

the easy reach of Santa Fe. The Mormons ended up with a territory very much different from the Deseret they had envisioned. Since Congress was attempting in 1850 to draw boundaries around the three distinct populations of the southwest, it is conceivable that Deseret could have become more of a reality if the Mormons had been a little quicker in colonizing it.

> Had San Bernardino been a flourishing Mormon metropolis by 1850, had Carson City or Las Vegas become a Mormon regional capital a decade later, had Fort Bridger or Fort Lemhi developed into substantial outposts, or had Colorado's southern San Luis Valley been dominated by a Mormon Manassa colony, the Mormon Corridor might have defined a different state of Utah. . . . Brigham Young's settlement program for filling up Deseret came too late with too little (Leonard 1992, 135, 136).

The Compromise of 1850 left a permanent mark on the political geography of the West. This compromise, however, was not intended to be the final word on western boundaries. It was as much a political truce on the extension of slavery as it was an organization of political units and further subdivisions were anticipated. The compromise did, however, establish boundaries that would endure and the presence of Mormons in the West played a key role in the decisions that were made. The very existence of a territory in the Mexican Cession independent of the settlements in either California or New Mexico is the direct result of Mormon colonization there. The configuration of the state of California as we know it today very likely would not have materialized had the Mormons not been where they were. In short, the Mormons had already left an indelible mark on the political geography of the West just three years after making their first appearance there. Mormons would continue to influence western boundary-making in the ensuing years.

# Chapter 4

# The Mormon Influence on the Boundaries of Nevada

## The Mormon Settlement of Nevada

Nevada, perhaps, provides us with the clearest example of how the presence of Mormons influenced the political geography of the West. Not only did the Mormon presence influence the *boundaries* of this state, but its very existence came about as a direct result of the fact that the Mormons had settled where they did. This chapter provides a brief history of the early settlement of Nevada followed by an examination of Nevada's boundaries and the impact Mormons had on them.

The two most important centers of early settlement in Nevada, the Carson Valley and the Las Vegas region, both of which went on to become by far the most populated and important areas of the state, were initially settled by Mormons. Just three years after the first Mormon pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley, a small group of Mormons, encouraged by the growing numbers of prospectors heading west, set out to establish a trading post at a strategic point just west of a vast, inhospitable desert and east of the last major obstacle, the Sierra Nevada. In 1850 this trading post, "the first settlement of any kind in Nevada" (Hulse 1972, 67), was established in the Carson Valley. By 1851

another group of Mormons, intent on farming the valley, had arrived and the settlement took on more permanence. Also about this time a few Gentile prospectors in search of gold and other precious metals began to trickle into the Carson Valley from the newly created state of California. Although clearly within the boundaries of Utah Territory, these settlers, Mormon farmers and Gentile miners, were isolated politically. The California state capital was not too distant but the Sierra Nevada provided a substantial barrier. On the other hand, there was nary a settlement between "Mormon Station," as the community had come to be called, and Salt Lake City, a distance of some 500 miles.[10] To compensate for this isolation, Mormons and Gentiles joined together to create a squatter government which worked adequately for a few months (Hulse 1972, 69-71).

Difficulties between the two major factions emerged, however, as more and more miners continued to stream into western Utah Territory from California. In 1853 a number of Gentiles circulated a petition which called for the Carson Valley to be annexed by California. Brigham Young, fearing the loss of part of Utah Territory and in an effort to appease the Gentiles there, responded by creating a separate county for the residents of the valley. He also sent Orson Hyde, a prominent church leader, to the Carson Valley as a probate judge in 1855 and instructed him to arrange for local elections. The fact that all elected officials but one were Mormon, however, did little to assuage the Gentiles' discontent. Brigham Young also sent an additional 60-70 Mormon families to the Carson

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[10] From 1852 to 1856, Fillmore served as the capital of Utah Territory. Fillmore, too, was approximately 500 miles from Mormon Station.

Valley in 1855 in an effort to solidify the Mormon presence there. "By the middle of 1856 Carson County was organized politically, economically, and socially in the firm and able hands of the Mormons" (Elliot and Rowley 1987, 56).

The fate of the yet-unborn state of Nevada would have been vastly different and, indeed, the very state itself may likely have not even materialized, had it not been for the events of 1857 in what has come to be known as the "Mormon War." In this year President Buchanan, after receiving highly exaggerated reports of a Mormon rebellion, dispatched to Salt Lake City a force of 3,000 soldiers to accompany a newly appointed Gentile governor. The Saints, only a few years removed from intense persecution and forced migrations, viewed this action of the President as a hostile invasion of "Zion" and Brigham Young prepared them for war. These preparations included a call for the Saints to concentrate their numbers and orders were sent to many distant settlements instructing the colonists to return to Salt Lake. Accordingly, on September 22, 1857, the first wave of Mormon settlers left Carson Valley for Salt Lake City and in the coming days approximately 1,000 Mormons abandoned their homes and farms in the Carson Valley and heeded the call of Brigham Young to return to the heart of their empire (Bowers 1996, 10). Most would never return.

This sudden mass exodus of Mormons provided an opportunity for the Gentiles in the Carson Valley to break away from Mormon-dominated Utah Territory. Not only was the area now practically void of Mormons, but anti-Mormon sentiment in Washington was growing steadily and Carson Valley residents knew this could be used to their advantage. The withdrawal of the law-abiding, orderly, and agrarian-minded Mormons

also brought with it a sudden increase in lawlessness - described by one Nevada historian as an "era of anarchy and confusion" (Bowers 1996, 10) - which further compelled the settlers there to petition for more local control. Consequently, in 1857 a series of mass meetings was held in the Carson Valley and a petition calling for the creation of a new territory in western Utah, to be known as "Columbus," was sent to Congress (Bowers 1996, 11).

Judge Thomas L. Crane, a native of Virginia, acted as the settlers' representative and accompanied the petition to Washington DC. The petition never made it out of the House of Representatives for two reasons. First, it fell victim to the sectional crisis of the time (the Speaker of the House, James L. Orr of South Carolina, feared the new territory would not allow slavery). Also, the sentiment back East was that the newly appointed non-Mormon governor of Utah Territory would appease the Gentile population in the Carson Valley (Davis 1984, 201 and Bowers 1996, 11). Before getting bogged down in the House, however, the petition initially garnered much support and Judge Crane prematurely wrote to the settlers in Carson Valley assuring them of its passage. This letter is extremely enlightening. The "official" justifications cited by Washington lawmakers and Carson Valley residents for a new territory in western Utah were that the people there had no effectual government (due in large measure to the exodus of the Mormons) and that the region was dominated by mining rather than agriculture. The *true* sentiment of Congress, however, while not stated overtly (at least not yet), is easy to discern from Crane's letter.

> Fellow-Citizens: It affords me much satisfaction to furnish you in advance information of great interest. The Committee on Territories has unanimously agreed to report a bill forthwith to establish a territorial government out of Western Utah, under the name of Sierra Nevada. It will be bounded on the east by the Goose Creek Mountains, on the west by the Sierra Nevada or the eastern line of California, on the north by the Oregon line, and on the south by the Colorado River.
>
> The bill will be pressed through both Houses of Congress, by all parties, as having an immediate connection with the present military movements against the Mormons. It has been agreed upon that it shall form a part of the *measures designed to compress the limits of the Mormons* in the Great Basin, and to defeat their efforts to corrupt and confederate with the Indian tribes who now reside in or roam through western Utah. For these and many other reasons, no time will be lost to organize a territory over western Utah, that there may be concentrated there a large Gentile population, as a check both upon the Indians and the Mormons (Angel 1881, 46 - emphasis added).

This letter makes abundantly clear the fact that as early as 1857 Congress was looking to "compress the limits of the Mormons." It is also clear that the creation of a new territory in the western part of Utah had more to do with this sentiment than it did with a benevolent desire to grant more autonomy to distant settlements.

Even though this initial appeal for the creation of a new territory failed, it did not take long for a second petition to find its way to Capitol Hill. By 1859 a second, more emotional appeal was made. Here, too, it is obvious that Mormons in the Great Basin - along with Congress' growing antagonism towards them - provided the impetus for the movement. Referring to this second attempt one Nevada historian concluded that "support for separation from Utah Territory appeared to be based primarily upon a desire to be freed from the Mormon authorities" (Bowers 1996, 12). Another stated:

> It is evident that the feeling of hostility existing between Mormons and other citizens of the United States had not been allayed in 1859, and that it was proposed to *use these feelings of unfriendliness as a leverage* by

> which to yet provide a territorial organization for the western portion of Utah that would not include Salt Lake City (Angel 1881, 62 - emphasis added).

The petition itself reads like the Declaration of Independence with a listing of grievances against the Mormon authorities in Salt Lake including "absolute spiritual despotism," hostility towards the Constitution and the laws of the country, protection of criminals, murder, and conspiracy with the Indians (Angel 1881, 63). In an address by the provisional governor, Isaac Roop, at the convention in which the petition was drawn, references were made to, among other things, the "curse of Mormon legislation," the "theocratic rule of Mormonism," "unjust and illegal attempts of Mormons to force upon us laws," the "Salt Lake oligarchy," the "numerous evils to which we have been subjected," and the "so-called laws of Utah Territory" (Angel 1881, 65). Statements like this leave little doubt that the creation of Nevada had as much to do with the presence of Mormons as it did with the presence of miners. It is unlikely that such an intense separatist movement in the Carson Valley, accompanied by strong support in Congress for it, would have ever materialized had Utah Territory been dominated by someone other than the Mormons.

Once again, these efforts of the people of western Utah Territory failed in 1859 for political reasons not associated directly with the petition (Elliott 1984, 60). However, the petition "left its impression, and served to give form and direction to a growing sentiment in Congress inimical to leaving other citizens of the United States under the unfriendly jurisdiction that had already . . . been determined to exist in Utah under Mormon control" (Angel 1881, 66). That Congress would be very conscientious of the

Mormons and where they were located as they deliberated western boundary decisions is quite apparent by this time.

The Territory of Nevada was finally established on March 2, 1861 by President Buchanan just two days before Lincoln took office. There are two primary reasons that explain why the territory was finally created at this time. First, the Comstock lode had been discovered and hundreds of prospectors and miners were pouring into the area, quickly swelling its population. Second, and more important, the Southern states had seceded and were no longer around to block efforts to create a new non-slave territory (Elliot 1987, 68). Even as a separate territory Nevadans continued to be obsessed with the Mormons. A reporter from San Francisco covering the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of Nevada Territory recorded that a proviso was put forth stating "that no marriage shall be valid which may be solemnized by any priest or minister of the Mormon faith or church" (Marsh 1972, 264). In the debate that followed, Mormons were referred to as "fanatics" with "damnable doctrines and practices" whose "whole aim was to subvert morality, virtue, and all else pertaining to a civilized society" (Marsh 1972, 264). One went so far as to say that "the Mormons claimed to be a religious sect, but they were really only a corrupt political organization" (Marsh 1972, 265). This "Mormon amendment" to the Nevada State Constitution was eventually rejected on the grounds that it was not consistent with the United States Constitution. It exemplifies, however, many of the feelings that the Carson Valley Gentiles had for their former, fellow-territorial citizens and accentuates the vital role that the Mormons played in the creation of that territory.

Before moving on to the question of Nevada's boundaries, a brief examination of the Mormon settlement of what eventually became southeast Nevada will be given. Much of this area fell outside Utah Territory, demonstrating that Brigham Young was not interested solely in exerting influence within the designated boundaries of Utah. (This stands in contrast to Brightman's theory of the development of Utah's borders.) The ultimate fate of many of these Mormon settlements in southeastern Nevada stands as one example of the negative repercussions inherent in Congress' boundary-tinkering.

Few people today who visit Las Vegas are aware that the town was originally settled by Mormons. Unlike Carson Valley, however, and in stark contrast to present day Las Vegas, this settlement was established for religious reasons. Brigham Young, desiring to take the Mormon faith to the Native Americans in that region, dispatched 29 men in 1855 to establish a mission in the place that would eventually become Las Vegas. A secondary purpose of the settlement was to provide a station along the "Mormon corridor' from Salt Lake City to San Bernardino. Due primarily to a conflict of interest between these "missionary Mormons" and a later arriving group of "mining Mormons," this settlement was mostly abandoned by 1858. Mormons, however, continued to settle in the area. In 1864 Panaca, the "oldest town in eastern Nevada" (Hulse 1978, 134), was established by the Mormons and in this same year a vigorous attempt was made by Mormons under the direction of Brigham Young to establish a settlement on the Colorado River (in present-day Nevada) to serve as an entrepot for river traffic coming up from the Gulf of California. Several other Mormon settlements sprang up in southeastern Nevada - which was actually either Utah or Arizona at the time of colonization - in the

succeeding years including Eagle Valley, St. Thomas, St. Joseph, Moapa, West Point, and Overton (Elliot 1987, 108). Some 10 years after the establishment of these colonies the Mormon settlers there, with absolutely no say in the matter, suddenly found themselves within the State of Nevada and many, as shall be seen, were forced to leave their homes as a result (Elliot 1987, 108). These boundary changes, and the events surrounding them, will now be examined.

## Nevada's Initial and Changing Boundaries

The Territory of Nevada, as mentioned earlier, was established on March 2, 1861. According to the "Act to Organize the Territory of Nevada," the boundaries were established as:

> beginning at the point of intersection of the forty-second degree of north latitude with the thirty-ninth degree of longitude west from Washington; thence running south on the line of said thirty-ninth degree of west longitude, until it intersects the northern boundary line of the Territory of New Mexico; thence due west to the dividing ridge separating the waters of Carson Valley from those that flow into the Pacific; thence on said dividing ridge northwardly to the forty-first degree of north latitude; thence due north to the southern boundary line of the State of Oregon; thence due east to the place of beginning...(US Statutes at large, Vol. 12, page 209, Chapter LXXXIII - An Act to Organize the Territory of

Nevada)[11]

That more land was not granted outright to the Territory of Nevada is not surprising. After all, the Gentiles huddled near the border of western Utah Territory had no real claims to any territory east of 39° W longitude. In truth, they had little if no influence in any territory outside the vicinity of Carson Valley. However, by granting so much territory to Nevada, Congress was effectively "compress[ing] the limits of the Mormons," at least as much as they felt they could at that time while still affording the new territory some legitimacy. The "legitimacy" that existed for the substantial size of Nevada Territory can be traced to the fact that the area taken from Utah coincided exactly with its two westernmost counties, Carson and Humboldt. Congress, as shall be seen, however, was not to be satisfied with the taking of 63,214 square miles from Utah Territory and would continue in succeeding years to add more territory to Nevada, as well as other states and territories, at the expense of Utah.

An additional 18,000 square miles was stripped from Utah and given to Nevada Territory less than 17 months after her creation. The historical record regarding this land transfer is minimal, testifying to the sudden and arbitrary nature of the decision, and the Congressional Record shows that there was little, if any, discussion on the bill. What

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[11] One interesting feature of this boundary definition is that Nevada's western boundary is referred to as the "dividing ridge" of the Sierra Nevada. This ridge, however, lies *within* the state of California. Congress, therefore, made this portion of the boundary definition contingent upon that state's agreement to it. California, not surprisingly, has never agreed to it, although technically it still could even at this late date. By default, then, Nevada's western boundary became the eastern boundary of California.

happened behind closed doors, of course, is a matter of speculation. It is interesting to note that measures to "punish the practice of polygamy" (Congressional Globe 37th Congress) were before Congress at this time and similar measures would continue to be brought before them in the ensuing years; years in which Utah's boundaries were doomed to drastic changes. On July 14, 1862 Congress passed the act that moved Nevada Territory's eastern boundary from 39°W longitude to 38°W longitude and, before Utah could do anything about it, the maps were redrawn. A weak historical justification for the move exists in the fact that in 1859, by an act of the Territorial Legislature of Utah, the northwest portion of Utah Territory - extending to 38°W longitude - was, for "election, revenue, and judicial purposes," attached to Carson County for a short time (Swackhamer 1979, 45). From the author's point of view this shaky justification merely provided the excuse needed for Nevada officials and their cohorts in Washington to extend Nevada's boundary at the expense of Utah. When Congress a few years later proposed moving Nevada's eastern boundary *another* degree east, however, Utah Territory mustered some resistence.[12]

By the time of this second land grab attempt, Nevada had become a state. Despite the objections of some in Washington who felt that Nevada's population was too small (21,406 people compared with Utah's approximately 70,000 - Swackhamer 1979, 102

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[12] That Utah by this time was beginning to recognize an unsavory pattern of territorial loss is obvious. In 1864, when a bill regarding Montana's boundaries was put before the House, Utah delegate John F. Kinney felt compelled to inquire as to whether the bill "takes anything from Utah?" He was told brusquely that if he "will look at the map he will see that it does not come within a hundred miles of Utah" (Congressional Globe 38th Congress, 1st Session, 1168).

and Jackson 1978, 115), Abraham Lincoln officially declared Nevada a state on October 31, 1864.[13] Utah had little hope for statehood at this time since hostility towards the Mormons was at a high point. However, desiring three more votes that would help to pass the 13th Amendment, it was politically expedient for Lincoln to support statehood for Nevada (Swackhamer 1979, 82). Nevada's state constitution included a very interesting clause. Article 14 section one states:

> Whensoever Congress shall authorize the addition to the Territory or State of Nevada of any portion of the territory on the easterly border . . . not exceeding in extent one degree of longitude, the same shall thereupon be embraced within and become part of this state . . . (Swackhamer 1979, 91)

Evidently, Nevada state officials felt that additions to Nevada at the expense of Utah were so imminent that it would be legislatively convenient to slip this clause into the state constitution so as to make the impending land grab as easy as possible. Sure enough, just over a year after obtaining statehood, Nevada's state senators sponsored a bill, which was introduced in the House by Representative James M. Ashley of Ohio, calling on Congress to "extend the limits of the state of Nevada" (Congressional Globe 39th Congress 1st Session, 645).

Ashley first introduced this bill, which was composed of two sections, on February 5, 1866 to the House of Representatives (Congressional Globe 39th Congress, 1st Session, 645). The first section proposed extending Nevada's eastern boundary one

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[13] As Nevada's mining boom waned, much of her transient citizenry moved on and after 1880 her population experienced a steady decline. The population of Utah, however, continued to swell. In 1900, for example, Nevada's population was only 42,355 (Swackhamer 1979, 101, 102) while Utah's stood at 276,749 (Hunter 1946, 410). By this time Nevada had been a state for over 35 years compared to less than five for Utah.

degree of longitude to the east, thus stripping 18,325 square miles from Utah Territory. The second section called for the addition to Nevada of its current triangle-shaped southeastern corner south of 37° N. latitude which would strip 12,225 square miles from Arizona Territory. The bill quickly made its way through the committees in both houses of Congress with very little debate and only one minor amendment before it passed the Senate and was brought before the floor of the House on May 3, 1866. Congressman Ashley presented the bill and had it read. It is apparent from the reaction of William H. Hooper, representative of the Territory of Utah, that he had not had much time to consider this bill. Hooper first asked Ashley to explain specifically how this bill would affect the territorial size of Utah. Upon learning that the bill proposed taking from Utah Territory more than 18,000 square miles, Hooper inquired of the Speaker of the House whether it would be in order for him to request a postponement of the consideration of this bill until it had been printed. The speaker indicated that it would be in order if Mr. Ashley would agree to the request. Ashley, however, refused the request and was reprimanded for it by one Mr. Washbourne of Illinois.

> I think the gentleman from Ohio, the Chairman of the Committee on Territories, ought not to urge this matter against the wishes of the Delegate from Utah without giving him a fair hearing. This bill proposes to take off eighteen thousand square miles from that Territory; and I think it only fair and just that the Delegate representing the Territory should have a full opportunity to be heard on this question (Congressional Globe 39th Congress 1st Session, 2369).

In spite of this call to be "fair and just," Ashley proceeded with discussion on the bill, completely ignoring both Hooper's request for a postponement and Washbourne's appeal for fairness. Moments later Hooper again asked for the bill to be printed and again

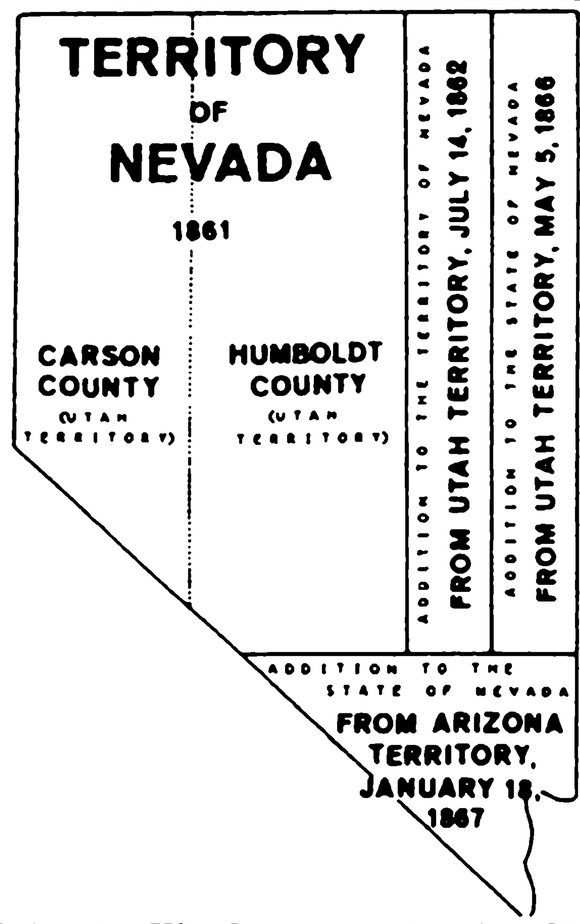
Ashley refused. He did, however, grant Hooper 15 minutes to speak. Among other things, Hooper stated that "I have not been able to find any tangible reason assigned, indeed any reason at all, for the course which is attempted to be pursued" (Congressional Globe 39th Congress 1st Session, 2369). He referred to the objections he made in the House committee regarding the Senate bill but noted that "during the pendency of this matter in the Senate I never received any notice, nor did I have any opportunity of appearing before that committee to represent the views of the citizens of Utah touching this matter which so vitally affects their interests." He continues:

> It is not, Mr. Speaker, only in behalf of the people of Utah that I object to the dismemberment proposed, but to the principle that is to be established. I believe the course of legislation now proposed is without precedent in the history of the country or its legislation in reference to the Territories. On the simple action of a committee thousands of square miles are taken from one territory and attached to another without assigning a reason or consulting the people who are to be transferred. It does appear to me a position of this kind, transferring land from one Territory to another, with the inhabitants thereof, is reducing these people, and nothing more or less, to the condition of serfs; and in behalf of my constituents, the people of Utah, I here most solemnly protest against it. . . . I deem it almost next to useless to refer to the fact that the people of Utah were the first to break a path from the Missouri River to the center of this continent. We claim to be the pioneers. We claim to have taken the germ of everything now in that country, over the broken roads and there planted them without any expense to the Government. We have there built up a state of one hundred and fifty thousand people; we have built up two hundred and fifty grist and saw mills; we have established three cotton factories; we have grown two thousand bales of cotton; we have opened up one hundred and fifty thousand acres of arable land, from which not only that State but all the Territories adjacent draw their supplies (Congressional Globe 39th Congress 1st Session, 2369).

At this point Ashley declared that he must "resume the floor" (not granting Hooper the full 15 minutes he so magnanimously granted him) upon which an obviously exasperated

Hooper made his final plea. "I ask the House in the name of justice, and in respect to the rights of a people who have done as much as any other to sustain the Government, to reject the bill" (Congressional Globe 39th Congress 1st Session, 2369). Ashley then proceeded to quickly steer the discussion away from Utah and allowed debate on a proposed amendment that aimed to strike out section two of the bill which called for the extension of Nevada's boundaries at the expense of Arizona Territory. The arguments given in support of this amendment were that a bad precedent would be set and the people of Arizona were opposed to it. Although these were the very same arguments brought forward by Hooper in regard to Utah, the proposed amendment and its resulting debate only touched on the question of Arizona. No one, other than Hooper, raised any arguments against the proposed measure as it related to Utah Territory.

This amendment regarding Arizona's boundaries ultimately did not pass but the bill itself did (Congressional Globe 39th Congress 1st Session, 2370). The following day the bill was signed by the President Pro Tempe of the Senate (Congressional Globe 39th Congress 1st Session, 2381) and then on May 7, 1866, it was signed by President Johnson (Congressional Globe 39th Congress 1st Session, 2414). The 18,325 square miles of land between 38°W and 37°W longitude of Utah Territory was, as a result of the convenient language of the Nevada State Constitution, immediately transferred to the state of Nevada. This is one of only a very few instances in which the boundaries of a *state*, as opposed to a territory, were significantly modified. The other section of this bill, which proposed to take additional territory from Arizona (for the most part present-day Clark County) was delayed for a few months since no provision for annexing this territory was



Map 7 - The Metamorphosis of Nevada
from Swackhamer 1974, 99

included in the state constitution. The Nevada state legislature proceeded to create the needed legislation and, despite the strenuous efforts of Arizona Territory's citizens and representatives, this chunk of land was finally ceded to Nevada on January 18, 1867 resulting in Nevada's present shape (Swackhammer 1979, 99) [Map 7]. The impact of this boundary change was very real and significant for hundreds of Mormons who suddenly found themselves within the state of Nevada. Taxes there were much higher than in Utah and state officials insisted that these taxes be paid in hard money which proved extremely difficult for many of the Mormon settlers. The Mormons begged Nevada's state government for help and even petitioned Congress to return the land to Utah but:

> these efforts were unavailing, and, early in 1871, the Mormons abandoned their settlements along the Muddy River and returned to Utah. About 600 persons had been living in the valley at that time, and they left much rich, cleared land and an excellent irrigation system, as well as their homes. Others, not of the Mormon Church, came into the region, tore down the houses, and made a profit from the property the Latter-Day Saints had left behind (Hulse 1978, 149).

It is interesting that such an important, far-reaching bill could breeze through

Congress so easily. While several representatives opposed the second measure of the bill which called for the taking of territory from Arizona on the grounds that it set a dangerous precedent, that the people in the lands in question had no say in the matter, and that the citizens of Arizona Territory were opposed to it, no one, other than the representative from Utah, extended these same arguments to the first section of the bill which proposed to take land from Utah. There can be little doubt that the reason this bill passed so easily is because most of the people in Utah Territory were Mormons. Anti-Mormon sentiment was very high at this time in Washington and there was, not surprisingly, anti-polygamy legislation pending in this session of Congress. Congress was careful, at least in 1866, to not overtly link these boundary considerations with their desire to limit Mormon influence. Non-religious justifications were always provided for boundary changes that were made. However, as Nevada historian Russell R. Elliot points out, these official justifications did not always make sense.

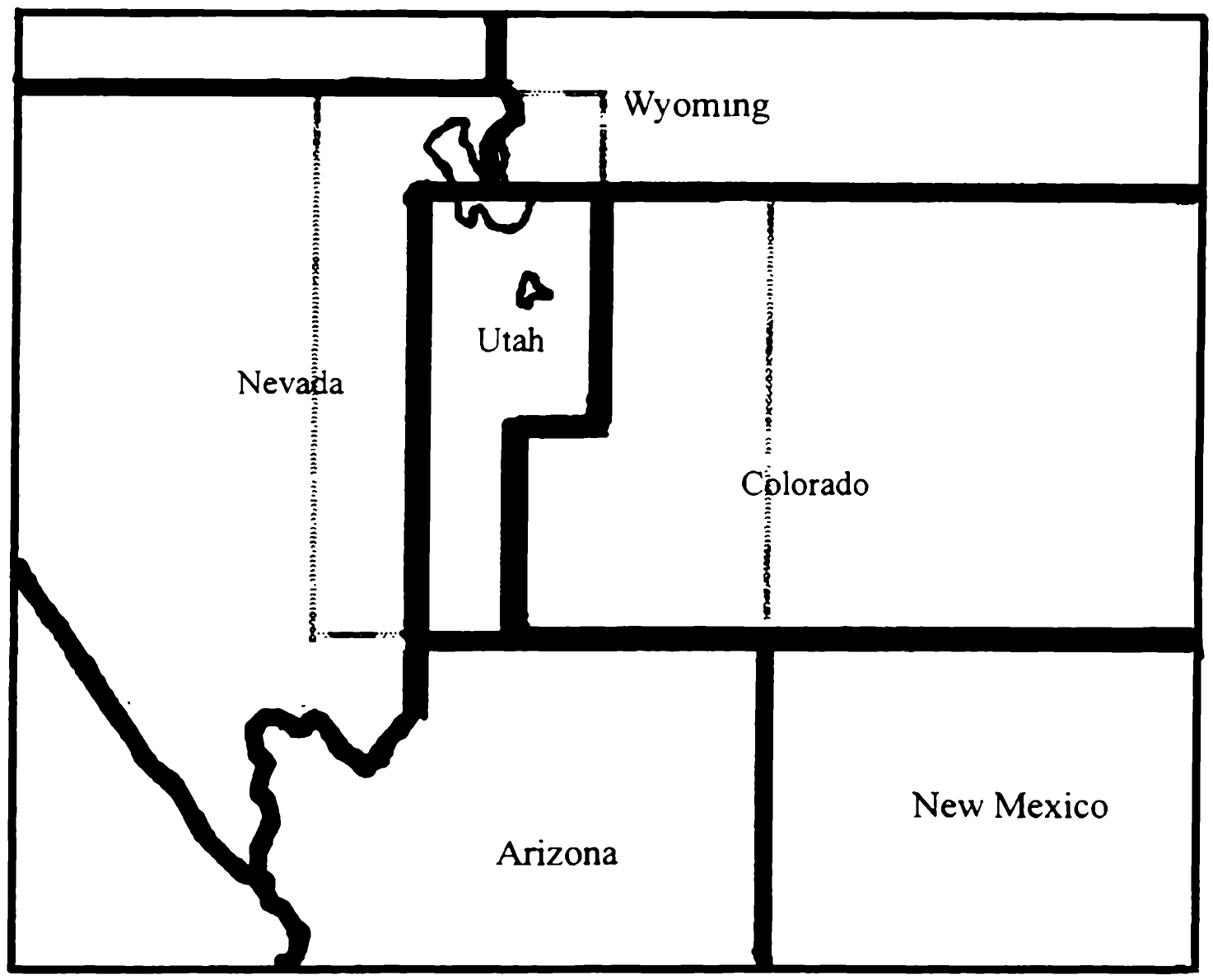
> During the debate in Congress, the principle argument used to back Nevada's request [for additional territory] was that the desired territory was valuable for its mining, and since Nevada was a mining state, the interests of the two sections were identical. Proponents of the measure conveniently ignored the fact that the Pahranagat mines already were inside Nevada. (Elliot 1987, 108, 109).

Obviously, the boundary changes were motivated by something else. Utah was able to maintain her new western boundary without further losses after 1866, but not because efforts were not made to take more. Indeed, if some Congressmen had had their way, Utah would have ceased to exist altogether.

The Proposed Dismemberment of Utah

James M. Ashley, Congressman from Ohio and primary proponent of the bill previously discussed, apparently became obsessed with the Mormons and Utah Territory. On July 23, 1866, just a few weeks after the passage of the previous bill, he submitted a report to the Congressional House Committee on the Territories entitled "The Conditions of Utah" (Report number 96, 39th Congress, 1st Session). This excruciatingly one-sided report consisted of a parade of witnesses who essentially claimed that the Mormons were hostile to and even in open revolt against the federal government, that Church leaders encouraged the murder of apostates and church enemies, and that non-Mormons living in Utah were in grave danger. At the insistence of Utah Representative William H. Hooper, one sympathetic witness, a Mr Bennett, officer in the army stationed in Salt Lake, was allowed to testify. He made several positive comments about the Mormons and refuted the charge that they were a threat to the government or anyone else. Nevertheless, Ashley, with much apparent support in Congress, waged a personal crusade against the Mormons and the Territory of Utah which culminated in 1869.

On January 14 of that year, a bill (H.R. No. 1625) was reported back from the Committee on Territories to the floor of the House which in essence would have wiped the Mormons off the political map of the United States. This time, many in Congress did not even attempt to hide their true motivations. HR 1625 called for the boundaries of




Map 8 - Ashley's Proposed Dismemberment of Utah

Nevada, Wyoming, and Colorado to be adjusted so as to appear as they do on Map 8. This would have left Utah Territory with a mere 20,000 square miles and the intention of the Committee on Territories, as Ashley readily admitted, was that Utah, in time, would cease to exist altogether.[14]

After reading this extensive bill which would have affected the boundaries of a number of states and territories but which, as shall be seen, was clearly aimed at

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[14] There was an earlier attempt to completely wipe Utah off the map when "an 1861 bill in Congress proposed an extinction of Utah, dividing it along 113°W between Nevada and a proposed Jeffersonia (Colorado)" (Meinig 1998, 110). Obviously, though, this measure did not get far in Congress.

weakening Mormon political power, Ashley had the audacity to declare that "The Senators and Representatives from the States immediately interested in this change of boundary are in favor of the bill" (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 3rd Session, 364). No mention is made of the representative from Utah Territory (clearly the most "interested" area affected by the bill), who was, not surprisingly, decidedly and vehemently against it. Ashley, not waiting for anyone to inquire as to the reasons and motives behind the proposed changes, next offered the following:

> In my judgement this bill will make the best disposition which can be made of the Mormon question, by reducing the territorial area of that prospective state, thus giving the Mormon community notice that no state government will ever be organized there by our consent; and as soon as the population in the adjacent organized States and Territories shall be able to take care of this population, which, voting asa unit, has persistently for fifteen years defied the Government of the United States and for eight years flagrantly disobeyed its laws, the control of the affairs there shall be given to the "Gentile" population. This was the motive which prompted the committee in reporting the bill . . . (Congressional Globe 40th Congress 3rd Session, 364).

The grand designs of Ashley and his cohorts in Congress are clear from his remarks. First, this proposed boundary change, like those before it, had *everything* to do with the Mormons. Also, this bill, in marked contrast to the precedents already set in state-making, sought to completely shut out and deny a large, very homogenous group from some measure of self government.

Although somewhat lengthy, the interchange on the House floor that followed these remarks by Ashley is both enlightening and relevant so I feel it worthwhile to include it here. Following Ashley's introductory remarks, Representative Washbourne of Illinois spoke up:

I ask the gentleman to hear me a moment. I have had but a few minutes to look at this bill. From the reading of it, and from the statement of the gentleman, it seems to be a bill to dismember Utah Territory. I merely desire to suggest that as the Delegate from that Territory is not here, being detained by sickness, it seems to me it would be but fair to postpone it until he can be heard. The people who sent him here have a great deal of interest in this measure, and I suggest that it be postponed so that it can be reached at a given time hereafter.

Mr. ASHLEY, of Ohio. In reply to the gentleman's suggestion, I will say that I see no necessity for postponing the bill. It does not touch the settled portions of Utah, but it adds to the Territory of Colorado all that part of Utah unsurveyed and unoccupied by the Mormons, and thus extends the jurisdiction of Colorado over that part. It excludes the Mormons socially, of course, from that part, but they can move where they please. It concentrates whatever of the Mormon element governs the Territory of Utah within a limited jurisdiction, so that the farce which they have played there for many years of electing a Governor and Legislature and enacting State laws may be annulled by the notice which this bill gives them that they shall not have territorial area enough to make a state. I drew the bill originally to blot out the Territory, but the committee thought it was best to let that part of it remain where the great body of the Mormons were until such time as the population of the adjacent Territories and States would be able to take care of them, and not be overborne by the consolidated vote of that oligarchy.

Mr. WASHBOURNE, of Illinois. I do not think the gentleman has met my point. He acknowledges, in the first place, that this bill takes away a large portion of the Territory of Utah. That Territory is represented here. Now, I think it but fair and just to that Delegate, in a matter which so deeply affects his constituents, that he should be here when the bill is acted upon. He is detained by sickness; and I appeal to my friend if he were in the same situation whether he would not consider it rather sharp practice to dispose of the bill in his absence.

Mr ASHLEY, of Ohio. My committee will not be called again this session, so that unless this is passed now there is no hope of getting it through the Senate.

Mr WASHBOURNE, of Illinois. I do not ask to have the bill placed in any worse position than it is now. That would be unreasonable. But we can postpone it so that it will not be placed in a worse position.

Mr CULLOM. When will the Delegate from Utah be here?

Mr. WASHBOURNE, of Illinois. I understand he has started from home; and the reason why he is not here is he is detained by sickness.

Mr. ASHLEY, of Ohio. If the House will agree to postpone the bill one week from today immediately after the reading of the Journal I will

> consent to it.
> Mr ELIOT, of Massachusetts. I object.
> Mr ASHLEY, of Ohio. Then say after the morning hour.
> Mr. BROOKS. I think we should allow a longer time, so that the people of Utah can hear what is to be done. Say two weeks.
> Mr ASHLEY, of Ohio. Very well; I have no objection, if the bill shall be taken up and disposed of (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 3rd Session 364).

What happened next in regards to this bill is unclear but, needless to say, it did not pass.

How different, indeed, the West might look today had Mr. Washbourne of Illinois not had a keener sense of fairness than some of his peers appeared to posses.

Some credit for the bill's failure must be given to Representative Hooper of Utah Territory who, thanks to Washbourne, had an opportunity to fight strenuously against it. We can only speculate as to what backroom deals were proffered or alliances made. What we do know is that a few weeks following the introduction of this bill, Hooper made an impassioned speech on the floor of the House against the proposed measure. This lengthy and emotional oration, which lasted more than an hour, consisted of Hooper's proposed amendment to the bill which would have kept Utah's boundaries as they were. Most of Hooper's speech, however, focused on a dramatic retelling of the Mormon experience. The incredible hardships faced by the Mormons at the hands of their fellow-countrymen were contrasted with many examples of Mormon patriotism and loyalty to the Union. Before getting into the heart of his speech, however, Hooper could not resist taking a shot at Ashley and his suspect methods, referring to his "want of personal courtesy and all common fairness in seeking to pass [the bill] in the absence of the Delegate representing the people whose interest in the measure is fourfold greater

than that of any other constituency . . . " (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 3rd Session 243). It also did not take long for Hooper to attack the bill for what it was. " . . . the end sought by this measure is not the promotion of justice nor the benefit of the region affected. It is the destruction of an obnoxious system of religious faith through the temporal ruin of its disciples" (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 3rd Session 244). Later he declared:

> And at this very moment, when the test of contact is on the very eve of application [referring to the new associations that would develop between Mormons and those outside Utah as a result of the completion of the transcontinental railroad], that the advocates of this bill, assuming themselves to be champions of Christianity and Republicanism, shrink like timid children from the encounter and seek to intrench themselves behind the flimsy ramparts of political boundaries which they hope to erect for their defense (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 3rd Session 247).

Hooper pointed out the hypocrisy of the bill which sought to undermine the raison d'etre of any state or territory. Referring to the desire of the bill's proponents to strip away any form of autonomy, he states, "Thus the original object of the territorial legislation, which was to give self government to a homogenous people and offered them the fullest guarantees of law, will be utterly destroyed" (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 3rd Session 247). Hooper did not hesitate to characterize the bill for what it was, and he placed the burden of its future squarely on the shoulders of his fellow members in the House of Representatives.

> Were the question of Mormonism not involved . . . I do not hesitate to say that a map thus disfigured with mutilations would not for a moment be contemplated with favor. Will the members of this House allow this prejudice so to overcome their judgement and sense of justice as to blind them to the enormity of the proposed change? I do not believe it. . . . Never will I credit an anomaly so foreign to the character of the American

> people, so hostile to the spirit of the age, so monstrous in its design, and so mischievous in its consequences, till I hear the vote counted and the result announced (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 3rd Session 244 and 247).

Apparently Hooper was persuasive. H.R. number 1625 disappeared from the Congressional records.

Although the bill failed, its introduction and subsequent debate sheds much light on the Zeitgeist of this period. There can be no doubt that, when considering the boundaries of western states and territories, Congress was very much aware of who, what, and where the Mormons were. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, Nevada provides us with the clearest and most straightforward example of how the Mormon presence in the West was influential in the creation of boundaries. Had the Mormons not only been where they were, but also *who* they were, it is extremely doubtful that Nevada, with her present boundaries, would have developed as it now exists. Had, for example, a non-Mormon population existed in the valleys of the Wasatch Mountains, the impetus for a new territory in the western part of the Great Basin - and certainly the addition of more and more territory to it - would probably have not existed. Nevada, to a large degree, exists because of who the Mormons were and where they settled.

# Chapter 5

# The Mormon Influence on the Boundaries of Other States

## Arizona and New Mexico

The Compromise of 1850, which established Utah's southern boundary with New Mexico, was examined in chapter 3. The precise location of this boundary, it will be recalled, was at the heart of much sectional wrangling between Northerners and Southerners. Both sides, confessing their geographic ignorance of the area, agreed that a straight line would be most appropriate. Consensus over where that line should be, however, was not as forthcoming. Many Southerners were pressing for the latitude of 36°30' as the boundary. By utilizing the historically significant parallel established by the Missouri Compromise as Utah's southern boundary, Southerners hoped to ensure the practice of slavery below it. Northerners, on the other hand, sought to make the old line obsolete as far as the Mexican Cession was concerned and for that reason they favored a line at 38°, 37°, or even further south than 36°30' at 36°. The 37th parallel was finally accepted as the boundary between western New Mexico and Utah Territories after hours of intense debates and seemingly endless votes.

Although the sectional crisis of the time drove the debates over which *latitude* to

accept, the general idea behind the boundary being drawn approximately where it was resulted from Congress' perceived limit of Mormon expansion southward. (The impressive Mormon settlement of San Bernardino, California was not established until June of 1851.) The original boundary proposal called for Utah's southern border to be defined as "the range of mountains running round and separating the waters flowing into the Colorado and the Great Basin" (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 1481). Stephen A. Douglas, recognizing that these mountains were not well defined and, indeed, perhaps not even where they supposed them to be, proposed that the southern boundary of Utah be defined simply as the 38th parallel. When Jefferson Davis inquired as to the reasons for this change, Douglas responded:

> I find that the boundaries at present proposed by the bill separate the Mormon settlement in some slight degree. I thought the thirty eighth parallel would include them all. There was also a mistake as to where it was supposed the mountain range run. I am willing to take 37° or 37°30'. That will certainly include all the settlements (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 1482).

Another senator then proposed making the boundary at 37° and Douglas, true to his word, indicated that he had no problem with that. Jefferson Davis then retorted:

> I think the Senator from Illinois will find that there are Mormon settlements south of the lowest degree of latitude that has yet been proposed. My recent information is that the Mormons are down, some of them, south of Walter's Pass [at the southern tip of the Sierras].
> Douglas: There may possibly be a few, but I think they are very scattering [sic]. There are no considerable settlements.
> Davis: I was about to call the attention of the Senator from Illinois . . . to a fact which, I am sure, he must be aware, that there are Mormon settlements considerably lower down. . . . If there is, therefore, no boundary indicated by the physical geography of the country, I see no reason why we should not go down far enough to include all the

> inhabitants, nor why we should avoid a line [36°30'] which has some authority in the country, as if there some special reasons against adopting it (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 1482-83).

An exasperated Douglas, eager for a compromise, declared that he really did not care too much about the particulars of the line and stated:

> I do not consider it a matter of the slightest importance whether we take the thirty eighth or the thirty seventh parallel of latitude, or whether we take the line of 36°30'. I think the 38th parallel of latitude will probably include all the regular Mormon settlements. . . . I would just as soon take the line of 36°30', if Senators have a preference for it (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 1483).

To which Davis, no doubt speaking on behalf of a number of Southern Senators, replied, "I have a preference for it." At this point in the debate, several Senators attempted to adjourn, something they had attempted numerous times already, and leave the question unsettled. A larger number of Senators, however, frustrated by their inability to make real progress in the organization of the Mexican Cession, were determined to find a solution to at least this one question before retiring for the day. Most Southerners fought for 36°30' while many Northern Senators, apparently not as eager for compromise as Douglas, insisted on any line other than that politically-charged parallel. Some Northerners were even willing to accept a line *south* of 36°30', so long as it was not the old Missouri Compromise line. Senator Hale from New Hampshire, for example, declared:

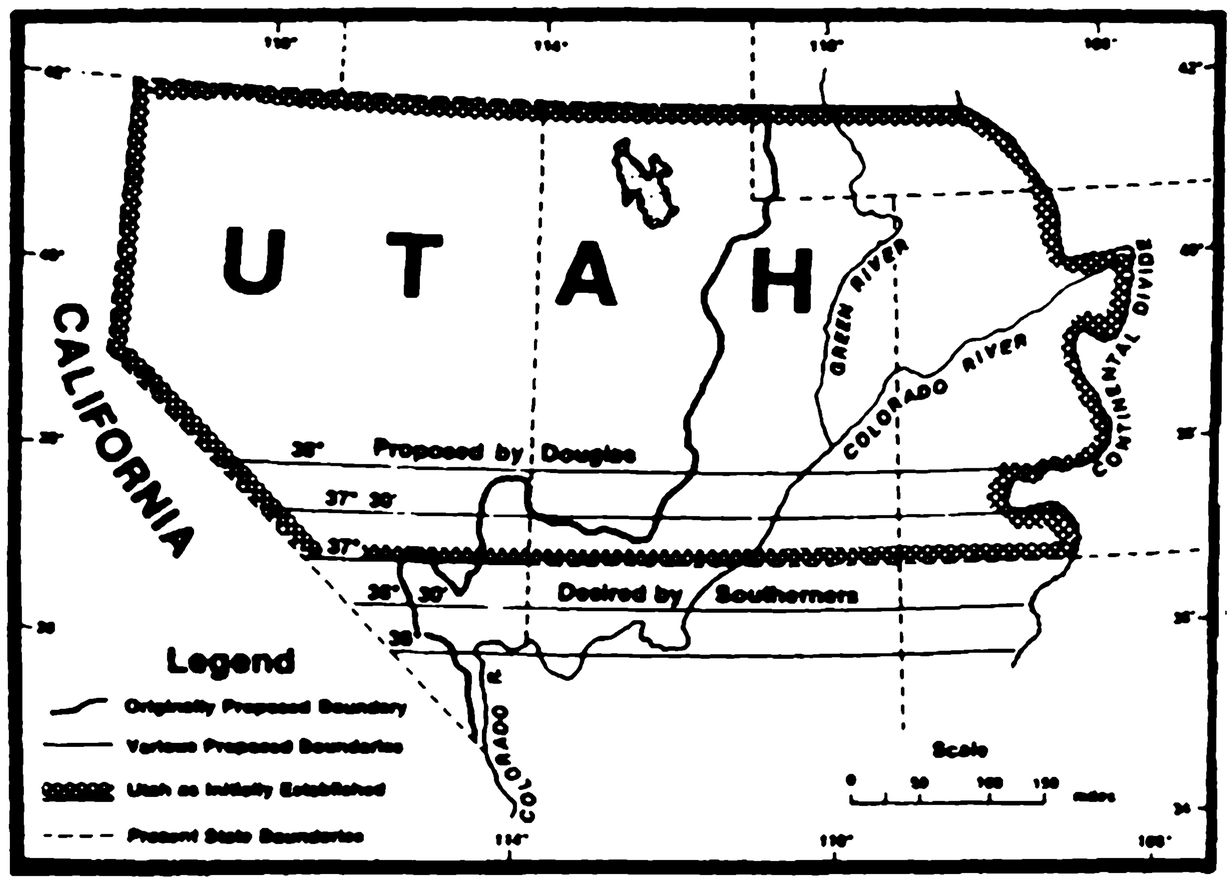
> I shall vote against 36°30', because I think there is an implication in it. [Laughter.] I will vote for 37° or 36°, either, just as it is convenient; but it is idle to shut our eyes to the fact that there is an attempt in this bill . . . to pledge this Senate and Congress to the imaginary line of 36°30', because

> there are some historical recollections connected with it in regard to this controversy about slavery. I will content myself with saying that I never will, by vote or speech, admit or submit to anything that may bind the action of our legislation here to make the parallel of 36°30' the boundary line between slave and free country (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 1484).

The debates and votes continued - with the line 36°30' losing by a single vote on one occasion - until eventually the required number of votes was obtained for a compromise line at 37° and the southern boundary of Utah Territory was finally established (Congressional Globe 31st Congress, 1st Session, Appendix 1482, 1483) [map 9].

That the senators, in deciding which parallel to use as the boundary, were more concerned with the expansion of slavery than they were with the *exact* southern limit of Mormon colonization is quite clear from the debates. Nevertheless, the line itself owes its existence to the fact that the Mormons had settled where they did. "The major reason for drawing the line that was to become the northern boundary of Arizona . . . was to separate Mormons from Hispanos" (Comeaux 1983, 237). Had there been no Mormons, there would have been no reason to even draw a boundary in this vicinity. Thus, the line which was to become the southern boundary of both Utah and Colorado and the northern boundary of both Arizona and ultimately New Mexico was drawn where it was as a result of the Mormon settlement of the West.

This line drawn by Congress is a perfect example of a dysfunctional boundary. On the one hand, Congressmen knew they wanted a line that approximated the southern limit of Mormon settlement, but on the other hand, they readily admitted their geographic ignorance of the area. The result, as previously discussed, was a straight line. Referring



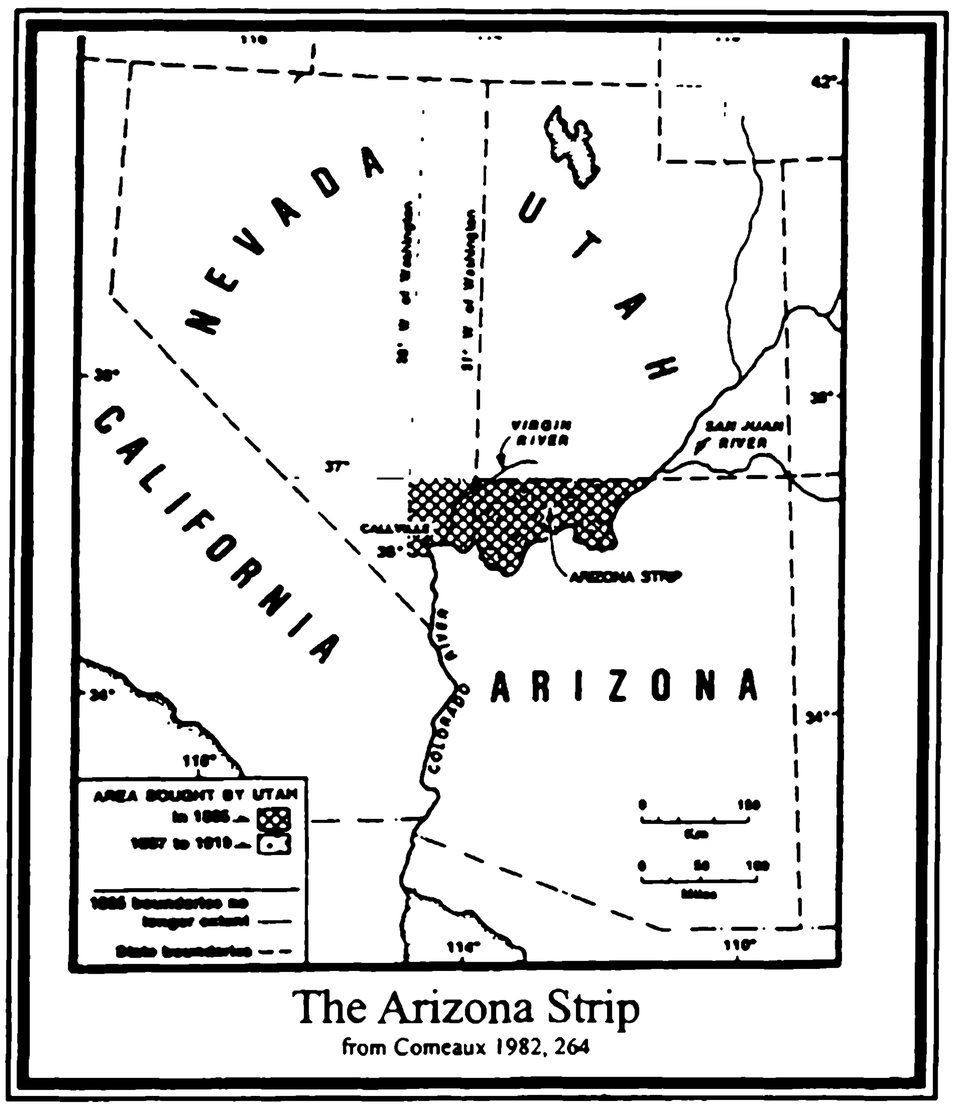

Map 9 - Proposed Southern Boundaries for Utah
from Comeaux 1983, 248

to this boundary, Arizona geographer Malcolm L. Comeaux writes: "Because of its predilections for symmetry, Congress drew a straight line, never considering the physical or cultural factors, and troubles developed because of that line" (Comeaux 1981, 117). And later:

> Congressmen were largely ignorant of cultural and physical conditions in the West, but a lack of knowledge was never a serious deterrent to politicians determined to draw boundaries. For the convenience of Easterners drawing lines on maps of unknown areas, longitude and latitude were used for the vast majority of Western boundaries. By good fortune some of these straight lines proved acceptable, but others, like the one across northern Arizona, have caused problems (Comeaux 1983, 237.)

The various parallels that were argued over took into account Mormon settlement, but they did not consider the physical conditions of the land itself.

The most glaring and obvious problem with this boundary relates to the so-called



The Arizona Strip
from Comeaux 1982, 264

"Arizona Strip[15] [map 10]. This approximately 8,000 square mile chunk of land is completely and effectively isolated by the Grand Canyon from the rest of Arizona. Along with the obvious inconveniences of travel and communication, this boundary at 37° made the Strip a veritable "no-man's land" as far as the law was concerned because it was inaccessible to Arizona officials and Utah authorities had no jurisdiction there. Most of the original settlers in the Strip were Mormons with close ties to Utah including a "Mormon settlement at or near the mouth of the Paria [River]" (McClintock 1921, 90). Brigham Young also recognized the strategic importance of the area for his inland empire. His proposed State of Deseret had included much of California's southern coast so as to insure access to the Pacific Ocean but, not only was Utah left landlocked as a result of the Compromise of 1850, she was effectively cut off from any rivers navigable to the sea. Just south of Utah's new border, though, along the Colorado River, were sites which were deemed suitable for river trade down the Colorado to the Gulf of California. Brigham Young called for the

[15] See "Attempts to Establish and Change a Western Boundary," a 1982 article in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, by Malcolm L. Comeaux, for a good discussion of the "Arizona Strip" and its geographic implications.

establishment of a Mormon port on the Colorado and by 1864 Call's Landing, or Callville, had been established in Arizona Territory at the confluence of the Colorado and Virgin Rivers. This settlement was eventually abandoned in 1869 but in the intervening years "two steamboats . . . made the trip somewhat regularly from the mouth of the Colorado to Call's Landing, connecting with steamships plying between the mouth of the Colorado and San Francisco" (McClintock 1921, 115, 116 - quoting BH Roberts). Salt Lake merchants patronized this route up the Colorado then overland to Salt Lake City until the completion of the transcontinental railroad made it obsolete.

The Mormons in Utah were quick to recognize the geographic impracticalities of the 37th parallel as their southern boundary and made their first attempt to modify it in 1865. At this time all the territory south of 37° was in Arizona's hands and Utah petitioned Congress for the annexation of all the shaded territory on map 9. In this memorial to Congress Utah's Territorial Legislature carefully outlined all the practical reasons for why such a change made sense, focusing on the fact that Utah was isolated from navigable waters and that:

> the growing interest of agriculture, commerce, as well as the mineral interests of the Territory, seemingly demand an outlet to products, and more ready means of import to encourage the reclamation of the desert (House Misc. Document. 53, 38th Congress, 2nd Session - quoted in Comeaux 1983, 263).

The fact that a road was being constructed "at great expense" to link the navigable waters of Arizona to southern Utah was also emphasized.

In their attempts to acquire the Arizona Strip, the Mormons (unknowingly) complied nicely with the model of territorial acquisition defined by S.B. Jones in 1945.

Referring to an international setting, Jones noted that: "only rarely does a claimant state rest its case on one line of argument. More frequently legal arguments are supported by non-legal points. These points usually refer to the historical, geographical, strategical, economic, and ethnic qualities of the territory which is claimed." And later: "geographic arguments are normally designed either to show the desirability of extending a state's territory to make the boundary coincide with some physical feature, or to demonstrate the basic unity of an area which is divided or is threatened with division" (Jones 1945, 118, 119). The Mormons were doing both.

As already demonstrated, though, Congress was not shy about stripping land from Utah and so it is not surprising that she was not eager, no matter how much sense it made, to *add* any territory to it. Congress certainly had the power and authority to grant such a logical request but the issue died when the Committee on Territories, still interestingly, and not surprisingly, headed by James M. Ashley of Ohio, took no action and did not report the bill out of the Committee, this being "a common way to pigeonhole an unacceptable idea" (Comeaux 1982, 263).

In 1866, the following year (as discussed in Chapter 4), Nevada expanded eastward and southward at the expense of both Utah and Arizona. Callville was absorbed by Nevada and Mormon hopes for a port on the Colorado were dashed because Nevada, by this time, had obtained statehood and therefore could not be forced by Congress to cede any of its land. The Arizona portion of the Strip, however, still remained and Utah made several more attempts to annex the anomalous region whose inhabitants, other than a few Natives, "always have been Mormons, who have strong ties to the north . . . "

(Comeaux 1982, 266). Having forever lost the land to Nevada which could have provided access to the sea, the main arguing point of Utah officials in subsequent annexation attempts was that the transfer of land was in the best interests of the citizens of the Strip who were very much isolated from their county seat (not to mention the rest of Arizona). Perhaps realizing the futility of trying to wrestle land away from Arizona as an out-of-favor-territory, Utah waited until she had obtained statehood before attempting a second time to annex the Strip from as-yet territorial Arizona. Utah petitioned Congress for the Strip at least six times while it enjoyed this advantageous position but all to no avail as each bill in turn was pigeonholed in committee. Occasionally during this period Utah made direct appeals to Arizona requesting that she voluntarily hand it over but, citing possible future economic benefits, she flatly declined each entreaty. Throughout this period Arizona practically ignored the Strip even as the number of Mormons in it continued to grow. Prior to 1913 "no officials of any institutions or departments of the state [of Arizona] had made even a cursory survey of [the Strip]." (McOmie, Jacobs, and Bartlett 1913, 21).

In 1912 Arizona finally became a state but this did not prevent Utah from making one final attempt to obtain the Strip. Since it was now a matter between two states, the federal government was not involved as Utah took her case directly to her southern neighbor. This time, Utah offered to pay money for the region and it was rumored that she was even willing to give to Arizona in exchange for the Strip her own territory south of the San Juan River to boot (Tucson *Arizona Daily Star*, Jan. 28 and Feb. 9, 1919). Arizona, though, was simply not interested in losing any of its territory and the only real

suspense lay in deciding "who was to be on the committee that was going to have the honor of rejecting the Utah request" (Comeaux 1982, 267). An exasperated Utah delegate, perhaps sensing now more than ever the futility of trying to accomplish something that undoubtedly to him at least made perfect sense, exclaimed: "What would make me happy would be for someone to tell me one good reason why Utah should not own this strip" (Phoenix, *Arizona Republic*, Feb. 9, 1919).

It is not surprising that Arizona turned down this chance to cede part of her land to a neighboring state. Utah had her best opportunity to obtain the Strip when the decision lay in the hands of the Federal government. However:

> The antipathy felt by the nation toward Mormons . . . resulted in Utah's lack of success in maintaining control over all of its initial territory, and the failure of its many attempts to expand its border south of 37°. Although congressmen must have realized the validity of the various Utah proposals, none succeeded, probably because at that time Utah was considered an aberrant state, owing to Mormon attitudes and polygamy. Congress was therefore not inclined to further her goals. Arizona maintained control of The Strip not because of her political strength, but because of animosity felt toward Utah by the nation at large (Comeaux 1982, 268).

The northern boundary of Arizona and New Mexico stands as a perfect example of how the Mormons played more of a key role in the political geography of the West than has been previously acknowledged. Meinig, for example, stresses that the largely symmetrical boundaries of the West, with a few anomalies, are the result of "an attempt [by Congress] to bring about a greater concordance of political areas with commercial and culture areas" (Meinig 1972, 123). *Where* the Mormons had settled was certainly taken into consideration as this line was intended to approximate the southern limit of

Mormon settlement. However, if Congress had been truly interested in drawing boundaries that incorporated distinct populations, economies, and cultures, it would have been a simple and sensible matter to modify this boundary so as to include within Utah the Arizona Strip, a region clearly within both the Mormon cultural and physical sphere and obviously isolated from the rest of Arizona. In subsequent years, however, Congress was also concerned with *who* the Mormons were and, despite the sensibility behind such a move, were loathe to the idea of granting additional territory to Utah which was home to the out-of-favor and politically unpopular sect. In the case of this particular boundary, we see how its original placement was influenced by *where* the Mormons were. We also see how the decision *not* to modify it, in spite of the opportunity to more effectively conform the boundary to the cultural and physical geography of the region, was greatly influenced by *who* the Mormons were.

This boundary also resists the arguments put forth by George F. Brightman who stressed that Utah's boundaries evolved as a natural outgrowth of the Mormon economic sphere. Brightman maintains, essentially, that Brigham Young chose to settle those areas that would fall politically and economically within the jurisdiction of a Mormon-dominated Utah, whether it be a territory or a state, since "the Mormon settlers only hope of maintaining identity was by means of economic control of the area" (Brightman 1940, 87). Thousands of Mormons, however, migrated to Arizona under the direction of Brigham Young *after* the boundary between Utah and New Mexico Territories was established in 1850. Indeed, just two months before his death in 1877, Brigham Young advised a company of incoming Mormon immigrants to seek out a settlement site in

western Texas or New Mexico (Morgan 1950, 271). The Mormons crossed the 37th parallel for various reasons. Some came to convert the Native Americans in the area while others sought political refuge from the government's crackdown on polygamy. Most, however, came simply for the purpose of establishing communities and farms (Comeaux 1981, 138). In 1876 Brigham Young "called" 200 people to settle along the Little Colorado in eastern Arizona and within a few months the towns of St. Joseph, Obed, Taylor, and Sunset had been established (McClintock 1921, 139). Also during the 1870's, long after Utah's southern boundary had been drawn, other Mormon towns in this part of Arizona emerged with uniquely Mormon names like Wilford, Woodruff, Snowflake, Brigham City, Heber, Thatcher, St. David, St. John, and Fort Moroni (McClintock 1921, 139). The Mormon town of Mesa was settled in 1878 (Comeaux 1981, 143). One of the earlier Mormon settlements in Arizona was that of Lee's Ferry in 1872 which "remained the only good crossing of the Colorado in Arizona for a long time" (Comeaux 1981, 139). Those Mormons who came to settle in Arizona, many under the personal direction of Brigham Young, surely recognized that they were settling in an area politically and economically separated from the Mormon core. Yet they came, settled, and remained, having played (and continuing to play) an important role in the destiny of the state of Arizona. As of 1998 there were 289,000 Mormons living in that state comprising almost seven percent of the total population (Deseret News 1999-2000 Church Almanac 1998, 549). Here is a clear example of how Mormon population and economic strength were not limited to the boundaries that Congress created for it.

The 37th parallel as established in 1850 as the boundary between the Territories of

Utah and New Mexico has long endured in the political geography of the West. Both its initial creation and its stubborn resistence to change can be attributed to the Mormon presence in the West. Initially it was drawn so as to approximate the southern limit of Mormon settlement. Later it resisted change, even overtly logical change which would have drastically improved the boundary, because of the animosity that existed between Mormons and Congress.

## Colorado

Colorado's origins, and boundaries, are remarkably similar to that of Nevada's. In the 1850s prospectors began trickling into the Front Range of the Rockies which straddled the boundary between Kansas and Utah Territories much like the early mining towns east of the Sierra Nevada had straddled the Utah-California boundary. Unlike Nevada, though, there was no Mormon presence in the Front Range region.[16] The settlers, finding themselves greatly isolated from either Salt Lake or the more settled portions of Kansas, began to clamor for their own government. As early as November of

[16] In 1846 and 1847 a sizeable number of Mormons did live in present-day Pueblo, Colorado. A group of Mormon converts from the southern states heading for the Great Salt Lake decided to winter there after discovering that the main body of Mormons had been delayed in Iowa. Later, they were joined by some members of the Mormon Battalion and in May of 1847 they all pressed on to the Great Basin. "In this Mormon village were born the first white children in Colorado" (Taylor 1979, 7).

1858, the tiny population of Auraria voted to send a delegate to Washington D.C. in the hope of gaining territorial status and in October of 1859, frustrated by Congress' slow response, representatives from several towns gathered to create, without approval or authorization from Washington, "Jefferson Territory" (Ubelohde, et. al. 1972, 99, 100).

The calls for greater autonomy emanating from this region were not being ignored by Congress but the sectional crisis of the time prevented immediate action. The slavery issue coupled with the question of representation, as has been seen, made every appeal for new western territory a complex one. The "Territory of Colorado" - Republicans did not like the idea of naming a territory after a Democratic president - was finally created in 1861 for two reasons. First, the population of the region was booming. In 1860 "more than 5,000 immigrants crowded through Denver in a single week" (Abbott, et. al. 1982, 65). Secondly, and more important, the southern states seceded after the election of Lincoln in 1860 thereby eliminating the most difficult obstacle to the creation of new western territory. Kansas, with her present boundaries, was quickly admitted as a free state on January 29, 1861, which effectively left the Pike's Peak settlements without any organization. Congress quickly began working on organizing the area and on February 28, James Buchanan signed into existence the Territory of Colorado (Ubelohde et .al. 1972, 102).[17]

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[17] In an interesting episode of state-name-musical-chairs, we find that "Idaho" was originally proposed as the name for this new territory. The Congressmen decided they liked "Colorado" better only to have a senator request that that name be reserved for the Arizona region. Ultimately, though, the name Colorado stuck. (See Congressional Globe 36th Congress, 2nd Session, 710, 766.)

Congress' growing preference for geometric lines came to a climax with the organization of the Territory of Colorado. For the first time a territory of the United States was created that had no physical boundaries whatsoever. In deciding Colorado's western border it is apparent that Mormon settlement was of utmost concern. Evidently, the proposed western boundary of Colorado was initially further west at the Green River but early in the discussions on the bill to create this territory a Senator Green from Missouri, in proposing an amendatory boundary change in the bill, stated that:

> There is a slight change in the boundary . . . and it seems to meet with general acceptance. . . . I will briefly explain it and the Senate will understand it in a moment. It proposes only two changes. The reason for that [first one] is, that a portion of the inhabitants of Utah Territory have settled there, and this would have a tendency, if the bill remains as it now is, to divide them. They had better all remain together. I have no objection to that modification (Congressional Globe 36th Congress, 2nd Session, 728).

The second proposed change, which called for an adjustment in Colorado's southern boundary with New Mexico, received considerable attention and a good deal of debate. However, the proposed change to Colorado's western boundary was not mentioned again and the amendment passed with little fanfare. Lawmakers, evidently, were content knowing that Colorado's western border coincided with the easternmost settlement of the Mormons and it was ultimately defined as the line 32 degrees west of Washington DC or approximately 109° west of Greenwich (Congressional Globe 36th Congress, 2nd Session, Appendix, 326). Clearly, the most important factor in choosing Colorado's western boundary was Mormon settlement.

In establishing Colorado's western boundary, Congress took very liberally from

Utah. In all, 29,500 square miles were stripped from the already-established territory and given to the newly created one. This, despite the fact that the gentile miners exerted little influence west of the Front Range. Indeed, as late as 1876, this area, with the exception of one minor mining rush, "was empty of settlements and mostly still Indian lands" (Meinig 1998, 139). Meanwhile, "Mormons began to settle in the [San Luis] valley [of southwestern Colorado] in the late 1870s" (Simmons 1979, 130). As the Mormons crossed the 109th meridian and colonized areas that had once belonged to Utah, several Coloradans became alarmed. Noted Colorado historian Virginia McConnell Simmons:

> The usual rumors were bandied about to the effect that the Mormons were polygamists, thieves, or worse, while Denver's newspapers campaigned against permitting the Mormons to settle in the state. It was even claimed that the Mormons intended to set up bases all the way across Colorado and to take over the state. Nevertheless, the law-abiding colony in the San Luis Valley persisted and eventually earned the respect of their neighbors (Simmons 1979, 131)

By 1883 there were nearly 1,000 Mormons in western Colorado (Jenson 1940, 178).

It is interesting to note that the Territories of Nevada and Colorado were created at almost the exact same time and in the same session of Congress; a Congress which, as demonstrated in Chapter Four, was interested in compressing the limits of the Mormons. In fact, momentum for anti-polygamy legislation was building during this particular session and within a few months the Morrill Act was passed "thus placing on the statute books the first congressional legislation aimed at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the first action of what proved to be an extended anti-polygamy crusade" (Lyman 1986, 11). That the Pike's Peak settlers had a strong case for separate territorial

status is not questioned. However, the author can not help but recognize the convenient historical events that presented themselves to a Congress hostile to the Mormons. At a time when the Mormons were very much out of favor with the eastern establishment and Congress was seeking to diminish their potential power and influence, two distinct Gentile populations emerged on Utah Territory's eastern and western frontiers. In creating territories for these population centers Congress took liberally from Utah and effectively boxed-in and politically isolated the core Mormon settlements.[18]

## Wyoming

Wyoming is very much a federally-contrived state. In other words, had it not been for actions taken in Washington, the state itself as it now exists would likely have not emerged. Even its symmetrical shape attests to its artificial origins. Meinig describes Wyoming as "the great exhibit of a spatial remnant, a large, virtually vacant block of country . . . " (Meinig 1998, 150). Whereas many regions of the West in the mid 1800s were filling up with prospectors, farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs, and religious refugees, the whole expanse of present-day Wyoming remained virtually untouched. Even by the

[18] It should be noted that when Utah's boundaries were drastically altered in 1861 with the creation of Nevada and Colorado Territories, a smaller, but still significant, piece of northeastern Utah Territory, with practically no discussion, was detached from her and given to Dakota Territory. This land later became part of Wyoming.

late 1860s numerous trails, stage and pony express routes, and even a telegraph line passed through the region but "none of these developments brought settlers and only the Indians seemed to really want the land" (Brown 1980, 14). In the late nineteenth century western historian and geographer Hubert Howe Bancroft made the following observation about Wyoming:

> It is remarkable that a section of country more traveled than any other between the great plains and the Pacific ocean [*sic*], should have remained unsettled for nearly half a century, the only white men there being traders and military men (Bancroft 1890, 694).

It was not until construction began on the fully subsidized Union Pacific railroad line in 1867 - which included one mile square land grants to any who chose to settle along it - that people began to make the area their home.

> By early 1869, the railroad extended across the Wyoming region to Utah. With the railroad came the first serious permanent settlement to the area (other than a small colony from Utah near modern-day Evanston, Wyoming). This group of people, who settled primarily in the brand new town of Cheyenne, demanded that the US Congress create an organized territory consisting of the large tracts north and south of the railroad grant (Brown 1980, 15).

At the time this area was part of massive Dakota Territory which already had a distinct population in its eastern parts. These two distinct population cores, widely separated from each other by Indian lands, naturally divided the already-too-large territory into two distinct halves and so it was a relatively simple matter to grant separate territorial status to each. On July 25, 1868 the Territory of Wyoming was formally organized (Brown 1980, 15). Still, the area was quite uncivilized.

> When it came time to designating a capital city early in 1868, Cheyenne had no real competition. The only other settlements with more than a few

> dozen persons were the town of Laramie (which had been established for less than six months), several very scattered military posts, and the somewhat transitory Indian communities. . . . [also] all of the soon-to-be-designated county seats were along the Union Pacific Railway (Brown 1980, 15).

How remarkable it is that Wyoming, in this condition, gained territorial status so quickly and enjoyed the fruits of statehood five years before Utah.

What is interesting about the organization of Wyoming Territory as it relates to Utah is that, once again, land was stripped from Utah and given to another. Congress, not content to organize the new territory simply out of western Dakota, also took land that had been part of Utah for almost twenty years, plus an unsettled portion of Idaho Territory, and gave it to Wyoming. Congress pointed out that the symmetry of Wyoming would be enhanced by such a move and insisted that this land grab was in the best interest of the people there. For the purpose of making a nice, box-shape, Congress, with very little discussion, significantly altered Utah's boundaries. In Wyoming's petitions to Congress for territorial status, this extra land had not even been requested. The settlers in what became Wyoming were merely asking for a new territory to be created out of western Dakota Territory (Larsen 1965, 65). However, on June 3, 1868, Senator Richard Yates from Illinois explained the reasoning behind the decision to take additional land from Utah. Among other things he stated that:

> The bill proposes to detach a small portion of territory now included under the organization of Utah. It is but one degree in extent from north to south, and the same from east to west. In this little square is located Fort Bridger, a military post of some importance. The population to be thus transferred from Utah to the new Territory - with a single exception - is entirely gentile, as they are designated by Mormons, and have petitioned us for the transfer. It is also proposed to transfer an irregularly-shaped

> strip of territory nearly a degree in width, and something over two degrees in length from north to south, now attached to Idaho. This was deemed proper by the committee in order to attain symmetry in the geographical boundaries of the new Territory. The committee was not advised that there is a dissenting voice among the inhabitants of the portion of Utah to the proposed change. On the contrary, being separated by a lofty range of mountains from their territorial seat of government, they eagerly accept the change. The committee are told that there is not a single inhabitant of the portion of Idaho transferred by this bill, therefore no opposition can come from that quarter (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 2nd Session part 3, 2792).

Several minutes of discussion followed these introductory remarks by Yates but, surprisingly, no one mentioned the proposed boundary changes to Utah. Rather, the Senators focused their energy on much more important matters such as whether the word "Shoshone" was more pleasing to the ear than the word "Cheyenne" and a good deal of time was spent arguing over the name of the proposed territory (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 2nd Session part 3, 2793). It was originally introduced as the Territory of Lincoln but calls for other names - utilizing local tribes and rivers - abounded. Ultimately, the challenges posted by the difficulty of spelling and pronouncing "Cheyenne" led to the acceptance of Wyoming (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 2nd Session part 3, 2795).

After this and other like matters had been discussed at length, a Senator finally asked a question that related to the proposed boundary change of Utah. His remarks, inquiring into possible changes in mining laws, reveal something of the underlying attitudes towards Utah felt by many in Congress at the time.

> Mr. Howard [from Michigan]: I beg to call the attention of the Senator from Wisconsin to the fact that a portion of the present Territory of Utah

> falls within the limits of this new Territory. He knows very well that there are very great peculiarities in the code of Utah, and I do not for one feel like confirming or affirming in any way any portion of the code of that famous Territory. Of course I do not refer to polygamy, which is already rendered unlawful by law, although I believe it is yet practiced in the Territory of Utah, the law being entirely impotent to check that vice. But does the Senator from Wisconsin intend that the Territory of Wyoming shall thus embrace within its limits a variety of laws, laws which may be inconsistent with each other in many respects?" (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 2nd Session part 3, 2798).

Senator Yates then offered the following reassurance:

> To relieve the honorable Senator of any particular apprehension on that subject, I beg to inform him that that portion of the Territory of Utah, as far as can be ascertained by the committee, does not contain over four or five beings - I believe one single family (Congressional Globe 40th Congress, 2nd Session part 3, 2798).

Senator Yates, minutes after confidently declaring that the "inhabitants of the portion of Utah" affected by the change "eagerly accept" it, now admitted that this consisted, as far as he knew, of but one family, a single member of which, evidently, was a Mormon. In other words, for the sake and convenience of "four or five beings," Congress was willing to strip 3,580 square miles (Neff 1940, 691) from a territory that had been in possession of that land for almost 20 years and give it to another. Where was this same concern for the hundreds of Mormons who were displaced after granting another slice of Utah to Nevada in 1866? What about the fact that southern Idaho was dominated by thousands of Mormons? Indeed, if five people justified the taking of a large chunk of land from Utah, why could not Congress see fit to transfer the Arizona Strip to Utah? Obviously, *who* the Mormons were mattered as much as *where* the Mormons were as Congress made its

boundary decisions. No resistence in Washington to this proposed boundary change can be found.

It is true that there were not many Mormons in the area that was stripped from Utah when this decision was made (although it is likely that there was more than just the one that Yates acknowledged). However, this is not to say that the Mormons had no interest in the area or had no historic claim to it. On the contrary, the Mormons, under Brigham Young, had made a concerted effort to settle the region as early as 1853 and there is little doubt they would have succeeded had it not been for government interference.

As emigrants continued to make their way to the Salt Lake Valley via the Mormon Trail, Brigham Young recognized the need for a way-station just before the last difficult stretch over the Wasatch Mountains where pioneer companies could stop for repairs, rest, and re-supply. On October 7, 1853, Brigham Young appointed Orson Hyde to organize a party for the purpose of establishing a settlement east of the Wasatch on the Green River. In early November, Hyde set out with 39 men and, being very fortunate to not encounter severe weather so late in the season, arrived at Fort Bridger on November 13 without any difficulties (Twitchell 1959, 7-8). The party selected a site 12 miles southwest of Fort Bridger and commenced the construction of "Fort Supply." About two weeks later another group of men and supplies, including over 100 head of cattle, arrived from Salt Lake City to aid in the establishment of the new settlement. The men toiled through the winter to build the fort and by the following spring over 100 Mormons were laboring there. The loyalty and obedience that the Church membership had for Brigham

Young is evidenced by this episode as over 100 men willingly left their families and newly-established homes in Salt Lake in order to build a fort in a place known for both hostile Natives and harsh weather. Bancroft noted in 1890 that "the Mormons . . . were the first actual settlers . . . in what is now a portion of Wyoming but was then considered to be in Utah" (Bancroft 1890, 696-97). Several families joined their husbands and established permanent residence there as the settlement grew and developed, and in the spring of 1855 they "planted over seventy acres of wheat and other grains" (Twitchell 1959, 12), the first "serious, non-transitory agriculture" in Wyoming (Brown 1980, 153). The fort proved to be a valuable asset to the westward moving wagon trains, a somewhat shaky friendship was nurtured with the various tribes that passed through, and several ambitious building projects at the settlement were undertaken. The settlement sat at an elevation of over 7000 feet and, despite being continually plagued by early and late frosts (almost a foot of snow fell on September 4, 1857, for example), the Mormons in and around Fort Supply had every intention of establishing a permanent colony there.

In 1857, however, word reached Salt Lake that a federal army was marching from the east to put down an alleged Mormon rebellion. Fort Supply stood right in the path of the approaching army and would be the first Mormon settlement reached. Brigham Young ordered the evacuation of the settlement and, in order to prevent Mormon property and supplies from falling into the hands of the invading army, directed that the colony be burned. On October 3, 1857, Fort Bridger, which had previously been purchased by the Mormons, was set ablaze and two or three days later Fort Supply suffered the same fate. It took three days for the fort and surrounding buildings to completely burn down

(Twitchell 1959, 23). On September 20, 1857, John Pulsipher, one of the residents of Fort Supply, recorded the following in his journal after reaching Salt Lake:

> Lord bless that noble band of brethren and sisters that have labored so to build up the kingdom by making peace with the natives and form a settlement in that cold dreary place on Green River County [Fort Supply]. We worked hard and by the Lord's blessing on our work were quite comfortably situated to live.
>
> Besides public work, traveling, missionary, making water ditches, building meeting houses, public coral and etc. I have cleared land of its timber - grubbed out willow thickets, for plow and hay land and got some of it fenced all round by itself [,] share of mill, lumber on hand - which at a low rate is upwards of a thousand dollars, of my individual property left - a total loss to me, because of this cruel persecution that Government allows against us (Twitchell 1959, 25).

Upon reaching the Bridger Valley in late 1857 the federal army rebuilt Fort Bridger, establishing it as an army post, and took control of the area (Twitchell 1959, 49). Much of the surrounding land was confiscated by the federal government and it became military property. The Mormons had a keen interest in what was later to become southwest Wyoming and "they probably would have succeeded in making Fort Supply a permanent settlement if they had not been forced to burn the fort and flee before Johnston's Army" (Twitchell 1959, 104). However, they *were* forced out and re-settlement of the area proved impossible due to the government takeover. It was not until 1890, some 33 years later, that the government finally allowed homesteading in the area. Not surprisingly, a number of Mormons "returned" to the Bridger Valley and five Mormon settlements were established there (Twitchell 1959, 57-73). Of course, by this time, the area was part of the State of Wyoming.

In 1868 Senators in Washington DC could justify stripping land from Utah and

giving it to Wyoming by pointing out that there were few Mormons in northeast Utah Territory. Had it not been for hostile government action against the Mormons, though, combined with over thirty years of military control, there almost certainly would have been a strong Mormon presence. Also, while not exhibiting a strong presence there when Wyoming was created, the Mormons, in time, would come to dominate the region around and to the north of Fort Bridger that had been stripped from Utah and Idaho Territories. "A few of them [Mormons] entered Star Valley [extreme west-central Wyoming] in the 1870s, and many more followed in the 1880s; they also began moving into the Big Horn Basin [north-central Wyoming] in the eighties" (Larsen 1965, 224). Ultimately, most of western Wyoming, the part that was taken from Utah and Idaho in 1868, became a region dominated by Mormons. Observed Wyoming geographer Robert Harold Brown in 1980, "There is a concentration of Mormon churches and part of four stakes along the western border of the state. The culture of the region is thus referred to [by Meinig] as US northern Mormon" (Brown 1980, 146).

The decision to strip land from Utah with the creation of Wyoming Territory provides us with yet another example of how the Mormons influenced the political geography of the West. First, the fact that few Mormons at the time lived in this region provided the justification for taking it from Utah. *Who* the Mormons were also played a role. The author finds it doubtful that under normal circumstances Congress would, for the sake of symmetry and on behalf of "four or five beings", shave off almost 4,000 square miles from a territory that had existed for almost two decades and give it to a brand new one. Under normal circumstances Congress would not think of insulting the

leaders and citizens of the well-established territory in such a manner. However, as has been demonstrated, the relationship between Congress and the Territory of Utah was not normal. Congress made no secret of its desire to limit Mormon control and the opportunity to create a nice, box-shape for the new territory of Wyoming provided all the justification needed for Congress to take one last slice from Utah.

# Chapter 6

## Two Hypothetical Scenarios

To this point the actual impact that Mormons had on several western boundaries has been examined. For almost twenty years, from 1850 to 1868, we find that two factors, who the Mormons were and where they settled, played key roles in western boundary decision making processes. While we can demonstrate that these factors were central to many of the individual decisions made, it is somewhat difficult to comprehend and grasp the full impact that the Mormons had in the shaping of the West. In an effort to illustrate this far-reaching impact, two hypothetical Wests will be presented in this chapter.

In the first scenario it is assumed that the Mormons did not come West. Indeed, we can go so far as to say that the Mormon religion did not exist at all. In a West free of Mormon settlement we can imagine how the states might have taken shape and thus get some idea of how influential the Mormon colonization there was. In the second scenario it is assumed that the Mormons did come West and that they settled just as they actually did but with one key difference: there was nothing about the Mormon religion that perturbed Americans in general and Congress in particular. By examining this scenario and how the West might look if the Mormons and Congress had not been at odds with

each other, we can better appreciate how this enmity between them actually influenced the shaping of the West. In other words, these two hypothetical scenarios allow us to get a better feel for just how the political geography of the West was influenced by *who* the Mormons were and *where* they settled.

Before examining these two scenarios, it should be made clear that the author is not attempting to definitively state exactly how the western United States would look if we assume these two conditions. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the actual role played by Mormons in actual western boundary decisions and this final chapter, which examines how the West *might* look under certain conditions, is intended merely to illustrate the fact that Mormons did indeed play a key role. As has been demonstrated, there were a number of factors, not the least of which was slavery, that influenced western boundary making and the author readily admits the difficulty of attempting to reinterpret these several decisions after having eliminated one of the key factors involved. Indeed, under these circumstances, the author could easily find justification for a variety of western state boundary scenarios. However, even if the assumptions made in this chapter are impossible to prove and are found to be debatable, its intended purpose is still legitimate. If the Mormons had not come West, or if they had had good relations with the government, the West would, undoubtedly, look very different on a map today. By speculating about how this map *might* look, we can better appreciate and comprehend the true significance of Mormons in the shaping of the West. This exercise, then, which requires some guesswork (not to mention imagination) can prove to be very helpful and insightful. Dr. Donald Meinig recently noted that there is much geographic and historic

value in re-examining how boundaries came to be and in speculating how they might look if certain conditions had been different. Exploring these "what ifs" of history, as Meinig calls them,

> can jar us out of habits of mind, loosen images so familiar, so constantly put before us, so deeply imprinted on our national consciousness that they are assumed to be fixed and inevitable. It is a fresh and forceful way of reminding ourselves that there was . . . nothing natural or inevitable about . . . the eventual shape of the continental United States (Meinig 1993, 217).

I am sure Meinig would agree that the same could be said for the eventual shape of the several states *within* the United States. By loosening the images of the western United States that are so deeply imprinted in our consciousness and consider how they might look absent a Mormon influence, we can more fully understand and appreciate the significance of that influence.[19]

## A Mormon-less West

Most people would agree that the West would be very different today if the Mormons had not colonized there. How might the western states have taken shape if we assume such a condition? For one thing, there would be no Utah. When the Mexican

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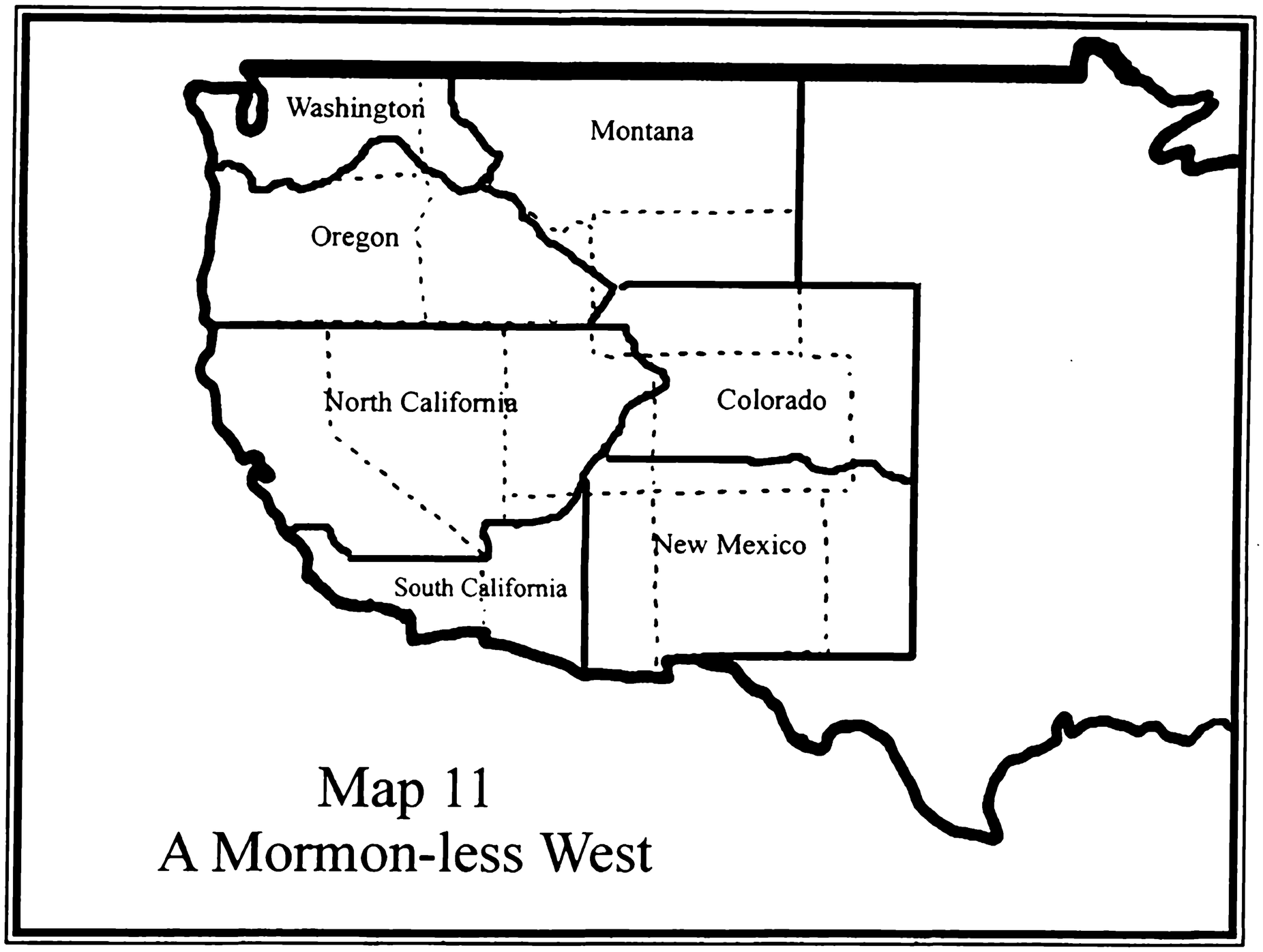
[19] In these hypothetical scenarios I am limiting my scope to the extreme western states. If the western states had indeed taken shape in the manner that I am proposing, the Midwestern states, too, would likely have been affected. However, only the western portion of the United States will be examined.




Cession was being organized, Congressmen at first focused on the two major population centers, California and New Mexico, and most proposals called for the creation of two states or territories that reflected this. After the Mormon presence in the Great Basin was acknowledged, however, momentum for three political units began to build and ultimately California was admitted as a state and the Territories of New Mexico and Utah were created for the benefit of Hispanos and Mormons respectively. If there had been no Mormons, there would have been no need for a third political unit and it is probable that only California and New Mexico would have emerged. New Mexico may well have occupied the area it requested in 1850 which included much of present-day Texas - the Compromise of 1850, as originally proposed, even included within New Mexico the

panhandle of Texas (Meinig 1998, 118) - and California likely would have embraced the rest. The slavery issue of the time must be kept in mind when we consider the "what-ifs" of history. Since it was almost inevitable that California would be admitted as a free state - she had, after all, requested admission as such and Congress could either take it or leave it - the South would likely have insisted that New Mexico, not yet ready for statehood, be organized as a slave territory.[20] This assurance of slavery in New Mexico would have made obsolete Southern insistence that Texas be granted all the territory she claimed, thus paving the way for the acceptance of the logical boundaries that New Mexico's Constitutional Convention had proposed in 1850 (with some minor modifications) (Leonard 1970, 389, 390).

That a super-sized state of California would be admitted to the Union is another likely scenario. Congress enthusiastically accepted, without reservation or modification, the boundaries that were proposed by the California State Convention. Before settling on what was to become their present boundary, though, the Convention had originally supported a huge California that encompassed most of the Mexican Cession. Only the realization that Mormons had settled near the Great Salt Lake - and that it would be too expensive to reimburse the travel expenses of Mormon delegates - could alter this plan. Ultimately, the boundaries that were proposed by California's Convention resulted from that Convention's acknowledgment of the Mormon presence in the West. The federal

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[20] It was a widely held assumption in Washington at this time that California, if not quickly brought into the Union, would go the way of Texas and opt for independence. Thus, there was tremendous pressure on Congress to bring California into the fold as soon as possible.

government, too, likely would not have opposed a big California. President Zachary Taylor, it will be remembered, favored such a concept and encouraged the Mormons to join with the Californians in making it a reality. Also, northern Congressmen would have been very eager to admit to the Union a huge chunk of land in which slavery was outlawed and they would have pushed hard for its admission. Robert Semple, a California State Convention delegate, related to the convention on September 24, 1848 a conversation he had had with a member of Congress:

> I observed to him that it was not the desire of the people of California to take a larger boundary than the Sierra Nevada; and that we would prefer not embracing within our limits this desert waste to the east. His reply was: 'For God's sake leave us no territory to legislate upon in Congress.' He went on to state that the great object in our formation of a state government was to avoid further legislation. *There would be no question as to our admission by adopting this course*; and that all subjects of minor importance could afterwards be settled (Browne 1850, 184 - emphasis added).

In other words, many Congressmen viewed a large California as the solution to their difficult task of organizing the Mexican Cession and they would do all they possibly could to ensure a massive California's admission into the Union.

It must be kept in mind that even when the more moderately-sized California emerged, it was assumed, both by Californians and Congressmen, that an eventual north-south division was inevitable. Another California State Convention delegate, Winfield S. Sherwood, stated on October 8, 1849: "I have no doubt in ten or twenty years from this time, if we fix [our boundary] upon the Sierra Nevada, still we will be divided into two or three states west of that line; but that is a matter for us to determine hereafter - perhaps for our descendants" (Browne 1850, 418). Certainly, with a massive California, further

subdivision, most likely between a northern and southern half, would have been expected. Just where this boundary would be drawn is difficult to say. Monterey, site of the California State Convention, centrally located between the northern and southern settlements, and situated near the well-known line of 36°30', would have been a prime candidate for the point at which to draw the line. However, a straight line east along 36°30' would have split the San Joaquin Valley in half. "In the popular usage of the time [1850s and 60s] Southern California was all that lay 'south of Tehachapi' - beyond the curving ridge linking the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Ranges, closing off the southern end of the Central Valley" (Meinig 1998, 57). Californians and Congressmen likely would have opted for a line south of Monterey, say at 36°, then, in order to keep the San Joaquin Valley intact, the line would have jogged to the south, along the crest of the Gabilan and other coastal ranges, thence due east along the 35th parallel to the Colorado River.[21] Because there was no Mormon settlement in the region and since the slavery issue, insofar as California was concerned, had been settled, the Colorado River would have made an ideal boundary for northern and southern California from this point until it intersected with New Mexico's western boundary.[22]

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[21] In 1860 the California State Legislature actually passed a bill which was signed by the governor requesting that California be divided. After this bill was sent to Washington, however, it was "lost in the turmoil of secession" (Meinig 1998, 46). The bill requested that the "Territory of Colorado" be created out of California's six southernmost counties, which would have resulted in an east-west boundary very similar to the one drawn here.

[22] Interestingly, if California were divided today in the manner presented here, each state, North California and South California, would have a smaller population than today's California even though each would occupy more territory than California presently occupies.

As for Nevada, prospectors would still have eventually trickled eastward across the Sierra Nevada into the Carson Valley but there would have been no need for these settlers to clamor for annexation by California since they would have already found themselves already that state. Thus, it is unlikely that a Territory, or later State, of Nevada would have ever emerged since its raison d'etre, the Mormons and the Territory of Utah, did not exist. Miners along the Front Range of the Rockies, however, would likely have called for, and received (just as they actually did) separate territorial recognition. The Front Range was greatly isolated from both the Pacific Coast and the settled portions of Nebraska and Kansas so it was logical to grant this distinct population separate political status. The Territory of Colorado, for the sake of uniformity, could easily have assumed for its western boundary the Green River, a prominent physical feature. This very boundary for Colorado had actually been proposed in Congress in 1861 but "when it was learned that citizens claiming allegiance to Utah were living in the area" a meridian that coincided with the easternmost extent of Mormon settlement was ultimately agreed upon (Hafen 1926, 106, Leonard 1970, 396, and Leonard 1992, 135). Here again, the eastern extent of Mormon settlement was not an issue so the most obvious and convenient *physical* boundary, the Green River, could have easily been employed. Colorado's eastern boundary likely would have coincided with New Mexico's eastern boundary. Where the northern boundary would be drawn is pure conjecture but, given the size of North California, South California, and New Mexico, a line at the 43rd parallel would have resulted in a comparable size for Colorado. Wyoming, therefore, would likely never have emerged since the Union Pacific Railroad, which practically

gave birth to that state, would have been built through Colorado. As it was, Colorado actually did make attempts in the 1860s to acquire more land to the north so that the transcontinental railroad would traverse through her territory but obviously these attempts were not successful (Meinig 1998, 139).

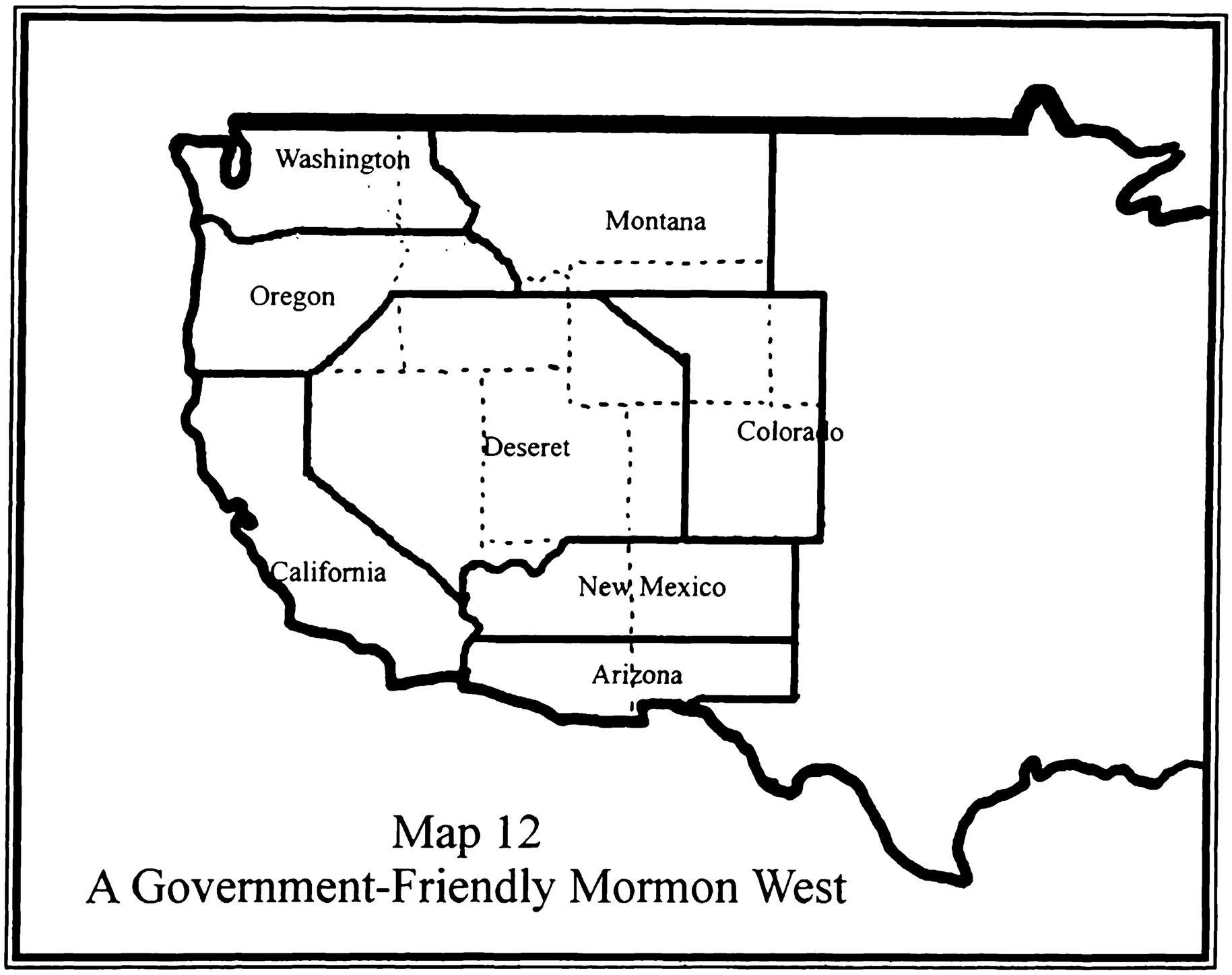
The organization of the area north of 42° is a bit tricky. First, we can speculate that Idaho would have never emerged as a distinct political unit. After all, "by 1877 Idaho had thirty-one distinct Mormon settlements and by 1890 about twenty-five thousand Mormon residents . . . [or] about one-quarter of Idaho's total population at that time" (Schwantes 1990, 57). Therefore, assuming our hypothetical scenario, much of the population base for this region would have been non-existent. Also, much of the White population that did emerge in southern and western Idaho as a result of mining could have easily found itself in Oregon. After all, when Oregon was created the Columbia and Snake Rivers formed much of her northern and eastern boundaries. A straight line is presently employed from a bend in the Snake River south until it intersects with the 42nd parallel perpendicularly. However, if California, as per this scenario, extended all the way to Colorado, it is logical to assume that Oregon would not have felt compelled to limit its eastern boundary as it did and would have extended it eastward possibly along the Salmon River. It is not unlikely, too, due to Oregon's lengthened eastern reach, that she would have utilized the Columbia and Snake Rivers as her *entire* northern border. This would have included within Oregon the anomalous Walla Walla region. This area had close ties to Portland - many of its citizens actually petitioned Oregon for annexation in the 1860s (Meinig 1998, 82) - and could easily have ended up within that state.

Indeed, from 1853 to 1859, a straight line resembling the one drawn here did actually exist between Oregon and Washington Territories. Again, due to the relative sizes of the states in this scenario, this line could easily have come to divide the *states* of Washington and Oregon. In time, a satisfactory boundary, separating the states of Oregon, Washington, and Montana (whose population nucleus was far-removed from any other substantial settlements and therefore demanded separate political recognition), would have emerged somewhere in present-day Idaho. Thus that state, including its "absurd panhandle" (Meinig 1998, 84), would never have emerged.

It is also possible, under this scenario, that a great interior state centered in Spokane, heart of the "Inland Empire," and including the Boise mining region and possibly even portions of North California may have developed. The Inland Empire, separated geographically and culturally from either Portland or the Puget Sound regions, may have sought to sever their political ties with the West Coast and the long-established and agrarian-minded populace of the Willamette Valley may have preferred that a separate political entity be created for the vastly different mining areas that emerged around Boise in the 1860s. However, by this time the West's boundaries would have become less fluid, the respective states would have likely balked at the prospect of losing territory or, in other words, prospective wealth, and seven rather large political units may well have developed there.

## A Government-Friendly Mormon West

This phrase, "government-friendly Mormon West," is used to describe a hypothetical scenario in which the Mormons did come West and settle, just as they actually did, but with one key difference. In this scenario, no hostility developed between the Mormons and the government. Surprisingly, perhaps, the author does not assert that the State of Deseret, as proposed by Brigham Young in 1848, would have emerged under the conditions of this scenario. As has been noted in chapter three, Congress' rejection of the proposed State of Deseret was not the result of rabid anti-Mormon prejudice on the part of Congress but rather the result of months and months of haggling in a Congress divided over the slavery issue. We can assume, then, that under this hypothetical scenario the Compromise of 1850 would have emerged just as it actually did, with California, including the same boundaries she now possesses, being admitted as a state, and two other territories being created. There is some evidence, though, as noted in chapter three, of anti-Mormon sentiment beginning to emerge in Washington at this time. The Mormon-preferred name of Deseret, for instance, was rejected by Congress and replaced with a word, Utah, that was wholly unrelated to Mormonism. It is likely, though, that the *boundaries* drawn by the 31st Congress in 1850 were not motivated by a resentment of Mormons or a desire to limit them. It is therefore safe to assume that with this scenario, California, as per the Compromise of 1850, would have been admitted as a



Map 12
A Government-Friendly Mormon West

free state with her present boundaries and the Territories of New Mexico and *Deseret* would have been created.

In considering this second hypothetical scenario we will focus on Deseret and how it likely would have been shaped over the years and then attempt to fill in the rest of the West. First, we will examine territory that Deseret likely would *not* have *lost*, and then we will consider territory that Deseret likely would have *gained*. Again, in this scenario, prospectors and miners from California would have trickled across the Sierra Nevada into the Carson Valley and, being from California and having closer proximity to that state's capital, may have sought to have California annex the extreme western portion

of Deseret Territory. They likely would have failed. First of all, under this scenario, the Mormons were not an "aberrant" group and the prejudices and suspicions that hounded them for nearly a century would have been non-existent. It is likely, then, that these Gentiles would not have objected as much as they actually did to the prospect of being subject to the territorial laws and jurisdictions of Deseret. Also, Nevada was not able to successfully break away from Utah until most of the Mormons in the Carson Valley region had left in 1857 as a result of the Utah War. In 1856 the Carson Valley was "organized politically, economically, and socially in the firm and able hands of the Mormons" (Elliot and Rowley 1987, 56) and, since there would have been no Utah War in this scenario, there is no reason to think that the Mormons would not have continued to maintain a strong civilizing and stabilizing presence in the valleys east of the Sierra Nevada. Congress would not have stripped land away from Deseret and the prospectors that moved into present-day Nevada would have become part of the economy of Deseret, living side-by-side with the agricultural Mormons.

On the eastern frontier of Deseret another group of Gentile miners would also still have appeared on the scene just as they actually did. In this case, owing to isolation of this new population center, plus the fact that no Mormons had settled in this area, it is likely that Congress would have deemed it necessary to create a separate political unit. Colorado, though, out of deference to the Mormons who were doing so much to peacefully and successfully colonize so much of the rugged intermountain region, would not have absorbed as much land from Deseret. Rather than a western limit at about 109° W. Longitude, Colorado may have received a boundary at 107°. After all, as noted in the

previous chapter, there was only a small Gentile presence west of the Front Range well into the 1870s. However, in order to compensate for this narrower east-west width, she could easily have been granted more territory to the north with a boundary at approximately 44° N. This development, once again, would have nullified the need for the State of Wyoming. Thus, in terms of land, Deseret would have lost nothing on the west and much less on the east.

Not only would Deseret have been much more successful in maintaining her original territorial borders under this scenario, she likely would have expanded beyond them. In this scenario it is likely that Deseret would have obtained statehood shortly after California, thus making it much easier for her to absorb additional territory. On the south, Congress would have enthusiastically embraced Deseret's proposal to make the Colorado River her boundary from California to the 37th parallel. After all, Congress had not known much about the region when it drew the boundary and now several facts were known. Among them, the only settlers in this region were Mormons, a Mormon port had already been constructed on the Colorado which would facilitate river traffic up and down that river, a road was being built from the larger towns in Deseret to that port, and, after all, it was the least Congress could do for the Mormons after snubbing the state boundaries proposed by Brigham Young. Young's proposed boundaries had included access to the Pacific and the Compromise of 1850 had left Utah (Deseret) landlocked. Transferring this land to Deseret would at least provide them with access to a navigable river. Plus, it made no sense to leave that region within New Mexico (or Arizona) since it was completely isolated from her. Not only would the Strip have been enthusiastically

granted to Deseret under this scenario, it is not outside the realm of possibility that even more land, south along the Colorado, would have been annexed by Deseret. In 1864 Brigham Young wrote Territorial Delegate John F. Kinney:

> asking that Congress 'grant us about two degrees on one side or the other side of the [Colorado] river, to the Gulf of California, or to the boundary of the United States in that direction. This addition to our territory would give us an outlet on the western ocean as we need.' Suffice it to say Judge Kinney did not succeed with Congress (Jackson 1978, 39).

Under this scenario, though, he just may have.

The author's decision to divide Arizona and New Mexico north and south as opposed to east-west is a speculative one, but it is not without justification. As early as 1854 settlers within the Territory of New Mexico were requesting a north-south split. In 1860 a convention in Tucson called for the territory to be divided at 33°40'. There was congressional support for such a decision, the proposed line "was actually reasonably concordant with some important geographic factors" (Meinig 1971, 23), and the Tucson plan "seemed to be a strong indication of a likely geopolitical design for the southwest" (Meinig 1971, 23). The Civil War, however, served to quash this seemingly inevitable development. An overzealous Arizona viewed the Union's rupture as a prime opportunity to obtain the territory she desired and on February 14, 1862 the "Confederate Territory of Arizona," consisting of the southern half of New Mexico Territory, was formally admitted into the Confederate States of America (Peck 1962, 154). Union forces from California and Colorado, though, quickly routed the Confederate forces in the breakaway territory and with that defeat went hopes of a "Confederate corridor to California" (Meinig 1971, 25). On February 25, 1863 the Territory of New Mexico was

"divided in two longitudinally along the 109° W meridian, a direct contradiction of the abortive Arizona design" (Meinig 1971, 25). The vastly different boundary development schemes presented in these two hypothetical scenarios would undoubtedly have impacted the political situation in Washington, a subject this thesis does not even attempt to explore. Perhaps the Civil War would have ben averted. Perhaps it would have occurred ten years earlier. Assuming, then, that the political conditions of the country were different, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the anticipated north-south division of New Mexico Territory would have become a reality. After all, this type of division was favored by the inhabitants of what became Arizona, there had been much support for it in Washington, and the boundary coincided with some important geographic features. Indeed, even *after* the longitudinal split, Arizona tried unsuccessfully to annex south and southwestern New Mexico (Meinig 1998, 152). Therefore, the political repercussions of a "government-friendly Mormon West," while impossible to quantify, could very easily have paved the way for the anticipated division of New Mexico into a northern and southern half.

On the north, it is very possible that the well-established 42nd parallel would have been breeched. Brigham Young, doubting the agricultural viability of the valleys north of Bear Lake, emphasized the colonization of the more arid south. After his death, however, the area of present-day southeastern Idaho became a focus of Mormon colonization (Meinig 1998, 100). It is likely that at some point Deseret would have successfully petitioned Congress for annexation of the area - including the Star Valley of present-day Wyoming - since the population of these lands was overwhelmingly Mormon, it was

culturally, economically, and politically tied to the Mormon core region, and the 42nd parallel was, after all, an antecedent boundary, drawn before the region had been settled. It is likely, too, that what is now southern Idaho would have been divided north and south between Deseret and Oregon around the time the two became states, possibly also utilizing the 44th parallel as the dividing line between them.

Since California's width in this scenario is much smaller than her width in the previous scenario, Oregon likely would have opted for the Columbia River as its northern boundary with Washington to the point where it bends to the north. Then, uncertain of its ultimate eastern extent, a straight line eastward would have been employed (just as it actually was). In time, as the West continued to take shape, this line would have been extended to Montana. From Deseret's extreme northwestern boundary with Oregon a straight line could have been drawn to Deseret's extreme northwestern border with California and a similar line, from the Star Valley in Wyoming to her extreme northeastern border with Colorado, could also have been drawn, thus enhancing Deseret's compact shape. This would have placed within Deseret the Boise region, another area which would have experienced a mining boom. There may have been some initial agitation in the mining camps for separate political status but since no animosity between Gentiles and Mormons would have existed in this scenario, it is likely that Boise, like the Carson Valley, would have become assimilated into the economy of Deseret. The present panhandle of Idaho would likely have been attached to Washington Territory and, since Wyoming did not exist, Montana would have stepped in to absorb the rest. Thus, under this scenario, it is not unlikely that eight political units, including a large Deseret enveloping much of the interior, would have developed in the West.

# Conclusions

On a map the western United States looks the way it does for a variety of reasons. The many variables that combined to influence the drawing of western boundaries, including slavery, population, mining, agriculture, transportation, and representation, worked in concert to produce what we now see. The settlement and colonization of the Mormons was another vital factor. Identifying the influence that this religious group had on the political geography of the West has been the purpose of this thesis.

In the course of this study, several questions for possible further research have evolved. For instance, some of my findings suggest that the Mormon factor contributed to the use of straight, geometric lines in western boundary making. Colorado's western boundary, for example, originally proposed along a river, was later changed to a straight line that better approximated the eastern extent of Mormon settlement. Arizona's straight northern boundary *resisted* a proposed change to make it a physical boundary as a result of who the Mormons were. Would more physical boundaries have been employed in western state boundaries absent the Mormon influence? Also, as this thesis has pointed out, President Buchanan's decision to send a federal army to Utah in 1857 appears to have had a profound impact on western political geography. Several far-flung but well-

established Mormon settlements like San Bernardino, Mormon Station, and Fort Supply, were abandoned and the Mormon presence in these areas greatly diminished as a direct result of the "Utah War." What was the actual geographic impact of this event? In the hypothetical scenarios presented in this chapter the states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Nevada did not emerge. Was the creation of these states dependent upon the Mormon colonization of the West? On a more historical note, how did the actions of people like William H. Hooper, James F. Kinney, and James M. Ashley affect the political geography of the West? One thing is certain, the Mormons were a factor in the organization of the western states.

The Mormons did not simply build a new settlement in the West. A vast, aggressive colonizing effort took place which spread the Mormons and their accompanying influence over a wide geographic expanse. The Mormons made their first major impression on the political geography of the West with the passage of the Compromise of 1850 and the simultaneous creation of the state of California. The boundaries ultimately decided upon for California resulted directly from the fact that the Mormons had settled where they did. Congress' decision in 1850 to create three political units in the Mexican Cession, as opposed to two, was also the direct result of the Mormon presence in the West and the southern boundary for Utah Territory, as defined by the compromise, was drawn so as to approximate the southern limit of Mormon expansion. The relationship between the Mormons and the federal government eventually soured and even turned hostile and when two distinct Gentile populations emerged on Utah's eastern and western frontiers, Congress was quick to take advantage of the situation. Utah

suffered major territorial losses with the creation in 1861 of Nevada and Colorado Territories and during the next seven years three additional slices were taken from Utah. During this period Congress was very effective in their "measures designed to compress the limits of the Mormons" (Angel 1881, 46). On at least two occasions some in Congress even attempted to effectively wipe Utah and the Mormons off the political map of the United States but these attempts were not successful. Utah's strained relationship with Washington resulted in vast territorial losses for her and nixed any possibility of territorial expansion even though such boundary modifications would have done much to bring about a greater concordance between western boundaries and the physical and human geography of the region.

Indeed, the Mormons in the West present us with an interesting dichotomy. On the one hand, many western boundaries were antecedent or pioneer and when these boundaries served to compress the Mormons, such as with the Arizona Strip and southeastern Idaho, they remained resistant to change and became superimposed boundaries. In other words, they lack conformity to natural and cultural regions. On the other hand, when it served Congress' purposes to change a boundary so as to further compress the Mormons, such as is the case with Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming, there was little hesitation in turning antecedent boundaries into subsequent boundaries which, according to Congress, better enhanced the natural and cultural divisions of the area. This study, then, which examines the settlement of a distinct and unpopular group within an existing country and their relationship with the central government, can now be compared and contrasted with other similar studies. Thus, this thesis adds to the growing

body of work on internal boundaries and may contribute to the evolution of accepted theories and models.

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The Mormons' decision to seek refuge in the Rocky Mountains had far-reaching consequences for the political geography of this country. Two critical and key factors, who the Mormons were and where they settled, consistently influenced the boundary-making decisions of Congress during the latter half of the nineteenth century. While few fail to recognize the cultural and historical legacy of the Mormons in the West, many may not realize the key role they played in the development of the boundaries of the western states. The Mormon influence on the political geography of the West has to this point been under-appreciated and underestimated. This thesis has outlined the Mormon migration and settlement, documented the various boundary decisions made in Congress between 1850 and 1868 and how the Mormons influenced them, and finally, hypothesized how the West might look today - absent the Mormon influence - in order to further illustrate their impact. Certainly, the Mormon influence on the political geography of the West was profound.

Appendix

Chronology of Important Events

1830 - April 6 - Organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

1847 - April - Vanguard company of Mormons leaves Winter Quarters for the Salt Lake Valley.
- July 21 - First Mormon pioneers arrive in Salt Lake Valley.

1848 - July 4 - Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo signed by President Polk.
- December 11 - Stephen A. Douglas proposes the entire Mexican Cession be organized into the State of California.
- December - Memorial for the creation of the State of Deseret is written in Salt Lake City.

1849 - March 3 - 30th Congress, unable to organize the Mexican Cession, adjourns.
- March 8 - Constitution of Deseret accepted by Mormon assembly.
- May - Mormon delegates sent to Washington DC to petition for Deseret's admission.
- July 18 - Deseret's statehood appeal officially presented in Washington by Almon W. Babbitt.
- September 6 - Indian agent communicates to Mormons President Zachary Taylor's desire for a super-sized California to be divided later.
- September - October - California State Convention in Monterey.
- December 3 - 31st Congress convenes.

1850 - January 8 - Mormon delegate arrives in San Francisco to encourage a super-sized state of California.
- February - California Legislature rejects Mormon proposition.
- April - Mormons settle in Carson Valley.
- September - Compromise of 1850 accepted by Congress.

1851 - June - Mormons establish colony of San Bernardino.

1853 - November 15 - Fort Supply established in present-day Wyoming.

1855 - June 14 - Las Vegas established by Mormon missionaries.

1856 - Republican national platform calls for the abolishment of the "twin relics of barbarism - polygamy and slavery."
- June - Utah makes its second appeal for statehood.

1857 - July 18 - the "Utah Expedition," a military force dispatched by President Buchanan, begins its march to Salt Lake.
- September 22 - Mormon abandonment of Carson Valley commences.
- September - Mormons abandon Fort Supply.

1861 - January - Utah makes its third appeal for statehood.
- February 28 - Territory of Colorado created. 29,500m² stripped from Utah.
- March 2 - Territory of Nevada created. 73,574m² stripped from Utah.
- March 2 - 10,740m² stripped from Utah, attached to Nebraska Territory.

1862 - July 1 - Lincoln signs the anti-polygamy Morrill Act.
- July 14 - 18,326m² stripped from Utah, given to Nevada.

1864 - March - Utah makes its fourth appeal for statehood.
- May - Panaca, oldest town in eastern Nevada, established by Mormons.
- October - Callville established along Colorado River in present-day Nevada.

1865 - January 11 - Utah makes its first attempt to annex the Arizona Strip.

1866 - May 7 - 18,326m² stripped from Utah, given to Nevada.
- July 23 - Representative James M. Ashley, of Ohio, presents a scathing report on Utah and the Mormons to the House Committee on Territories.

1867 - January - Utah makes its fifth appeal for statehood.

1868 - July 25 - 3,580m² stripped from Utah, given to Wyoming.

1869 - January 14 - Congressman Ashley introduces bill to dismember Utah.

1870 - January - Lee's Ferry established by Mormons along Colorado River in Arizona.

1872 - March - Utah makes its sixth appeal for statehood.

1876 - Brigham Young directs colonization of east-central Arizona.

1877 - August 29 - Brigham Young dies.

1882 - February - Utah makes its seventh appeal for statehood.
- March - Congress passes the anti-polygamy Edmunds Bill.

1887 - January - Utah makes its eighth appeal for statehood.
- March - Congress passes the anti-polygamy Edmunds-Tucker Act.

1890 - September - Church President Wilford Woodruff announces the "Manifesto," ending - for the most part - Church-sponsored plural marriages.

1896 - January 6 - Utah admitted to the Union as the 45th state.

1919 - February - Utah makes its sixth and final attempt to obtain the Arizona Strip.

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