

**ENEMIES FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC: US RELATIONS WITH MORMONS IN THE
US EMPIRE IN NORTH AMERICA, 1844-1854**

by

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Enemies Foreign and Domestic: US Relations with Mormons in the US Empire in North America, 1844-1845

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This dissertation seeks to explain the causes and events leading to the alienation of Mormons from the United States government from 1844 to 1854 in the context of American political and diplomatic history. This study demonstrates how foreign policy goals and partisan political concerns caused federal officials to negotiate with Mormons as a foreign, rather than domestic, entity. These interactions were based upon fear and misinformation on both sides and were colored by the overwhelmingly negative view of Mormons in popular US culture. It will examine the Mormons in their unique role as both conquerors and conquered in western North America, and how their religion, power, and politics prompted aggressive responses from federal, state, and local governments. This dissertation will add to the historiography of American continental expansionism and particularly to the understanding of Mormons in this process. It will discuss the formative years of the US/Mormon conflict in terms of American foreign relations and national policy. It provides a new interpretation of the Mormon Battalion, US efforts to force Mormon Americanization, and Mormon resistance to these efforts, characterized a conflict which lasted for decades. Early Mormon/US relations led to clashes between Mormons and the federal government for over half a century. The Mormons presented a special problem for the United States government. The Mormons had an American cultural heritage and were composed primarily of native-born white Americans. They were a group that was both foreign and domestic, one that was willing to unite with the United States, but unwilling to renounce practices deemed unacceptable by American culture. The Latter-day Saints' American citizenship, nearly homogenous whiteness, and adherence to American culture presented a unique problem for the expanding United States empire. American officials were forced to establish a "Mormon policy." Unlike other ethnic and racial groups which were forced to deal with the asymmetry of power resulting from the American conquest of western North America, Mormons were mostly white, English-speaking Americans. Examining Mormon/US interactions reveals the limits to "Americanism" and the extent to which religious and cultural nonconformity shaped federal leaders' views of Mormons as an alien people and enemies of the nation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation seeks to illustrate and explain the causes and events leading to the alienation of Mormons from the United States government from 1844 to 1854 in the context of American political and diplomatic (continental expansion) history. The study attempts to facilitate an understanding of how foreign policy goals and partisan political concerns caused federal officials to negotiate with Mormons as a foreign, rather than domestic, entity. These interactions were based upon fear and misinformation on both sides and were colored by the overwhelmingly negative view of Mormons in popular US culture. The dissertation will examine the Mormons in their unique role as both conquerors and conquered in western North America, and how their religion, power, and politics prompted aggressive responses from federal, state, and local governments.

The Latter-day Saints' American citizenship¹, nearly homogenous whiteness, and adherence to American culture presented a unique problem for the expanding United States empire. Interaction with Mormons in the Great Basin became a key factor in determining the status of the territories captured from Mexico. American officials were forced to establish a "Mormon policy" to deal with this group. This work will analyze these first years of interaction following Mormon removal from the nation. Unlike other ethnic and racial groups which were forced to deal with the asymmetry of power resulting from the American conquest of western North America, Mormons were white, spoke English, and held the distinction of both prior residence in the United States and official citizenship status. Thus, examining Mormon/US

¹ Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were commonly referred to as Mormons because of their adherence to the *Book of Mormon* as scripture in addition to the *Bible*, and this study will use the terms Latter-day Saint and Mormon interchangeably. In addition, this study will also reference the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the Mormon Church interchangeably.

interactions reveals the limits to American identity and the extent to which religious and cultural nonconformity shaped federal leaders' views of Mormons as an alien people, supposedly prone to disloyal and treasonous machinations.

During the course of the twenty years following the death of Mormonism's founder, Joseph Smith, the United States ignored, feared, negotiated with, used, and threatened the Mormon group which eventually moved to Utah. The Mormons themselves responded with sometimes provocative, other times naïve or wrong-headed, policies, as a means to their survival. This dissertation tries to make clear that there were no innocents in the story of Federal-Mormon confrontation, but that the Mormons – the weaker of the belligerents – suffered the brunt of U.S. imperialism. Eventually, their territory was occupied by US military forces determined to ensure proper respect for the laws of the United States, in a conflict called the Utah War. US efforts to force Mormon Americanization, and Mormon resistance to these efforts, characterized a territorial conflict which lasted for decades. Early Mormon/US relations set the tone and followed a course which led to clashes between Mormons and the federal government for over half a century, the lingering effects of which are still apparent even today. The foundations of this conflict will be presented in the following pages.

Mormons and Mid-Nineteenth Century America

Early in 1858, a new and exciting rumor reached the publishers of *Harper's Weekly* in New York. It seemed as if the Mormons would finally leave and go somewhere else. As the resulting article explained, the United States would be happy to be rid of these people. If the rumor proved true the Mormons would, by the thousands, move north to the British possessions

in Canada, the country could well rejoice. These people had, “rendered to the United States no appreciable return for the trouble and expense which they have cost us.”²

The periodical had recently reported on the numerous attempts to introduce legislation in Congress to bring more settlers to the lands of the West. The land was claimed by the United States, but it was only sporadically controlled by American settlers and military forces. Certainly Native American groups would dispute the fact that “the West” belonged to whites who were not even living there.³ No less than three times in three months following the publication of this article were different versions of homesteading bills presented in the Congress, each designed to help populate the vast open territories. Despite this, when this group of people left the very area that legislators were seeking to populate, the publication maintained sarcastically that, “It is unlikely that the masses of the American people will give way to unreasonable mourning over their departure.”⁴

Unfortunately for the gleeful editors of *Harper’s Weekly*, the Mormons in Utah did not pull up stakes and migrate to Canada. Two years later the same publication reported hopefully that the Mormons would soon move to Oceanica, some other island of the South Pacific, or perhaps even New Guinea. The hated thousands would leave “if an arrangement could be made by which they could be paid by Government for their improvements in Utah.”⁵

It was extraordinary that the publication would be celebrating the possibility of thousands of white Americans leaving American territory, especially those living in the West. But what is even more singular is the fact that a little over a decade earlier, the Mormons had themselves

² “Good News for John Bull”, *Harper’s Weekly*, January 23, 1858.

³ For a thorough discussion of Native American relations with whites in the West, see Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁴ “Good News for John Bull”, *Harper’s Weekly*, January 23, 1858. In fact, one of the motivations for the bill was to effectively drown the Mormons with waves of properly Christian, white Americans.

⁵ “A New Home for the Mormons”, *Harper’s Weekly*, July 21, 1860.

been advocates of extending and solidifying the American imperial control of the West.

Mormon leader Joseph Smith advocated peaceable annexation wherever it was possible. He had sent a petition to the Congress in 1844 asking that he be allowed to raise a volunteer army of 100,000 men (staggering in nineteenth century American terms) “for the Protection of the Citizens of the United States emigrating to the adjoining territories, and the extension of the principles of Universal Liberty.”⁶

Smith especially spoke of the citizens of the Republic of Texas, stating that they were unable to “protect” themselves as an independent nation. Nor were the settlers of Oregon safe from possible “foreign invasion.” He advocated assembling a volunteer army led by himself which would secure the United States’ rights to these lands. High-minded in his rhetoric, Smith explained that it was “the desire of the United States to see the principles of her free institutions extended to all Men.”⁷ Smith would not simply stop at Oregon Territory and Texas, but argued for the benevolent annexation of Canada and Mexico.⁸ In Smith’s view, the Mormons not only identified with America, they sought an expansion of the power and territory of the nation they believed was created by divine intervention.

While Smith’s expansionist rhetoric and the Mormons’ view of America as God’s chosen nation was shared by millions of Americans, their religion was not. Nor was their clannishness, which centered on gathering and city building to await the impending coming of the Messiah. Mormon settlements exercised seemingly disproportionate economic and political power in their local communities which bred resentments with other settlers. Mormon premillennial doctrines viewed the end times as near and the world as divided starkly between the wicked and the

⁶ Joseph Smith, memorial to Congress entitled, “To the Honorable, the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America Assembled”, March 26, 1844.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “General Smith's Views on the Government and Policy of the U.S.”, *Times and Seasons*, May 1, 1844.

righteous.⁹ Like Calvinist Puritans before them, Mormons believed themselves to be God's chosen people. They were graced to have a prophet restoring the true and living church of Jesus back onto the earth. Mormon theology by 1844 was radically different than the Protestant Christianity practiced in the United States.

Yet Mormon heresy to established Christian theological mores was not the motivating factor ushering in adoption of a federal policy toward the Mormons, nor was the Mormon social experiment or its minuscule impact on the economy of the United States. For federal officials, the Mormons were just another manifestation of the religious excesses of the era. When Mormons attempted to elicit a federal response to the private and state-sponsored violence against the group in Missouri, the United States refused to intervene. When similar outbreaks of violence occurred in Illinois, President James K. Polk again refused to intervene, despite desperate Mormon petitions for US help.

US/Mormon Relations

It was not until the Mormons appeared able to hinder American continental expansion that the federal government took notice of the sect. The Mexican War altered federal perceptions of Mormons from a position of benign oddity to one of existential threat. Initially fearing a Mormon/British or Mormon/Mexican alliance, the federal government entered into duplicitous negotiations with Mormon representatives. Popular representations of Mormons as seditious combined with the demographic realities of the Mormon migration to western North America to provoke the creation of a United States policy to deal with the dangers this sect seemed to

⁹ For a thorough examination of Mormon millenary thought see Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

present. This relationship, motivated by fear and founded on dishonest representations of intentions, permanently affected the course of Mormon/US relations, and is the subject of this dissertation. By highlighting the Mormons as a group that represented a possible threat to the United States' interests, the Polk administration set a standard for federal relations with Mormons. Although most were American citizens, the Mormons were treated as a potentially dangerous group. The United States and the Mormons stumbled forward in their relations with one another in the 1840's and 50's, under the cloud of this early executive decision. This dissertation seeks to shed light on the interactions between the two groups and concurrently focus American diplomatic history on the actions of the United States with various groups inhabiting the western portion of North America.

The typical story of minority groups struggling to cope with the demands and culture of their conquerors is a sad and familiar one. The case of the Mormons, however, is not. Rather than a group that was dominated by the forces of American cultural, economic, and military imperialism, overcome and repressed through an asymmetric power structure, the Mormon story works in reverse. The Mormons were nearly all white, Anglo-Saxon, American citizens. Most hailed from Northern states. And most were of traditional Protestant heritage prior to their conversion to Mormonism. Mormons embraced most aspects of American culture. A Mormon could not be readily identified by their speech, clothing, or profession. Yet their new-found faith taught subscribers that they were the elect of God and possessors of the true form of Christianity and clashed terribly with the ideas of their fellow Americans. In fact, Mormonism has been viewed by some to be more properly recognized as a new religion rather than simply a new sect of Christianity.¹⁰ Mormon involvement in the highly charged politics of the 1840's facilitated

¹⁰ Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 11-12.

the growth of anti-Mormon sentiment as the adherents of each party vacillated between regarding the Mormons as potential allies and inveterate enemies. Mormon willingness to switch party allegiances with alacrity only added to the negative sentiments regularly expressed about the Mormons' loyalty. Thus the Mormons had agency of their own and often employed it in ways that were detrimental to their own professed goal of peaceful, autonomous existence within American territory

The Mormons moved from Ohio to Missouri amidst persecution and from Missouri to Illinois as a result of direct conflict with local and state governments, and manifested by vigilante violence. This conflict left several Mormons and Missourians dead and thousands of Mormons destitute. Finally, when conflict erupted again in Illinois the Mormons were expunged from the country altogether and driven into Mexican territory. There the federal government would fluctuate between using the Mormons to further American national aims and shunning the Mormons for their distinctiveness. Eventually, leaders of both parties would view the Mormons more as foreign enemies than as Americans. One-time ally Senator Stephen Douglas would refer to the Mormons in Utah as a cancerous growth in the West and "enemies of the government", particularly because he claimed they were "stimulating the Indians to acts of hostility."¹¹

Such difficulty with the Mormons in their new Western home was not completely unforeseen. *The New York Sun*, upon learning of the planned Mormon exodus to the West in 1845, prophesied ominously that the Mormons would "become formidable enemies to the United States, either in California or Oregon; and the government should look to this matter in

¹¹ Stephen Douglas, "Kansas - the Mormons - Slavery," Speech delivered at Springfield, IL, June 12, 1857, Included in, *A Political Text-book for 1860: Comprising a Brief View of Presidential Nominations and Elections: Including All the National Platforms Ever Yet Adopted: Also, A History of the Struggle Respecting Slavery in the Territories and the Actions of Congress as to the Freedom of Public Lands, With Most Notable Speeches and Letters of Messrs. Lincoln, Douglas, Bell, Cass, Seward, Everret, Breckinridge, H.V. Johnson, etc., Touching the Questions of the Day; and Returns of all Presidential Elections since 1836*, Compiled by Horace Greeley and John P. Cleveland (New York, New York, 1860), 157.

season.”¹² This “matter” would eventually lead the United States government to marshal an army and send it to Utah Territory to crush a purported insurrection. Further, as the Civil War raged, Union troops would again be sent to keep an eye on the Mormons in 1862. The desperate Confederate States would look to the Mormons as a potential ally that could ravage the resource-rich western holdings of the Union.¹³ Though this alliance was not considered by the Mormons and never materialized, and the Mormons never directly fought federal troops or took an anti-Union position, this group of white Americans and white immigrants from Northern Europe would become perhaps the greatest thorn in the side of the expanding American Empire in the West, a curious development in a nation so concerned with racial identity. Long after other areas with similar or smaller populations were admitted as states, the Mormons in Utah would be controlled by the unwieldy territorial apparatus, which the United States used to prevent what it viewed to be the likely excesses of unrestrained Mormon access to democracy.

Over the past decade, scholars of American foreign relations have increasingly studied the creation, evolution, and nature of the United States’ empire. In explaining the genesis of American imperialism, historians have focused primarily on the territorial, economic, cultural, and political aspects of American power just prior to the twentieth century, beginning with the Spanish American War. However, relatively little scholarly attention among diplomatic historians has been paid to the American continental expansion through which Americans exerted authority over thousands of miles of territory in what has been termed the “American West.” This dissertation seeks to rectify this problem in part by examining US/Mormon relations in the years immediately prior to and following the death of Joseph Smith, the founder

¹² *The New York Sun*, October 27, 1845.

¹³ General Daniel Ruggles to Adjutant and Inspector General Samuel Cooper, February 18, 1865. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, Vol. XLVIII, Part 1, Chapter LX, 1393.

of the sect. The objective is to place the Mormons, a group largely excluded from imperial history by scholars, within the historical framework of American foreign relations. Viewing the Mormons as a foreign entity rather than a domestic concern much more clearly illustrates the relationship between the two groups. And, it closely reflects the actual feelings the two groups held for one another. Both Mormons and officials of the United States recognized their differences. The United States vacillated between viewing the Mormons as citizens in order to further the nation's own expansionist ambitions and as a foreign group with little or no allegiance to the United States, regardless of the Mormons' many professions to the contrary. Once the government perceived the Mormons as a threat to national objectives, it pursued a course with the Mormons that resembled its other diplomatic concerns. Relations with Mormons tested the limits of American republicanism, breaking with the easy white/non-white dichotomy with which other territorial subjugations could be justified. The heart of the Mormon/US conflict was a debate over American identity.

It is a common misconception to view Mormon history as synonymous with Mormon polygamy. While eventually nothing dominated US/Mormon relations like the polygamy controversy, polygamy's role in the early interactions between the two groups was almost non-existent. Rather, international fears and national political concerns dominated US policy toward Mormons from 1844-1851. The Mormons had a role in exacerbating these fears and contributing to the reactionary political climate which often affected national policy. Mormon rhetoric excoriated United States officials and sometimes the nation itself in language that was easily taken as treasonous.

However, it is a mistake to view the Mormons as a separatist group that wanted to be utterly detached from America. True, they were clannish and their gathering together in one

large body in Nauvoo, Illinois and elsewhere may lead one to view them as a group desperate for isolation from the nation. The Mormons, however, very much wanted not only to be a part of the American experience, but to take a part in shaping it. The settlement in Utah, as remote and desolate as it was, did not demonstrate Mormon desires for complete alienation from the United States. Rather, the Mormons immediately began the process of obtaining a territorial or state government. The Mormon goal was to achieve a state government, one in which the majority population shared their beliefs, and thereby mitigate the state-sanctioned mob violence that had occasioned difficulties in their previous settlements. For a brief time, in fact, the partisanship and rancor surrounding the slavery issue of 1848-1851 appeared to be working in the Mormons favor; their public neutrality on the slavery issue and lack of certain political patronage allowed both Whigs and Democrats to lend some support to the Mormon cause.

Following the creation of Utah Territory, however, US/Mormon relations paradoxically worsened. The revelation of Mormon polygamy and the controversy engendered by disputes with federal officials appointed to govern the territory led to a greater alienation of the Mormons from the United States government. Federal officials balked at Mormon political organization which to them resembled a theocratic despotism more than republicanism. The national disgust over polygamy and rumors of a Mormon insurrection in their Rocky Mountain enclave eventually motivated the United States government to dispatch thousands of troops on several occasions to deal with the perceived Mormon menace and ensure their tepid loyalty.

Not only is there a misconception of the way the Mormons viewed the nation, there is a lack of understanding of the way the nation viewed the Mormons. It is often taken for granted that because the Mormons did not receive federal aid, that most Americans wanted them extirpated as well. While this was the case for many, especially religious and political figures,

some were actually embarrassed that the nation had allowed the persecution of a religious group in violation of constitutional principles. Reformers like Thomas Kane sought to protect the Mormons from federal persecution and use the Mormons to help settle the overarching political controversy over slavery's expansion into the territories.

The Mormons eventually became literal outcasts from the nation, not because the federal government adopted an overtly anti-Mormon policy, but because it did nothing to stay the passionate forces advocating the removal of the group. This ambivalence led to problems for the federal leaders attempting to expand American power to the West. The expulsion of the Mormons led to unanticipated foreign relations problems for the United States government.

Mormonism was essentially a domestic concern that became a foreign policy problem. There is no evidence that the Mormons were destined to clash with the federal government; in fact, the Mormons were desperately trying to get the federal government involved in their plight. Mormon theology, especially as espoused by the Mormon leader and prophet, Joseph Smith, saw the American Constitution as divinely inspired by God. As such, the Mormons looked with incredulous eyes upon the vaunted federal system that offered them no protection from the brutal treatment they had received within several states. The refusal of presidents and statesmen to stand up for their rights as Americans shocked the Constitution-loving Mormons. Still, their religious belief that divine intervention had created the national government usually prevented them from directly attacking the American system of government. In the common Mormon view, the national leaders were to be blamed, but the system was established by God.¹⁴

While still living in the confines of the nation, the Mormons were a curiosity, to some even a loathsome fringe group, but the Mormons certainly did not see themselves in any way opposed to the American system of government. To the contrary, Joseph Smith and the apostles

¹⁴ Doctrine & Covenants, 101: 77-80.

believed that Mormons would have a great role in preventing the destruction of the United States at some point in the near future. While Mormon religious and political practices contributed to the difficulties with the United States, conflict between the federal government and the Mormons in Utah was primarily the result of the apathy and inability of the federal government to address these citizens' concerns while they were still living as a minority group within the confines of the family of states.

Following the murder of Smith and his brother in 1844, the views on Mormonism held by politicians in the national government did not change perceptibly. The great change was in the Mormon view of the United States government. Prior to Smith's death, Mormons entertained hopeful views that the United States government would eventually intervene on their behalf. Smith's presidential candidacy did not shun the federal government as inherently evil; it merely reflected that by 1844 he and other Mormons believed that the divinely-inspired and fundamentally sound structure needed a just man to head it. Believing that the Constitution was a document inspired by God, the Mormons considered their trials to be the result of corrupt politicians serving in leadership positions rather than a failing of the Constitution. They believed that eventually leaders not blinded by bigotry or corruption would come to the defense of the Mormons.

After Smith's murder and the failure of the United States government to prevent the Mormon expulsion from Nauvoo, Mormons came to view the federal government as at best a corrupt or utterly weak institution, incapable of being trusted, or at worst, being directly opposed to the Mormon religion. Mormons generally attributed religious bigotry to the apathy or scorn they received from the United States. The distaste the Mormons had for the government following these two cataclysmic events became an essential component in the conflict between

the United States and the Mormons. The assassination of Smith would leave a bitter taste in the mouths of Mormons in general, and powerful Mormon leaders like Brigham Young, in particular. They refused simply to forget the treatment they had received in the United States, even though such selective amnesia would have greatly facilitated the re-integration of Mormons back into the United States. Instead, Mormon rhetoric was often fiery, at times bordering on the seditious, and certainly provocative to federal authorities. Nevertheless, Mormon actions were usually much more loyal than their detractors would admit, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

Mormon Relations as Foreign Relations

Although scholars readily highlight the Mexican War as an imperial conflict, the Mormon aspect of expansion during this period has not been examined thoroughly.¹⁵ The Mormons were forced out of United States territory in 1846 by a combination of anti-Mormon forces and state authorities, with the silent support of federal political leaders. Without Mexican consent, the Mormons settled in the upper reaches of Northern Mexico to escape the violence facing them within the United States. Although the majority of these refugees were Americans, most hailing from the northern states, they left the United States and its territories to attempt to find what they perceived as religious freedom. Shortly after settlement in the Great Salt Lake Valley, the Mexican War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 brought this territory under U.S. sovereignty. Thus, the Mormons once again lived within the jurisdiction of the

¹⁵ For example, Fred Anderson and Andrew Clayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America 1500-2000* (New York: Viking Press, 2005), 274.

United States; American sovereignty overtook them almost as quickly as they left it behind. The Mormons were forced to deal once again with the U.S. government and its agents.

The federal government faced difficulties in each of the populated areas of the Mexican Cession. For instance, there were Mexicans in New Mexico and Apaches in Arizona. Neither recognized the ethos of Manifest Destiny which Americans claimed gave them the right to impose their culture and government. Dealings with sovereign Native American tribes included negotiations, exchange of formal and informal ambassadors, treaties ratified by the U.S. Senate, and threatened and actual military violence. Despite these hallmarks of international relations, many scholars of American foreign relations have neglected to recognize official U.S. interaction with these Native Americans as actual foreign relations, simply because their governments were not “Western” and because the end result of US policy was a total domination and assimilation of the land in question. This general relegation of Native Americans to “domestic” history is a tacit acceptance of the very ideas of Manifest Destiny that nineteenth century Americans espoused. And unfortunately, scholars have followed this trend by placing Indians, Mexicans, and Mormons within the context of Western American history, rather than considering them also as foreign groups.¹⁶

Federal relations with Mormons in the newly acquired territory of Utah have been treated as domestic concerns. While racist arguments were easily made against Native Americans and Mexicans, the federal government was faced with the sticky problem presented by the white, yet almost universally hated Mormons. The Mormons would be, throughout the balance of the 1850s and until the beginning of the Civil War, one of the primary foreign policy concerns of the United States, factoring into arguments over troop levels and expenditures as well as the national

¹⁶ Collin Calloway echoes these sentiments in his introduction to *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground: Plains Indian Views of How the West Was Lost*, (Boston: Bedford/St.Martin's, 1996), 1, 8-9.

debate over slavery in the newly-acquired territories. Thus, this dissertation will examine the year following the Mormons' expulsion from the United States until the years leading up to the Civil War. The Mormon issue of the 1845-1865 period is an important yet forgotten aspect of nineteenth century American continental expansion and imperialism.

Just as European empires were forced to confront the problem of incorporation of populations and areas under their military and economic control, the United States was faced with similar issues after obtaining nominal control over vast areas of North America following the Mexican War and the settlement of the Oregon dispute with Great Britain. The decimation of the Native American populations living in the West made American imperialism much easier. The US needed only to fill these areas with loyal white settlers to fully incorporate them into the family of states. But the loyalty and the whiteness of the western territories was a subject of debate and concern for members of Congress. Law professor Eric Biber has demonstrated that the determination of loyalty was based upon Eastern perceptions of the populations of these territories. He explains that "basic civil liberties, language, religion, race relations, and the structure of the family and marriage have all been elements that Congress has used as touchstones in attempting to reassure itself that the new state will be a loyal member of homogenous American federal democratic state." This was part of the "broader process of assimilation and 'Americanization'" as the United States determined what changes would have to be made by populations in these territories in order to make their admission palatable to the remainder of the Union.¹⁷ In the case of the Mormons and New Mexicans, this process would drag out for half a century as the nation balked at the religion of the former, the race latter, and the ethnicity of both.

¹⁷ Eric Biber "'The Price of Admission: Causes, Effects, and Patterns of Conditions Imposed on States Entering the Union', *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 46, No. 2 (April 2004), 120.

While Mormon/federal relations remained in flux between 1844 and 1854 and subject to negotiation on both sides, the collapse of the second party system dramatically altered Mormon ability to participate in the American discourse. The battle between two national parties, the Whigs and the Democrats, afforded the Mormons a middle ground between the two cantankerous factions. They attempted to curry enough favor with both to achieve their own political ambitions. The rise of the sectional Republican Party from the ashes of the destruction of the Whig Party effectively destroyed this middle ground. Michael Holt has argued that the demise of the Whig Party and the ascension of the Republican Party in its place was the direct cause of the slavery issue precipitating civil war.¹⁸ While Holt has overstated this relationship and relegated slavery's role to some degree, his conclusions about the end of the Second Party System apply to the explanation of Mormon/US conflict following 1856. While the Republicans' sectionalism was not an issue for the Mormons, their adoption of evangelical Christianity as a major component of party rhetoric doomed Mormon abilities to negotiate the existence of their polity on their own terms. Paradoxically, while the Mormons were most closely affiliated with free soil advocates, owned few slaves, and hailed overwhelmingly from non-slaveholding northern states or Great Britain, the Republican Party did not embrace Mormon Utah as a way of preventing the spread of slavery. Rather, it denounced polygamy and Mormonism in the same way it did slavery, as a moral evil. If slavery violated William Seward's "higher law", then so too did polygamy. Thus Mormons who were most ideologically predisposed to other tenets of Republican ideology were forced into a political alliance with slaveholding and doughface Democrats, who defended Mormon polygamy on purely self-serving grounds of eschewing the establishment of legal precedent. If the government could stop polygamy in the territories, then why not slavery? Popular opinion made this alliance with

¹⁸ Michael Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850's* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 257-258.

Mormons increasingly unpalatable, leading to the Utah War in 1857, as Democratic statesmen attempted to prove their dissociation from the sect.

It is tempting to view Mormon/US relations in triumphal terms of whiggish historical progression. In this model, the Mormons were a radical sect, alienated from the United States because of their heretical beliefs. Their belief in and practice of polygamy had to be abandoned in order for Mormons to Americanize their faith. Thus the first century of Mormon history is often viewed as the process by which Mormons altered their religion and changed their cultural structure in order to be accepted in the United States.¹⁹ But this argument has the failing of replicating the views held by 19th century opponents of Mormonism; replace the term “Americanization” with “civilization” and the arguments made about Mormon assimilation into American culture smacks of Manifest Destiny once again. When the ultimate end, amalgamation with the United States, is seen as a positive and progressive movement for the Mormon sect, the result is a culturally relative American triumphalism which takes for granted that Americanization is a positive good, and therefore desirable. Similar arguments were made about the acculturation and assimilation of Native Americans. Of course, in many respects Mormons themselves desperately sought acceptance and inclusion inside of American culture. This desire for acceptance did not alter, however, the tenets of their religion that were the most unpalatable to other Americans. Mormon attempts to assert political authority through their electoral power generally backfired and provided further cultural fodder to those attacking the sect as un-American. The interactions of the United States and the Mormons were complex and nuanced as well as haphazard and reckless. At times both sides were motivated by bigotry and selfishness.

¹⁹ A recent example of this kind of triumphalist reading of American expansion and assimilation can be found in the biography of a federal marshal sent among the Mormons to enforce federal anti-polygamy legislation. See John Gary Maxwell, *Gettysburg to Great Salt Lake: George R. Maxwell, Civil War Hero and Federal Marshal among the Mormons* (Norman: Oklahoma: Arthur H. Clarke Company, 2010), 27.

Both sought to establish relations on their own terms. Both sides viewed the other with justifiable apprehension. The key difference is the vast asymmetry of power which placed Mormons at a perpetual disadvantage in this relationship.

Historiographical Outline of American Continental Expansion

The standard discussion of empire involves those who are being repressed by the forces emanating from the conquering nation. The questions of assimilation, or ways to prevent it, are the hallmarks of many discussions of empire. Some Americans deny the existence of an American empire at all, while some concede that the U.S. might have been an imperial nation for a brief period following the Spanish-American War, but ceased to be so by World War II. Oddly, both Americans in general and historians alike tend to overlook the greatest expansion of the American empire.

The largest American territorial aggrandizement came in North America. The fact that the territories wrested from Mexico, Britain, and various indigenous tribes are now recognized as states within the United States should not alter the understanding of these territories as resulting from the expansion of the American empire. Niall Ferguson recognized this reluctance for Americans to view their conquest of Western North America in the same way they view the Russian conquest of Siberia. Although many will concede and accept that the American involvement in the Philippines was empire building, Ferguson posits that Americans have simply not applied the term “empire” to their Westward expansion because of its relative ease.²⁰

The ease of the expansion notwithstanding, the United States stretched its imperial reach to far-flung lands in Western North America. The federal government fought wars against,

²⁰ Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 14, 36.

entered into negotiations with, concluded treaties with, and sent diplomats to various Native American tribes living in the western portions of North America.²¹ These are the hallmarks of what is classically thought of as diplomatic history. Relegating indigenous groups in the West to objects of “domestic expansion” simply because they did not have the Western-style nation-state does further historical injustice to those groups as well as clouds the view of American imperialism. It reinforces the accepted belief that the decimation, removal, and exploitation of Native American groups and subjugation of Mormons and Mexicans was inevitable. And, if it was inevitable, regardless of the negative moral commentary that accompanies Manifest Destiny, at least tacitly justifiable. In this model, Americans were “settling the West” or even “pacifying the West”, but not acquiring thousands of miles of territory by conquering the people who lived there and forcing their acculturation. This is the great lie of competency which Daniel Vickers explained in his article, “Competency and Competition: Economic Culture in Early America.”²² The conquest and assimilation of the West may be viewed by some in terms of domestic policy, but it most certainly was not.

The history of American foreign relations and imperialism has not generally regarded US relations with the indigenous groups of the West as pertinent to discussions of nineteenth century diplomatic history, let alone viewing Mormonism in that light. On a broader scale, American continental expansion in general has in popular culture escaped the designation of imperialism. The celebrated American diplomatic historian Samuel Flagg Bemis simply stated what many Americans felt already to be true when he posited, “American expansion over a practically

²¹ See Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006).

²² Daniel Vickers, “Competency and Competition: Economic Culture in Early America”, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 1, (Jan. 1990), 28.

empty continent despoiled no nation unjustly.”²³ He was not alone in such thinking among academics of his time. In *The Colonial Empires*, D.K. Fieldhouse included coverage of the United States and shared Bemis’ assessment, explaining to the reader that American continental territory had been acquired “honestly.” Fieldhouse contended that “republican principles had been maintained” because new states carved from the territory had entered the Union as equals, and therefore the US had fulfilled its “manifest destiny” without becoming an imperial power.²⁴

More recently, the conservative commentator, Patrick Buchanan, echoed Bemis and Fieldhouse. Describing the aftermath of the Mexican War, Buchanan made the dubious distinction that the acquisition of this territory “was Manifest Destiny, not imperialism.” As evidence he explained, “Imperialism is the rule of other peoples against their will.” The area would produce “half a dozen states” according to Buchanan and, almost paraphrasing Fieldhouse, “Each would enter the Union with the same rights as the original thirteen.”²⁵ Left out in his assessment was the treatment of Mormons in Utah, the Mexicans in New Mexico, and the Apaches in Arizona, as well as hundreds of other cultural groups.

Most historians seeking to explain American imperialism in the modern world look back to the Spanish American War and the bloody Philippine War that followed in its wake as the beginnings of American hegemony in the world. Given the international power of the United States in the twenty-first century, studying the first foreign invasions conducted by U.S. forces appears to be an appropriate course when examining the American Empire. While many scholars critical of American imperialism would not dispute placing earlier expansionism in the

²³ Samuel Flagg Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, 5th ed. (New York: Holt, Reinhart, & Winston, 1965), 216.

²⁴ D. K. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966), 341-342.

²⁵ Patrick J. Buchanan, *A Republic, Not an Empire: Reclaiming America’s Destiny* (D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1999), 122.

discourse of empire, the fact still remains that many do not. The failure to recognize the early trappings of American imperialism continentally presents an unclear and incomplete picture of the American empire.²⁶ American continental expansion has escaped the unsightly moniker of imperialism not only among many scholars, but more importantly among most Americans who bristle at the idea of American empire at all, let alone in the laudatory period of westward expansion in American history.²⁷

Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" of American history is crucial the historiography of the U.S. West. In *The Frontier in American History*, Turner established the gold standard of the history of American expansion for decades. Far from castigating American expansion across the continent, Turner argued that in fact the expansion had made America the

²⁶Since the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon of September 11, 2001, the literature on the American Empire has expanded. Those critical of American actions, both economic and militarily, on a global scale have invoked the word "empire" in a most pejorative way. As historian Walter Hixon recently explained of this trend, "There is nothing quite like a failed preemptive war in defiance of virtually the entire international community to revive discussion of whether the United States is an 'empire'." Walter Hixon, "Empire as a Way of Life", *Diplomatic History* (April, 2007). Despite this increase in critiques of U.S. empire, few of these scholars, castigating as they might be of American actions, thoroughly examine American continental expansionism in the terms of imperialism. The focus of these historians has most often been on American foreign relations with other states – governments and other official entities and their institutions – and primarily during the period following World War II. For example, Andrew Bacevich's book, though having an all-inclusive title, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002) does not cover nineteenth century expansion at all. Charles Maier's book *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) spends only a few pages examining continental expansion in its relatively ambivalent attempt to determine whether or not the United States is an empire like others that proceeded it. Even scholars who devote space to the early period (and criticized Maier's ambivalence) of American continental expansion in works on American imperialism tend to devote the majority of their efforts to the later period. Michael Hunt's book, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained & Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press) devotes only one chapter to the entire nineteenth century, while seven other chapters cover the 20th century aspect of American imperialism. While Hunt admirably argues that American imperialism began with continental expansion, the very structure of the book and space devoted to continental expansion shows a disproportionate focus on extra-continental expansion.

²⁷Widely read and noted as an apologist for the British and American empires, Niall Ferguson has himself recognized this reticence among Americans to describe their nation's expansion in imperial terms. Ferguson posits that Americans have simply not applied the term "empire" to their Westward expansion because of the relative ease of white settlement in the region. Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 14, 36. The ease of the expansion notwithstanding, there is an immense amount of evidence that American expansion and subjugation of the indigenous and foreign peoples of continental North America did indeed amount to American imperialism.

great democracy that it was.²⁸ There was little if any apology proffered by Turner, rather a straightforward declaration that American expansion was imperial, necessary, and beneficial to the world and the West.²⁹ Turner wrote about American continental expansion in terms that echoed the expansion of European empires, and he in fact used them to compare the swathes of territory subjugated.

Despite the popularity of Jackson's thesis, there were detractors who criticized his view of American expansion, such as Scott Nearing, but these voices were silenced by criticism and their views cast by the wayside. None of these critics took up the Mormon question.³⁰ Mainstream historians such as Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., while critical of American treatment of Indians, saw the end result of American expansion as a foregone conclusion, and instead labeled only American overseas expansion as imperialism. He refrained from the designation with regard to continental expansion.³¹

²⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1921), 38.

²⁹ Turner, 203, 248. He explained to his 1893 audience that, "the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history." Without the strength that came from expansion, perhaps, he hinted, the overall strength of America was also destined to decline. Turner spoke of subjugating Native American peoples and civilizing the West with a matter-of-factness that would be missing from the later discussions of American expansion. He argued that in fact U.S. expansion was exceptional because, "no other [empire-building] nation on a vast scale has been controlled by a self-conscious, self-restrained democracy in the interests of progress and freedom, industrial as well as political." Turner accepted and perpetuated the Jeffersonian idea of an "empire of democracy." Jefferson had opined that while expansion had been the downfall of tyrannical empires in the history of the world, in the American democracy, expansion would in fact perpetuate freedom as it diffused power among various independent states across a vast expanse of territory. Left out of Jefferson's equation were the Native Americans who would be displaced by the expanding empire as well as other groups, such as the Mormons, that would be deemed unfit for the "democracy." Turner contended throughout his writings that the volatile nature of the frontier had, in Jeffersonian fashion, strengthened and refined the American democratic process.

³⁰ The chief critic of American imperialism in the interwar years was Scott Nearing. In 1921 he published *The American Empire*, a comprehensive examination of not only American overseas possessions, but an introspective look at the imperial nature of American expansion across the continent. Nearing unflinchingly contended that American conquest of the continent was every bit the equal to the imperial expansion of Britain, France, or Russia. Of the entirety of the Western United States, Nearing stated, "This domain was won by a process of military conquest; it was taken from the Mexicans and Indians by force of arms. In order to acquire it, it was necessary to drive whole tribes from their villages; to burn; to maim; to kill." Scott Nearing, *The American Empire* (New York: The Rand School of Science, 1921), 59.

³¹ Arthur Meier Schlesinger, *The Rise of Modern America: 1865-1951*, 4th ed., (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 246. World War II and the surge of patriotism that accompanied it and the onset of the Cold War kept most scholars from addressing America in imperialistic terms. Schlesinger one of the most well-known and widely-read historians of his age, dealt with American imperialism directly in a chapter in his book, *The Rise of*

In 1955 Norman Graebner produced *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion*. Graebner diverged from Schlesinger in that he labeled American continental expansion as “imperialism” and devoted his entire book to the 19th century portion of American expansion. Graebner believed that the pervasive ideology of Manifest Destiny had clouded historians’ views of the actual motivations behind expansion. However, Graebner’s “imperialism” consisted of the way in which America secured territory from Mexico and European nations such as France and Britain. Expansion at the expense of other states was imperialism, but the people living in the acquired territories, such as the Mormons and Native Americans, who held no allegiance to the Mexican government in the first place, were ignored. In this way, Graebner was both groundbreaking and static. While he did bring American

Modern America. First published in 1921, it went through numerous revisions and editions over the next 30 years. Despite the changing events in the post World War II world, his chapter, “Imperialism in Practice”, remained. It is notable though that unlike Nearing or Turner, Schlesinger’s discussion of imperialism was purely surrounding American territorial possessions and interventions that took place outside of the continental United States. Schlesinger believed that overseas American holdings “clearly violated the spirit and letter of the Declaration of Independence.” Continental expansion, with the subsequent admission of new states in each instance, was qualitatively different in Schlesinger’s view. His discussion of westward continental expansion did include some American heavy-handedness, but was not phrased in imperial terms. Though he was far from glamorizing the American displacement of the Indians, his writing included an heir of condescension and an implicit acceptance of the Manifest Destiny when he stated, “The story is hardly one to excite pride in the vaunted American spirit of fair play, but it amply illustrates the inexorable character of the conflict between two civilizations, the one dynamic and acquisitive, the other static and content with simple wants.” (33) Such condescension would no doubt have applied to Schlesinger’s view of Mormonism in Utah as well, though he did not address the issue directly. Though he offered a caveat that the morality of such expansion was questionable, it was telling that Schlesinger did not recognize the treatment of the Native Americans as imperialism while he was willing to categorize the treatment of natives in American insular possessions in those terms. In fact, some of Schlesinger’s rhetoric was implicitly, perhaps even overtly, racist. Though the Indian Wars may not have been viewed by Schlesinger as the shining example of American goodness, it did not keep him from concluding of the conflicts that, “the protracted warfare, however, had made the Great West safe for the more advanced race and placed the best lands at its disposal.” (35) In this vein it is easy to see a similar argument made against Mormons in Utah for being resistant to modernism and finally being brought out from under the shadow of polygamous darkness to see the true light. Schlesinger demonstrated an important shift in the historiography of American expansion and imperialism. While Turner had heralded the imperialism that had settled the West and Nearing had condemned it, Schlesinger had instead ignored it. Or, perhaps more specifically, he had accepted it. The Manifest Destiny of the United States and its people as the “more advanced race” to take Native American lands was seen as an inevitability. Therefore, Schlesinger’s examination of American imperialism focused on the Philippines and Latin America, rather than Idaho or Arizona, or Utah, which had by this time become states in their own right and were therefore properly “assimilating” the displaced native populations. Schlesinger’s take on American imperialism, focusing only American relations beyond the continental United States, would in fact be the vanguard of future efforts to categorize American imperialism as an extra-continental affair.

continental expansion back into the discussion of American imperialism, he had also fully accepted the premise offered by Schlesinger that American dealings with Native Americans, Mexicans in New Mexico, or Mormons in Utah were merely internal matters rather than the imperialistic subjugation of these peoples.³²

In the 1960's a group of scholars sought to challenge the fundamental premises of American history that most Americans took for granted. The leader of this group was William Appleman Williams. In 1959 Williams published his landmark work in the field, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*. He entitled his first chapter "Imperial Anticolonialism" and in it Williams very briefly addressed American expansionist history from the Revolution to the Spanish American War. In just three brief pages Williams tried to sum up the extent of American actions on the continent prior to 1898. He explained that both the economic need of farmers to acquire land and the feeling among early American leaders, such as Jefferson and Madison, that expansion would help sustain the republic, combined to make continental expansion a primary goal of politicians and the average citizenry alike.

Here Williams came as close as he would to discussing American continental expansion in the same terms he would the Philippine War later. He explained that the "perpetual force for

³² Norman Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1955), vi. According to Graebner, the real goal of mid 19th century American statesmen was a commercial one. Graebner argued that the three major deep water Pacific coast ports, San Diego, San Francisco, and the San Juan de Fuca Strait, glistened in the wanting eyes of Americans who saw them as the gateway to the East, especially the longstanding avaricious dream of opening the markets in China fully to American commerce. Graebner panned Manifest Destiny as "an inadequate description of American expansionism in the forties." Graebner thought that this term allowed for pretenses of a type of haphazard pioneer expansion to account for American continental extension. He argued that his research demonstrated that, "It was not by accident that the United States spread as a broad belt across the continent. It was rather through clearly conceived policies relentlessly pursued that the United States achieved its empire on the Pacific." (228) Though Graebner spoke in terms of calculated imperial extension, and accepted at least part of Nearing's argument that commercial motivations were paramount, his book was entirely devoid of any discussion of the Native Americans or Mormons who were the victims of this expansion. At great length, Graebner focused on the war with Mexico and the battle with British politicians over securing at least the southern portion of Oregon Territory. Though Graebner did receive some criticism for his work, none of the critics challenged his failure to examine extra-national groups who were victims of imperialism. Indeed, most simply criticized his emphasis on commercial sea ports and his refusal to acknowledge the inevitable nature of American expansion

expansion contributed much to the campaign to drive the Indians even further west, to the pressure to declare war on Great Britain during the winter of 1811-1812, to the determination to tear Texas and California away from Mexico, and to grab as much as possible of the Pacific Northwest.” Though it appeared this comment would pave the way for an examination of this early imperialism, it in fact would be completely clouded over by the subtitle of the second half of this first chapter which read: “The Crisis of the 1890’s and the Turn to Imperialism.” The fact that he was arguing that the United States “turned” to imperialism in the 1890’s implicitly made a statement that it was not imperial before. Though Williams and other scholars who agreed with him denounced American imperialism, their focus was not on early American expansion, but rather the twentieth century. Many historians of American foreign relations, following the trend that had been set, began their examinations of American imperialism with the Spanish-American War as the starting point.³³

The number of authors who sought to criticize American imperialism increased manifestly in the wake of Williams' revisionist arguments. Yet their eyes were also focused primarily on world affairs outside of the continental United States. It was American relations with other nations that had motivated their critiques in the first place; thus the focus on 20th century American imperialism is hardly surprising, although it is incomplete. Unfortunately, those most committed to understanding and criticizing American imperialism would have a hand in burying the first century of it simply by focusing primarily on American relations with other nations beginning in the late 19th century. American expansion at the expense of Mexico and

³³ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, New Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 27. Walter LaFeber, Thomas McCormick, and Lloyd Gardener each identified with Williams' critique of American imperialism and themselves became major revisionists in their own right. This new way of analyzing American dealings with the world was/is often referred to as “the Wisconsin school.”

European nations was duly noted and criticized as aggressive foreign policy, wars and policies aimed at subjugating Native Americans or Mormons were not.

The US-led “War on Terror” that followed in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks led to a flurry of publications on the topic of American imperialism. Yet many, like Thomas Magstadt’s 2004 book, *An Empire If You Can Keep It: Power and Principle in American Foreign Policy*, shelved American continental expansion as something outside the realm of the imperial discussion, as he wrote rather dismissively, “this is not the place to re-tell how the West was won or to recount the wars and massacres associated with the winning.”³⁴ Why is it not the place? What about early American continental imperialism exempts it from a comprehensive discussion of American empire?

Thomas Hietala’s 1985 book, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America*, sought to rectify the growing inattention that historians of American foreign policy showed the continent. As the title suggested, Hietala believed that American imperial expansion in the 19th century could “be better understood by considering...expansionist policies in terms of the cultural context.” Expansionists had embraced “territorial and commercial expansion as the best means of protecting the political and economic viability of the United States from dangers at home and abroad.”³⁵

He discussed the faulty logic that underpinned their imperialism as well as the devastating results it had on those who were the objects of imperial expansion. Hietala’s treatment was not merely of bilateral foreign relations between the U.S. and Mexico or European

³⁴ Thomas G. Magstadt, *An Empire If You Can Keep It: Power and Principle in American Foreign Policy*, (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2004), 50.

³⁵ Thomas Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), xi. Hietala demonstrated that the perceived consensus about expansion that Graebner had argued and Williams, LaFeber, and Fieldhouse had tacitly accepted was in fact an illusion. There were voices, most prominently among the Whig Party in the 1840’s, who questioned the morality of the nation’s actions. Hietala placed most of the blame for 19th century American imperialism at the feet of the Democratic Party.

nations. The oppression of blacks, Mexicans, and Native Americans who were victimized and exploited by the American empire were an important part of his work and represented a shift in the study of American continental imperialism.

While many modern historians, unwilling to accept the Schlesinger model, would certainly agree with Hietala that early American imperialism has been neglected, it does not change the fact that the space devoted to covering that period is glaringly bereft of treatment, even in so-called comprehensive studies of American imperialism and foreign relations. And, despite his breakthrough, Hietala saw only non-whites as victims of American imperialism in North America. He did not cover the Territory of Utah at all in his study though the Mormons living there constituted a huge portion of the existing population that would fall to U.S. control following the Mexican War. Mormons would be denied entry into the family of states because they were not properly Christian in expansionists' eyes. Nearly 50 years of repression of the Mormon religion and voting rights in the Territory would only cease when the Mormons acquiesced to American imperial demands and abandoned their doctrine of plural marriage in the face of threatened dissolution of their faith and community.

In 1996, the first substantial attempt to explain federal relations with Mormons as a form of imperialism appeared. D.W. Meinig, a geographer/historian, authored an article titled "The Mormon Nation and the American Empire" in which he detailed the difficulty Mormons encountered when the American Empire nominally gained control of the territory to which they had been driven from the US previously. Meinig argued that in many respects the Mormons were treated as though they were Native Americans. Indian reservations were seen as a stop-gap measure that would only be necessary until the various tribes had been broken up and/or assimilated. Meinig concluded that the "longstanding refusal to admit Utah to statehood, the

assault upon social nonconformity and theocratic political power, reconfirmed the basic U.S. refusal to accept geopolitical territories defined essentially in ethnic *or religious* terms. To many Americans, Mormonism...represented a species of 'tribal culture' that similarly had to be broken up."³⁶ Despite Meinig's research, no effort was subsequently made to incorporate Mormon history into the study of American imperialism. And Meinig himself did not follow up on his assertions made in this article with a book that more thoroughly demonstrated the case. An opportunity for Mormonism to be examined in terms of American foreign relations was thereby missed, and soon all but forgotten.

Another important author who, like Meinig, was concerned with religion in the American empire produced an argument that in some ways countered the cynicism of Hietala's examination of Manifest Destiny and early American imperialism. Anders Stephanson's 1995 book, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*, attempted a synthesis of American expansionism and imperialism from the colonial period to the end of the Cold War.³⁷ Yet despite his religiously centered view, and the obvious correlations between the forcing of Native Americans to accept the dominant culture in America and insisting on the same thing from the Mormons in Utah, Stephanson did not include Utah Territory or Mormonism in his discussion.

³⁶ D. W. Meinig, "The Mormon Nation and the American Empire." *Journal of Mormon History* Vol 22, No. 1 (Spring 1996), 48, emphasis added.

³⁷ Unlike Hietala who had dismissed the ideology behind Manifest Destiny as merely a propagandizing instrument of 19th century expansionists, Stephanson argued that, properly defined, Manifest Destiny was the persistent and pervasive idea in American culture that the United States has been providentially assigned a role in the history of world. He traced this concept from the colonial founding of New England by millenarian Puritans, certain they were establishing the city set on the biblical hill that would give light to the world, to Cold War presidents such as Ronald Reagan who saw the godless Soviet Union as the "evil empire" that must be resisted for America to fulfill its providentially assigned calling. Whereas Hietala saw fear and uncertainty as the key motivation behind continental expansion, Stephanson instead saw faith in the ultimate righteousness of American endeavors. As the chosen civilization, based on Anglo-Saxon Protestantism with American democratic ideologies, it was not only America's right, but indeed its duty to civilize the continent and eventually the world. Stephanson shed light on the fact that many proponents of Manifest Destiny did not simply envision an American civilization that spread from sea to shining sea, but rather one that filled North and South America, and, in some cases, the world itself.

On the heels of Stephanson's book, noted diplomatic historian William Earl Weeks published *Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from the Revolution to the Civil War*. He incorporated both American dealings with European powers as well as the alliances, treaties, and wars the U.S. fought with Native Americans living in the land the U.S. had already claimed as its own. Dealing with Manifest Destiny, Weeks agreed with Stephanson that the ideology could not simply be ignored as a propagandizing tool. Instead, it helped explain racial prejudices that would exist long after the subjugation of the continent had been accomplished. Weeks maintained that "the nationalistic dream of Manifest Destiny did not include nonwhite peoples."³⁸ But this lack of inclusion actually extended beyond a simple black/white dichotomy to white Mormons who were perceived to be at a total variance with American culture, a point which Weeks failed to address.

Even in highly focused monographs, that address a particular periodization of American empire during the 19th century, the Mormon situation is very noticeably absent. Frederick Moore Binder's, *James Buchanan and the American Empire*, focused only on the Buchanan administration and its imperial dealings with other nations.³⁹ In fact, the only mention Mormon/US relations receives in his book is the report of a tongue in cheek quip made by

³⁸ William Earl Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from the Revolution to the Civil War*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 63.

³⁹ Addressing the Oregon dispute with Britain, the proposed sale of Russian Alaska, and various American policies toward Europe, Mexico, and Latin America, Binder completely missed Buchanan's primary foreign policy goal of his administration: the subjugation of the Mormons in Utah by military force. Marshalling more than 20% of the United States total army, Buchanan sent it to Utah to compel the Mormons to acquiesce to the United States government. This protracted conflict, called Buchanan's War, the Utah War, or the Mormon War by contemporaries, has no mention in Binder's book at all. This is despite the fact it became a focal point of Republican criticism of his administration, not because he had sent the army, but because the army had failed to authoritatively subjugate the Mormon inhabitants and was costing millions of dollars in expenses.

Buchanan that he might purchase Alaska from the Russians just to have a suitable place to forcibly relocate the Mormons.⁴⁰

One of the more informative works covering the period following the Mormons expulsion and settlement in Utah was written by Newel Bringhurst and edited by eminent historian Oscar Handlin. *Brigham Young and the Expanding American Frontier* has a balanced and effective explanation of many of the events that occurred in the 1852-1865 period. But while the book outlines some of the conflicts that occurred between the Mormons and the federal government, its brevity precludes the explanation of many events. Bringhurst and Handlin saw the story of Mormonism as the story of hard-headed and successful Brigham Young, clashing with the American government as a matter of religious determination. Making Brigham Young the focal point of Mormon/US collisions is a route that was taken by many besides Bringhurst. Leonard Arrington's work, *Brigham Young, American Moses*, also takes this position that Brigham Young's obstinacy and strong-willed leadership was bound to clash with the officers of the United States, and hence was the primary reason for conflict. While this observation holds some truth, allowing the entire Mormon/US conflict to devolve into a mere conflict of personalities misses the fact that Young was not essential to this conflict. It would have occurred, and in fact did continue to occur, without him. Young may have been the face and voice of Mormonism, but there were many thousands of Mormons, and despite the claims made by the Eastern press, most apparently did not feel themselves to be oppressed and brainwashed by their supposedly conniving leaders.

These books miss the opportunity to see the US treatment of Mormons and Utah Territory as that of a foreign land, with foreign people, a foreign religion, and a foreign

⁴⁰ Frederick Moore Binder, *James Buchanan and the American Empire*, (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1994), 263.

government. At various times, both the Mormons and the federal government believed all of the above was true of them. While Bringham discusses some of the attempts made to restrict polygamy, he does not address other efforts calculated to “extinguish Mormonism”, such as the debate over the various homesteading acts in the 1850’s and passage of the Homestead Act of 1862. Not just a policy that reinforced free labor ideology, Republicans in the North saw it as a means of “Americanizing” the imperial holdings of the West, specifically Utah.⁴¹

This dissertation seeks to add to the historiography of American continental expansionism and particularly to the understanding of Mormons in this process. It will discuss the formative years of the US/Mormon conflict in terms of American foreign relations and national policy. It has been arranged chronologically so the reader can understand the conflict as it unfolds. The reader will notice the variations in federal policy toward the Mormons and how policy is motivated by international concerns as well as domestic political rivalries. Paradoxes

⁴¹ There are various books that cover both the Utah War and the occupation of Utah during the Civil War. The most elegantly written and comprehensive is Norman Furniss’s, *The Mormon Conflict, 1850-1859*. Though the book was written in 1960, it examined aspects of US/Mormon tensions that several later authors would disregard or miss. In particular, Furniss did not simply believe at face value that the Mormons were involved in murders, deception, and seditious activities, just because certain federal officials claimed such to be the case. Even more importantly, Furniss refused to believe the conflict was solely a question of polygamy, a position to which the modern world so often relegates it. He pointed out that conflict continued even after the Mormons abandoned polygamy. While his treatment was excellent, he missed the opportunity to widen the scope of the conflict. He too still saw the Mormon/US conflict as an internal affair rather than a foreign one. He called the Buchanan administration’s decision to invade and occupy Utah a “moderate policy.” (225) The fact that many were calling for the eradication of the Mormons through military means makes the course pursued by Buchanan seem more temperate, but Furniss fails to consider the fact an army was sent at all was in and of itself extreme.

Despite Furniss’s work, later examinations of the Utah War would regress back to simply laying the blame at the feet of the Mormons for not assimilating fast enough into American society, without ever asking the question of why the Mormons should be forced to assimilate into American society. James Varley’s 1989 work perhaps best exhibits this triumphalism in relation to the Mormons. His book, *Brigham and the Brigadier: General Patrick Connor and His California Volunteers in Utah and Along the Overland Trail*, hailed the anti-Mormon general who commanded the army that occupied Utah during the Civil War as a hero. Writing that Mormon immigrants to Utah were “stifled and cut off from all meaningful association with their new country [the US],” Varley uses highly questionable phraseology, taking away the agency of Mormon immigrants who held their religious beliefs in higher regard than other associations. In a conclusion that disregarded the evidence, Varley even explained that Connor and the US occupation forces, “helped keep [the Mormons] peacefully in the fold.” This is shocking given the fact that all evidence, both public and private, indicates that Mormon leadership never contemplated or planned secession from the Union during the Civil War. (274) In Varley’s view, Connor was a hero for giving the Mormons a better chance to become good Americans. The implication here is that to be a good Mormon was to be a bad American, if an American at all. Connor facilitated the assimilation of Mormons into American society, and that was to be lauded in his view.

in Mormon thought and rhetoric as opposed to actual action will also demonstrate Mormon agency in the unfolding of a national Mormon policy. The various actions of Mormon leaders and federal politicians led to the situation in which Mormons' identity as Americans was continually questioned and the group often came to be viewed as enemies of the nation.

Chapter 2: “I Will Protect the People in their Rights and Liberties”: Joseph Smith and the Political Alienation of Mormons

In February of 1863, nearly two years into the bloody conflict that had followed Southern secession, Colonel Patrick Edward Connor rushed a dispatch to his superiors. Like many of his fellow officers in the Union Army, he asked for more troops to deal with his present situation. His California Volunteers were simply not enough to defeat the enemy. His army of occupation was witnessing some of the greatest disloyalties and injustices ever recorded on the American continent. The local leaders of the people were manifesting “evidences of hatred and disloyalty to the Government.” He was sure they were stockpiling weapons, waiting only for the right moment to rise up in rebellion again. To make matters worse, these people were not even real Americans, but the “very lowest class of foreigners and aliens.” In fact, the wickedness of these people was such that he was sure that if the present war was a punishment from God for a national sin, it was because the American people had permitted “this unholy, blasphemous, and unnatural institution to exist almost in the heart of the nation.” His conclusion: they must be annihilated. Unless his forces were increased, however, he could not hope to put down the treasonous insurrectionists that were threatening his men and the nation as a whole. In closing, he added, “It would give me great pleasure to contribute my humble services to blot out this stigma on our national honor.”⁴²

Connor was not, as one might expect, occupying a captured city in a Confederate state. His references to traitors were not aimed at the people of the South who had taken up arms to fight the Union Army of which he was a part. The great sin he spoke of was not slavery. Rather,

⁴² Colonel Patrick Connor to Lieutenant Colonel R.C. Drum, February 19th, 1863. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Unions and Confederate Armies*, (Hereafter cited as O.R.)(Washington D.C., 1880-1900) Series 1, Volume 50, Chapter LXII, 318.

Connor was writing from his command post in one of the Western Territories. It had not seceded, or even held legislative discussions contemplating the matter. Only seven months earlier, the Territory and its “rebellious” people had supplied and outfitted a company of soldiers to guard the overland stage and mail route at the request of President Abraham Lincoln. Despite this, Connor and his superiors up the chain of command, all the way to the Secretary of War and members of Congress, saw these people as un-American. The problem was that the Colonel was in Utah Territory, and these people were Mormons.

The conflict between Mormons and the United States lasted for over half of a century. Mormon cultural and religious practices alienated them from the US and its government. Connor’s occupation of Utah during the Civil War, despite Mormon protestations of loyalty, was result of nearly two decades of sporadic conflict between the United States and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly termed Mormons. This conflict was not the result of calculated efforts by the Mormons to antagonize the United States. Nor was it initially the product of federal anti-Mormonism and religious bigotry. Rather, this relationship developed in the context of national political controversies and international concerns. Mormon migration to sparsely populated western North America exponentially increased the demographic importance of the relatively small group. The Mexican War served as the backdrop for the formative early US/Mormon relations which would serve as a template the decades that followed.

In order to appreciate Mormon mistrust of the United States government, one must examine the shifting views of Mormons toward the nation. The collapse of the Nauvoo experiment, the attempt by Joseph Smith to assert himself into the national political picture, and

failure of the United States to respond to Mormon grievances set the tone for the relations which followed.

Mormon Attempts to Enlist Political Support

By 1843, Mormons were actively seeking political alliances in order to strengthen their position in Illinois. The Mormon involvement with politics had begun early in the Church's existence. The great conflict that had precipitated the Mormon War in Missouri had been spawned during a battle over allowing Mormons access to the polls in Gallatin. The Mormons were emigrants from Northern states and formed a cohesive voting bloc; local politicians feared that the delicate balances of power would be upset by the influx of the Mormon religious zealots. The fact that Mormons tended to vote in blocs was not disputed by Mormon leaders. In 1838, before the greatest trouble had struck in Missouri, Smith had allowed several speakers, including a Whig candidate and one of Smith's counselors, to expound upon the views of the Whig party in order to give the people a greater balance in their political views because "the politics of the Church of Latter-day Saints [members], generally being Democratic" such diversity was needed.⁴³

Having failed to receive a redress of their grievances against the state of Missouri from President Martin Van Buren and the Democratic Party, the Mormons threw the weight of their political support behind William Henry Harrison in the 1840 election. Two years later, when Democratic statesmen and judges, including Stephen Douglas, appeared friendlier toward the Mormon cause, Mormon allegiance switched to Democratic candidates.⁴⁴

⁴³ Manuscript History of the Church (MHC), Vol. 2, May 10, 1838, Vol. 2, 796.

⁴⁴ *Times and Seasons*, January 1, 1842, Vol. 3 No. 5, 651.

But it was not total isolation that they were seeking. What Smith and the Mormons wanted more than anything was to be a part of American nation. They wanted their lands back in Missouri which they claimed had been unjustly taken from them because they saw America in general, and Missouri in particular, as the Promised Land. They were not seeking to be utterly separate from the American experience, but to be a vital part of it; in Mormon thinking, the most important part of it.

Although he had been continually frustrated in his attempts to obtain help from national politicians, the uncertainty of the political situation in late 1843 and early 1844 encouraged Smith to once again barter Mormon electoral support for promised federal intervention. Smith received a letter in late October of 1843 that perhaps encouraged him to try again. A devoted follower wrote Smith that a Colonel Frierson of Missouri was acquainted with South Carolina representative Robert Barnwell Rhett. Frierson intimated that Rhett along with other South Carolina Democrats were sympathetic to the Saints' cause. Frierson had even suggested that he had the ear of the greatest of all Southern legislators, John C. Calhoun.⁴⁵

This letter must have impressed Smith enough that he determined to share it with other members of the Church hierarchy, including Brigham Young and John Taylor, in a council meeting on November 2, 1843.⁴⁶ Calhoun had already rejected the Mormons' pleas for federal intervention once before, yet the Mormon leadership persisted.⁴⁷ The council decided that they would write Calhoun, as well as the other potential candidates in the very confused presidential election scene. They would "directly inquire what their feelings were towards us as a people,

⁴⁵ Joseph L. Heywood letter to General Joseph Smith, October 23, 1843, Joseph Smith Collection (JSC), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives (LDS Church Archives), MS 155, Box 3, 38-39.

⁴⁶ Brigham Young would become the leader of the Saints following the lynching of Smith and during the Mormon exodus from the country. John Taylor would succeed him as the third prophet/president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1880.

⁴⁷ John C. Calhoun to Joseph Smith, December 2, 1843, JSC, MS 155, box 3, folder 4, 63.

and what their course of action would be in relation to the cruelty and oppression that we have suffered from the State of Missouri, if they were elected.”⁴⁸

The letter to Senator Calhoun read:

Dear Sir,-As we understand you are a candidate for the Presidency at the ensuing election; and as the Latter-day Saints (sometimes called "Mormons," who now constitute a numerous class in the school politic of this vast republic,) have been robbed of an immense amount of property, and endured nameless sufferings by the State of Missouri, and from her borders have been driven by force of arms, contrary to our national covenants; and as in vain we have sought redress by all constitutional, legal, and honorable means, in her courts, her executive councils, and her legislative halls; and as we have petitioned Congress to take cognizance of our sufferings without effect, we have judged it wisdom to address you this communication, and solicit an immediate, specific, and candid reply to What will be your rule of action relative to us as a people, should fortune favor your ascension to the chief magistracy?

Most respectfully, sir, your friend, and the friend of peace, good order, and constitutional rights,

Joseph Smith.

In behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁴⁹

Well aware of how difficult the Democrats’ political situation appeared with a divided party facing the formidable Henry Clay and a unified Whig front, Smith was sure to remind Calhoun that the Mormons were an organized and potent force in Illinois, a state that would be hotly contested in the coming election. Illinois had voted Democrat in 1840 by fewer than 1900 votes, and the Mormon voting bloc could make up that difference.⁵⁰ Smith implied that the Mormon vote could tip the balance for whoever would redress their grievances.

⁴⁸JSC, MS 155, Box 1, 158, LDS Church Archives. Also, Joseph Smith, History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 7 vols., introduction and notes by B. H. Roberts, Vol. 6, 62. Hereafter referred to as HC.

⁴⁹Joseph Smith to John C. Calhoun, November 4, 1843, JSC, MS 155, box 2, folder 6, 34.

⁵⁰Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 114.

Similar letters were sent to the three other potential Democratic candidates, including former Secretary of State Lewis Cass of Michigan, former Vice President Richard M. Johnson, and former President Martin Van Buren, who was then considered the front runner for his party's nomination. A letter was also dispatched to Henry Clay, the popular Whig candidate. Joseph Smith bitterly added a postscript to Van Buren's letter, asking, "whether your views or feelings have changed since the subject matter of this communication was presented you in your then official capacity at Washington, in the year -41, and by you treated with a coldness, indifference, and neglect, bordering on contempt."⁵¹

It had been Van Buren's executive refusal to intervene that had pushed the Mormons to vote for William Henry Harrison and the Whig ticket in the 1840 election. Now the Mormons hoped that at least one of the candidates would respond favorably to their inquiry, that at least one great leader would champion their cause.

First to respond was Henry Clay. Consummate politician that he was, Clay attempted to woo the Mormons with cordiality, without making any political promises. Clay announced that he could "enter into no engagements, make no promises, give no pledge to any particular portion of the people of the United States. If I ever enter into that high office I must go into it free and unfettered, with no guarantees but such as are to be drawn from my whole life, character and conduct." Quickly following up on his position statement, Clay attempted to soften the blow of rejection. Perhaps aware that the Mormons had supported the Whig William Henry Harrison in the previous presidential election, Clay explained that he had "viewed with lively interest" the growth and progress of the Latter-day Saints. Aligning himself with them morally if not politically, he continued, "I have sympathized in their sufferings under injustice, as it appeared to

⁵¹ Joseph Smith to Martin Van Buren, November 4, 1843, JSC, MS 155, box 2, folder 6, 34.

me, which have been inflicted upon them... they ought to enjoy the security and protection of the Constitution and the laws.”⁵²

But Smith and the Mormons were not interested in moral sympathies. They wanted their lands and their rights, as they supposed, to their freedom of worship. The receipt of the Clay letter marked a dramatic turn in the Mormon prophet’s feeling toward the Whig party in general, and Senator Clay in particular. Smith’s previous Missouri experiences had left him embittered toward Van Buren and the Democratic Party. In a previous interview with *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette* editor, David Nye Waite, in August 1843, Smith had explained, “I have sworn by the eternal gods that I will never vote for a democrat again; and I intend to swear my children, putting their hands under the thigh, as Abraham swore Isaac, that they will never vote a democratic ticket in all their generations. It is the meanest lowest party in all creation.” He later clarified that he meant the current locofoco Democrats, as opposed to the past leaders of the party.⁵³

But Smith did not think his personal distaste for Democratic candidates influenced the Mormon people. He told Waite that, “There are five-sixths of my people so led away by the euphonious term ‘democrat,’ that they will vote the Locofoco ticket.” He did not blame them, saying, “I am a democrat myself. I am a Washington democrat, a Jefferson democrat, a Jackson democrat... The Locofocos are no democrats, but the meanest, lowest, most tyrannical beings in the world. They opposed me in Missouri, and were going to shoot me for treason, and I had never committed any treason whatever. Consequently, Smith continued, “I voted for Harrison, and I am going to vote for Clay.”⁵⁴

⁵² *HC*, Vol. 6, 376.

⁵³ “The Prairies, Nauvoo, Joe Smith, the Temple, the Mormons &c.”, *The Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, September 15, 1843.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

Smith not only gave his whole-hearted endorsement to Henry Clay in the interview, he employed redundancy to make his point, “I am a Whig, and I am a Clay man. I am made of Clay, and I am tending to Clay, and I am going to vote for Henry Clay; that's the way I feel. But I won't interfere with my people, religiously, to affect their votes, though I might to elect Clay, for he ought to be President.”⁵⁵

But Smith's former feelings toward Clay evaporated quite rapidly with the senator's response that he could not directly pledge himself to the Mormon cause. Smith was embittered toward Clay for his refusal to help and maligned Clay's positions and views. It took Smith some time to respond to Clay, but when he did, it would be a venomous letter of contempt.

On the heels of Clay's disappointing letter, his ardent political opponent, John C. Calhoun, dispatched his reply to the Mormon inquiry. The encouraging letter Smith had received in October concerning Calhoun's probable support notwithstanding, the firebrand of the South wrote a matter-of-fact reply to the Mormon leader:

Sir,-You ask me what would be my rule of action, relative to the Mormons, or Latter-day Saints, should I be elected President, to which I answer, that if I should be elected, I would strive to administer the government according to the constitution and the laws of the union: and that as they make no distinction between citizens of different religious creeds, I should make none. As far as it depends on the executive department, all should have the full benefit of both, and none should be exempt from their operation.

But, as you refer to the case of Missouri, candour compels me to repeat, what I said to you at Washington, that according to my views, the case does not come within the jurisdiction of the federal government, which is one of limited and specific powers.

With respect, I am, &c. &c.
J. C. CALHOUN.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ John C. Calhoun to Joseph Smith, December 2, 1843, JSC, MS 155, box 3, folder 4, 63.

Calhoun had apparently once before told Smith in a personal interview that federal jurisdiction did not apply in the Mormons' case when the latter had traveled to Washington in search of federal help for the Mormon difficulties with Missouri. Smith had obviously had his fill of the South Carolinian's platitudes concerning state's rights. Although Calhoun assured Smith that he would treat all religious groups equally, the fact remained that the Mormons felt that they had not been treated, nor were they being treated, as equal citizens under the protection the Constitution. Their dalliance into the realm of non-traditional Christianity had rendered them political, as well as religious, outcasts. Their clannish nature and hierarchical structure further alienated them from other Americans. Mormonism was a politically toxic cause to endorse and many in the federal government preferred allow Mormons to struggle with state governments than take such a politically volatile stance as defending the Mormons. Like many other problems for governmental leaders, the Mormons were something best put off for a later person to deal with.⁵⁷

Filled with indignation, Smith wrote a lengthy and severe letter to Calhoun. Mockingly referring to Calhoun's views he wrote, "[a state] can exile you at pleasure, mob you with impunity; confiscate your lands and property; have the legislature sanction it: yea, even murder you, as an edict of an Emperor, and it does no wrong, for the noble senator of South Carolina, says the power of the federal government is so limited and specific that it has no jurisdiction of the case!"⁵⁸

If the Mormons were waiting for more favorable responses from the other potential candidates, their hopes were futile. Democratic Senator Lewis Cass also wrote Smith a less than satisfactory reply. He too claimed that he believed the Constitution provided that, "the

⁵⁷ *Times and Seasons*, Vol., No. 10. Nauvoo, Illinois, May, 15 1844, Whole No. 94, 549.

⁵⁸ Joseph Smith to John C. Calhoun, January 2, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 2, folder 7, 4. Underlining included in original letter. A copy of this letter was also reprinted in the *Times and Seasons* of January 1, 1844.

Mormonites be treated as all other persons in this country are treated.” As with Calhoun though, the senator closed his letter by making his position on the matter clear, stating, “I am bound, however, in candor to add, that if your application for redress...has been, as you say rejected by constituted authorities of the State of Missouri, and by the Congress, I do not see what power, the President of the United States can have over the matter, or how he can interfere in it.”⁵⁹

Smith’s journal entry of December 27 said that he had dictated a response to Cass at the same time as he had Calhoun, and one would estimate that the tenor and content was the same. The purpose of both return letters was to “shew them... that there was power in government to redress wrongs.”⁶⁰

But Smith was not content to merely write back strongly worded letters. Convinced that neither political party, nor their respective hopefuls, was willing to stand up for the Mormons’ right to their Missouri lands, Smith made a fateful decision. If the Mormons could not find a friend among any of the great candidates of the land, he would become a candidate for the presidency himself.

Joseph Smith Declares His Candidacy

It is unclear exactly how long Smith had entertained thoughts of running for president, but it seems he genuinely was hoping for a candidate to stand up for the Mormons’ rights as citizens. Most pundits were certain that the 1844 presidential race would become a choice between Clay and Van Buren. To the Mormons, this was no choice at all. They could either choose the Democratic candidate who had in his previous stint as president coldly refused to help

⁵⁹ Senator Lewis Cass to General Joseph Smith, December 9, 1843. JSC, MS 155, box 3, folder 4, 68-69.

⁶⁰ Joseph Smith, Journal, December 27, 1843, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 7, 220, LDS Church Archives.

them regain their Missouri lands, or they could choose the Whig candidate who had already gone on record that he would not intervene to help the Mormons.

The Mormons could not simply eschew the political process altogether given their strong theological connection to both the land of America and the governmental system of the United States. While some argue that Smith's attempt at the presidency was a manifestation of his ever-escalating megalomania, evidence does not really support this claim. What is far more likely was that Smith was trying to give his followers a choice they could vote for in good conscience. Certainly Smith enjoyed knowing that the Mormon vote would aid neither camp. But the evidence shows Smith to be desperate to get a candidate to back the Mormon cause, not someone who actually believed he would carry the election. What is certain is that by January 29, 1844, the Mormon prophet was ready to throw his hat in the ring as an independent candidate. In a meeting with the twelve apostles a unanimous vote affirmed that Joseph Smith be nominated as a candidate for President. The men pledged to "use every honorable means to secure his election."⁶¹

Joseph did not want a nominal campaign alone. He explained to the Twelve that if they were going to have him be a candidate for president, the Mormons would have to get serious about electioneering. He announced that "every man in the city who could speak" would have to be sent out to various states. Interestingly enough, they would not simply campaign for the Smith, but their stump speeches would be about "election laws" and the "Mormon religion." An unorthodox way to gain popularity perhaps, but this demonstrates just how connected Joseph Smith saw Mormonism and America. Americans just did share this view.⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid, 253.

⁶² Ibid.

Smith instructed several church leaders to go on electioneering missions. He sent Sidney Rigdon to his home state of Pennsylvania and Parley P. Pratt to his home state of New York. Smith concentrated his campaigning in Northern states that were often bastions of Whig support, perhaps because he wanted native sons from each state to lead the campaigning and the vast majority of Mormon leadership hailed from Northern states.

Smith then outlined an ambitious scheme to hold “conferences all over the nation” that he would attend. He tried to distance his candidacy from the bitter partisan politics of the day, as third party candidates have done many times since. Smith instructed the Twelve, “Tell the people we have had Whig and Democrat Presidents long enough. We want a President of the United States.” Bitterly Smith continued, “If I ever get in the Presidential chair I will protect the people in their rights and liberties.” Though the Mormons had voted for a Whig candidate the last go around, Smith had no use for Henry Clay or the Whig party, even repeating some of the often used rhetoric of the Democrats that, “the Whigs are striving for a King under the garb of Democracy.”⁶³

Smith claimed, “There is oratory enough in the Church to carry me into the Presidential chair the first slide.”⁶⁴ Taken by itself, this appears to be bombastic and idealistic rhetoric, which, of course, it was. Smith made such a pronouncement to encourage his followers, as many third party candidates do, that their efforts would not be in vain. Later statements by Smith show that he had not deluded himself to believe he could actually win a national election, though the level of popularity his candidacy brought him certainly intrigued him.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid. It is interesting that Smith would choose this, of all points, on which to attack the Whigs as his major claim had been and would be in his own candidacy that the president indeed should have more power. As later evidence will illustrate, many of Smith’s political views were more in line with Whig politics than they were with the Democrats, especially on the issue of the national bank. It is possible that his now deep and abiding distaste for Henry Clay was being expressed with this comment.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Joseph Smith, Journal, March 7, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 8, 24.

Smith does not seem to have initially presented his views to the Twelve in any greater detail than this. It did not matter to these men what the platform was, they would follow Brother Joseph without hesitation. None of Smith's closest associates and councilors attempted to dissuade him from making a run for the presidency. In fact, one of the first non-Mormon associates he met with gave a wholehearted endorsement to his scheme.⁶⁶

But the reaction of the Governor of Illinois was much more the norm. Governor Thomas Ford later explained Joseph Smith's candidacy in these terms: "To crown the whole folly of the Mormons, in the Spring of 1844 Joe Smith announced himself as a candidate for president of the United States."⁶⁷ Undoubtedly, many politicians viewed this new Mormon foray into politics in the same light.

The local Illinois papers, which were well-acquainted with the tensions in the state between Mormons and non-Mormons, cast immediate dispersions on his candidacy. The *Alton Telegraph* reported, "We opine that the Prophet, whatever may be his merits, will not get more votes at the approaching election, than the Locofoco candidate obtained in 1840."⁶⁸

But Smith's candidacy was not solely a symbolic protest candidacy. Immediately following his meeting with the Twelve, Smith set to work putting to prose his political platform.⁶⁹ By February 5, 1844, Smith had formulated a unique set of issues on which to campaign. They were contained in a written speech he titled, "Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States."

Joseph Smith's Platform

⁶⁶ Joseph Smith, Journal, December 27, 1843, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 7, 254.

⁶⁷ Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois: From Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847* (Chicago, 1854), 224.

⁶⁸ "A New Candidate!" *The Alton Telegraph and Democratic Review*, February 24, 1844.

⁶⁹ Joseph Smith, Journal, December 27, 1843, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 7, 220.

Smith opened his speech in a controversial way, by addressing the issue of slavery in the opening lines. While most politicians of both parties avoided the volatile issue and instead concentrated on topics such as tariffs, the National Bank, and arguments about the proposed Texas annexation, Smith chose to open his platform with a pronouncement about slavery. He felt “a double anxiety for the happiness of all men, both in time and in eternity” and marveled that in this great land “some two or three millions of people are held as slaves for life, because the spirit in them is covered with a darker skin than ours.” To Smith, this was a great contradiction of the promises uttered in the Declaration of Independence. The government’s job, he continued, was to protect and help the people, and its officers “ought to be directed to ameliorate the condition of all, black or white.” The Constitution “meant what it says without reference to color or condition.”⁷⁰

After opening his speech in a way that could have been mistaken for an abolitionist, Smith left the topic and proceeded to remind the readers/hearers of the great and glorious leadership that had once governed the United States of America. Beginning with Benjamin Franklin, the Mormon Prophet began to extol the virtues of these founding fathers. He celebrated the words and deeds of Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Monroe, Madison, and Andrew Jackson. In each little biographical sketch, he sought to point out the virtue of these leaders in juxtaposition to what would come next.

In counter point to all of the great leaders, Smith then related that “our blooming Republic began to decline under the withering touch of Martin Van Buren.” It is hardly surprising that Van Buren would be the politician on whom the hammer would fall the hardest.

⁷⁰ Joseph Smith, “Gen. Smith’s Views of the Government and Policy of the U.S.,” *Times and Seasons*, 15 May 1844, 528. The document is filled with more information than can be readily presented to the reader here. As such, only the largest points will be dealt with in this examination.

Smith, and the Mormons in general, blamed Van Buren for failing to stop their forced expulsion from Missouri.⁷¹

Smith laid out his plans for the government if elected. He advocated cutting the number of congressmen in the House of Representatives by two-thirds. In order to promote a return to the virtuous statesmen of the past, he advocated a drastic cut in pay for the Congress in general, allocating them just two dollars per day with their room and board. Identifying himself with the average American and appealing to Jacksonian agrarianism, Smith defended the pay cut by stating, “that is more than the farmer gets, and he lives honestly.”⁷² The implication, of course, was that many Washington politicians did not.

In a radical departure from the rhetoric of reforming the corrupt Congress and empowering the executive, Smith then turned to the topic of prison reform. As one who had been imprisoned several times, especially in Missouri, Smith knew the American prison system of the mid nineteenth century from the inside. Unregulated, unsanitary, and unsavory, Smith sought a prison reform that would require states to have prisoners punished for their crimes by way of “work on public roads, on public works, or any place the culprit can be taught more wisdom and virtue.” This was not simply a chain-gang idea. Idealistically, Smith urged that penitentiaries be “turned into seminaries of learning.” Practically, he denigrated the practice of imprisonment for debt as “savage.”⁷³

Moving from a topic that had almost no resonance on the national stage, Smith returned to the explosive slavery issue. His idealism on this issue demonstrated a lack of understanding

⁷¹ Ibid, 531.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Joseph Smith, “Gen. Smith’s Views of the Government and Policy of the U.S.,” *Times and Seasons*, 15 May 1844, 531-532. Smith’s strong stance on prison reform is a curious one. While most of his proposed policies were calculated to have broad appeal among many Americans, a platform urging a relaxation of policies for convicts was a dubious one in that regard. The addition of this plank to his policy statement reveals a very personal connection to the issues surrounding his candidacy.

of the cultural and economic realities of slavery in the Southern states. Smith urged the people of the slave states to petition their state legislatures to abolish slavery themselves. He hoped such action could abolish slavery by 1850. Failing that, Smith did have a more practical solution. He maintained that the federal government should take the money used selling lands in the West, as well as the money Congress would save by its reduction and pay cut, and buy the slaves of the South individually from their owners.⁷⁴

Smith later explained in conversation with the Apostles that he planned to liberate the slaves in “2 or 3 states” at first, beginning a gradual, federally-funded emancipation.⁷⁵ Reflecting the popular sentiment that freed slaves would need to be colonized outside of white America, Smith reasoned that the purchased slaves should be freed, and then possibly sent south to newly annexed Texas or Mexico, where “all colors are alike.”⁷⁶ Smith urged the nation to, “Break off the shackles from the poor black man, and hire him to labor like other human beings.”⁷⁷

Smith’s position on slavery moved him close to the abolitionist ideas of the day. He saw Africans slaves as being inferior to whites only because of the lack of education and opportunity. When asked in late 1842 by apostle Orson Hyde what a man should do if he was baptized while the owner of “a hundred slaves”, Joseph responded that he had “always advised such to bring their slaves into a free county - & set them free - Educate them and give them equal Rights.”⁷⁸ A few days later Hyde made further inquiries as to “what is the situation of the Negro?” Smith explained that “they come into the world slaves mentally and phy[s]ically. Change their situation

⁷⁴ Ibid, 532.

⁷⁵ Joseph Smith, Journal, March 7, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 8, 26.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Joseph Smith, “Gen. Smith’s Views of the Government and Policy of the U.S.,” *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1844, 532.

⁷⁸ Joseph Smith, Journal, December 30, 1842, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 5, 12-13.

with the white & th[e]y would be like them. They have souls & are subjects of salvation.”

Smith sought to hammer home the point by telling Hyde that educated slaves were every bit the equal of those who owned them. While he would restrict freed blacks to “their own Species”, a remark which reflected common antimiscegenation fears of the time, Smith declared that if it were in his power he would “put them on a national Equalization.”⁷⁹

Although the Mormons collectively and Smith personally had strong Democratic leanings, this did not prevent Smith from taking the contrary position on one of the most hotly debated topics of his day: the re-chartering of the National Bank. The instability of local financial institutions had been illustrated to Smith in a very real and painful experience. In 1837, When the Mormons living in Kirtland, the church leaders established the Kirtland Safety Society for local banking needs. Many church members, certain that a bank set up by the Prophet must be backed by God as well, invested heavily in the newly formed institution. However, with the issuance of the Specie Circular by Andrew Jackson, the alarmed state of Ohio refused to grant a charter to the Kirtland bank. The Mormons proceeded to issue notes anyway by renaming their bank the Kirtland Safety Anti-Banking Company. When the full effects of the Panic of 1837 reached the Mormon enclave, the bank, already tenuously maintaining its existence, collapsed along with dozens of others in Ohio.⁸⁰ The subsequent fall-out caused a major apostasy from the Mormon Church, and even close friends of Smith abandoned him.⁸¹ No doubt this experience, much like his many imprisonments, shaped his political views.

Smith advocated a “Central bank” that would have branches in “every state and territory.” The central bank and the state banks would only be allowed to print money in direct

⁷⁹ Joseph Smith, Journal, January 3, 1843, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 5, 42-43.

⁸⁰ Kenneth H. Wynn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 110-111.

⁸¹ Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism Founding* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 332.

correspondence to the capital the banks actually maintained in their vaults, factoring in interest as well.⁸² Speculative notes backed only by volatile land prices had partially killed the Mormons' community in Kirtland, and Smith outlined a hard money banking idea that he believed would eliminate such devastating collapses. Illinois residents had recently experienced a series of bank suspensions of specie payments culminating the state's refusal to accept devalued bank notes for the payment of taxes. The economic turmoil ultimately led to the collapse of the only chartered banks in the state: the Bank of Illinois at Shawneetown, the State Bank of Illinois, and the Bank of Cairo. At the time Smith developed his presidential platform, there were no banks operating in the state at all.⁸³ His Whig-like allegiance to hard money banking had been apparent in an 1842 letter in which he counseled the recipient that "Gold and Silver is the only safe money a man can keep these times."⁸⁴ His distrust of local banking operations broke sharply with the financial positions held by Jacksonian Democrats.

Bouncing from one position of deep personal experience to the next, Smith harangued the idea that presidential power was so limited and narrow that it could not be used to call out troops to suppress conflicts in individual states without first being asked. Having had an "Extermination Order" issued against his people by the Governor of Missouri, Smith argued that "the governor himself may be a mobber." The frustration Mormons felt over the way the federal government failed to react to the Mormons' Missouri persecutions shaped Smith's political views. It was only after neither great political party was willing to commit themselves to a redress of Mormon grievances that Smith had forayed into the political realm in the first place.

⁸² Joseph Smith, "Gen. Smith's Views of the Government and Policy of the U.S.," *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1844, 532.

⁸³ Theodore Calvin Pease, *The Frontier State, 1818-1848* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & CO., 1922), 310-315. See also George William Dowrie, *The Development of Banking in Illinois, 1817-1863* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1913).

⁸⁴ Joseph Smith to Edward Hunter, March 9, 1842, JSC, MS 155, Box 2, Folder 5, LDS Church Archives.

The result was a curious mixture of Democratic expansionist and agrarian ideals, placed side by side with Whig positions on federal authority and banking.

After presenting Whiggish cases for an increase in presidential power and the establishment of a national bank, Smith gave that party's platform a wide berth. He addressed the issue that would dwarf the rest as the election approached: annexation. He had already mentioned the annexation of Texas in his discussion of ending slavery in the United States, but now Smith joined forces with the most vocal expansionists of his day. As Scott Silverstone explained in his work on the annexation debate, "Because northwestern Democrats consistently edged out northwestern Whigs in the popular vote, in terms of party identity the most prominent activists on the [issue of annexing the entire Oregon country] at the national level were Democrats."⁸⁵ Many of the most prominent Democrats who had denied help to the Mormons were the most fervent annexationists. Smith echoed many of their arguments as he put forth his view that, "Oregon belongs to this government honorably."

But his plan for the expansion of American power was not limited to the Oregon Territory. He argued that Texas should be annexed, and moreover, if Mexico and Canada wished to join the fraternity of states, that they too should be extended the "same friendly grip." Just as Smith saw his church one day filling the North and South America, he saw the God-inspired United States as destined to encompass at least all of the territory of North America. He proclaimed boldly that, "when we have the red man's consent, let the Union spread from the east to the west sea."

Smith's idealism carried even farther than simple Manifest Destiny in North America, however. If he were president, he argued that:

⁸⁵ Scott A. Silverstone, *Divided Union: The Politics of War in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 124.

...when the people petitioned to possess the territory of Oregon, or any other contiguous territory, I would lend the influence of a Chief Magistrate to grant so reasonable a request, that they might extend the mighty efforts and enterprise of a free people from the east to the west sea, and make the wilderness blossom as a rose. And when a neighboring realm petitioned to join the union of liberty's sons, my voice would be, Come-yea come, Texas; come Mexico, come Canada; and come all the world: let us be brethren, let us be one great family, and let there be a universal peace.⁸⁶

There was no doubt that Smith saw himself, and Mormonism, as a vital part of the American Empire. While others may have castigated them as outsiders, Smith believed the Mormons were the most patriotic of real Americans. While his views were different than the two major parties, they were not radical in nature for the most part. Though his critics and enemies of the Mormons would argue that "Old Joe" Smith was seeking to create his own nation in western Illinois, Smith himself believed he was seeking a purification of the presidency and the nation on the grounds he had espoused. He had, in effect, taken the two biggest planks from the major parties platforms and made them his own, stealing the thunder of annexation and expansion from the Democrats and advocating a national bank and economic reforms espoused by the Whigs. Since these were not mutually exclusive policies, Smith's platform was designed to appeal to many Americans, though few would have actually cast their votes for him.

Reaction to Smith's Candidacy

That Nauvoo had such great autonomy within Illinois and was growing in numbers well out of proportion for its location was of particular interest to newsmen further east. They saw Mormonism and Joseph Smith in the light of a foreign power, a view that would be oft repeated

⁸⁶ Joseph Smith, "Gen. Smith's Views of the Government and Policy of the U.S.," *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1844, 533.

throughout the 19th century. The power of a religious leader to motivate his followers to action was viewed as even more dangerous than the authority exercised by despotic monarchies in the Old World. The political power of Mormonism was certainly seen to be on the rise. One writer explained that Nauvoo was:

...getting to be a great place, and the doings of the "Saints of the Latter Days," who constitute a little republic among themselves, are becoming quite as interesting as those of foreign governments and principalities. Prophet Joe possesses more power than many of the crowned heads of Europe, for, while their subjects are always kicking authority, his people are ready to obey all his recommendations, and carry out cheerfully his plans. We see by a late number of the "Times and Seasons," that the question who shall be President is being agitated in that community, as one of no small importance to them. The editor does not commit himself in favor of either of the prominent candidates... Joe himself may possibly become a candidate, and outstrip them all.⁸⁷

The astute writer proved to be prophetic himself. The Mormons would back Smith as their candidate. But the growing local power of the Mormons was infuriating the people of Illinois whose resentments and complaints against the Mormon community in Nauvoo had been growing for years. Rumors of conflict between Mormons and anti-Mormons swirled. At least part of the trouble was the Mormons' growing political power in the western portion of the state. Even prior to Joseph Smith's run at the presidency another newspaper writer, recognizing the growing conflict, concluded, "All may be remedied, if the Mormons, as a religious body, will but eschew politics and amalgamate with our citizens." If the Mormons wanted peace in the United States, they would need to conform. Even then, this writer opined, "We fear it is too late to do even that."⁸⁸

For many, conforming was not merely a matter of the Mormons renouncing their peculiar doctrines. Their political power stoked the fires of hatred against them locally in Illinois. After

⁸⁷ *Pittsburgh Morning Post*, December 20, 1843.

⁸⁸ *The Saint Louis New Era*, reprinted in the *Madison City Express*, October 12, 1843.

having supported a particular Whig candidate earlier, Cyrus Walker, the Mormons had shifted their allegiances away to the Democratic candidate in the 1843 election. Rather than recognizing the right of Mormons as Americans to vote for the candidate which best represented their interests, Whig newspapers took the shift in allegiance as proof that the Mormons were less than true Americans and debased individuals. One took the election results as proof that “they are without principle, political or moral, and that treachery and deception constitute one of the principle attributes of their nature.” Politically scorned, the Whig writer explained that the Mormons were essentially Democrats in nature, making them incapable of “entertain[ing] feelings in common with men of integrity and honor.” It was far easier to dehumanize the Mormons than to deal with the issues surrounding them. The paper later devoted a section to chastising papers that had presented the Mormon troubles in Illinois in any light sympathetic to “Old Joe Smith” and his fanatical followers.⁸⁹

Already alienated from the Whigs owing to the swing in Mormon voting patterns, Smith’s published letter in May of 1844 that lambasted the Whig champion Henry Clay turned disdain and alienation to bitterness and hatred. The *Alton Telegraph and Democratic Review* also claimed that the Prophet’s elder brother, and closest counselor, Hyrum Smith had received a revelation from God and was dictating to the Mormon people that they were to give their votes to the Democratic candidate in the upcoming election. This, combined with Smith’s response letter to Clay left the senior editor to exclaim, “we shall endeavor to shun him [Joseph Smith] and his adherents as a moral pestilence.” No mention here was made of the emerging doctrine of plural marriage within the hierarchy of Mormonism. Simple failure to align with the proper party was cited as a grievance worthy enough to be termed a “pestilence” upon the country. As political

⁸⁹ *Alton Telegraph and Democratic Review*, August 26, 1843.

rhetoric heated up in 1844, such pronouncements and sentiments would certainly foster at least part of the mob violence that would assault the Saints in Nauvoo.⁹⁰

A meeting was held in Nauvoo on March 7, 1844 in which most of the church leadership approved the political platform and candidacy of the Joseph Smith. Their prophet further outlined his political beliefs, especially in the foreign policy arena. While he noted that some were opposed to the annexation of Texas because of slavery, Smith rejoined, “Object to Texas on account of slavery. This is the very reason why she should be received.” Smith explained:

Houston says gentlemen if you refuse to receive us we must go to the British and the first thing they will do will be to set the negroes and Indians [against the United States] and they will use us up. British officers running all over Texas to pick a quarrel with us[. It would be] more honorable for us to receive them and set the negroes free and use the negro and Indians against our foes. Don’t let Texas go...⁹¹

Smith again reiterated that his plan could solve the slavery issue. If only he could “liberate 2 or 3 states” through his plan of indemnification, he believed slavery could be done away with in the United States.

Perhaps trying to settle the minds of those who ardently supported either the Whigs or the Democrats, and well aware that the Mormons had been blasted in many publications for shifting their political allegiances, Smith asserted to his listeners, “We have as good a right to make a political party to gain power to defend ourselves as for demagogues to make use of our religion to get power to destroy ourselves.”⁹² It is obvious that Smith’s presidential campaign and all that accompanied it returned to one theme again and again: the Mormons wanted federal help to protect themselves, and no one would offer it. This was the last roll of the dice for a people who felt trapped,

⁹⁰ Ibid, June 8, 1844.

⁹¹ Joseph Smith, Journal, March 7, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 8, 25.

⁹² Ibid.

abused, and abandoned by their government, regardless of how much of the animosity toward Mormons was a result of their own intemperate actions.

While Joseph Smith was an unlikely candidate, he was certainly not an unknown candidate. Already known on the national stage for his peculiar society and religion, Smith brought more attention to himself with his candidacy. Papers as far away as Bangor, Maine took notice that the Mormon leader had entered the political fracas of 1844.⁹³

Smith made sure that the leaders of the nation also took notice. On February 17, 1844, Smith had about 200 copies of his “Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States” mailed to “The President and cabinet, Supreme [Court] Judges - Senators [and] Representatives – principle papers in the U.S.[,] all the Governors and many postmasters and individuals.”⁹⁴

Upon receiving one of the mailed copies the *Washington Globe*, a vehicle for Democratic Party rhetoric published in the nation’s capital, critically assessed Smith’s platform. Referring to Smith derisively as “Mormon Joe”, the paper assaulted first the argument that was most at odds with the Democratic Party: Smith’s plan for a national bank. Titling his article “A New Advocate For A National Bank”, the writer asserted that Smith had united himself in principle with leading Whigs such as Henry Clay and Daniel Webster in their pro-bank policies. He sarcastically asked readers that if now the Mormon Prophet was on board, “Who can doubt the propriety of such an institution?” The Prophet, he continued, had become, “thoroughly imbued with the Whig financial doctrines.” Despite his objection on principle, he did concede that Smith’s plan for a national bank was based on a better plan than the classic Whig scheme. However, as could be expected, Smith’s radical plan for prison reform was met with the greatest

⁹³ *Daily Whig and Courier*, March 18, 1844.

⁹⁴ Joseph Smith, Journal, February 27, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 7, 283.

of scoffs. The author humorously opined that if the criminals were released from prisons then the specie from the newly proposed bank would quickly disappear!⁹⁵

It was not just the *Globe* that saw the Mormon candidacy as laughable. The following article from the *Green Bay Republican* was typical of the reaction Smith's candidacy received:

CLEAR THE WAY!!!—Joe Smith the Mormon Prophet, has formally announced himself as a candidate for the Presidency. Van Buren and Clay will be compelled to withdraw from the contest, or the election will go into the House of Representatives!!! By the way, the Racine Ægis, on behalf of the Political Abolitionists of Wisconsin, should immediately nominate Mr. Jacob LyBrand for the second office on that ticket. What a strong ticket it will be!

For President, JOSEPH SMITH, of Illinois,
For Vice President, JACOB LYBRAND, of Wisconsin.

The *Republican* saw Joseph Smith in the same bad light that it saw the strong abolitionist sentiment in the southern portion of Wisconsin. The connection was only made clearer by Smith's plan to end slavery within the next decade.⁹⁶

Still other papers tried to paint Smith as really being aligned with the opposing party, in order to discredit their political competitors. One Whig publication in Ohio labeled Smith “another Locofoco candidate for President” in order to lump him in with the Democratic Party. The paper took great glee in pointing out that while Smith differed with their champion Clay because he was too much of a Federalist, Smith disdained Van Buren even more. Of course the paper was trying to show how Van Buren's own party despised him, which many in fact did, as attested to by their failure to nominate him later that year. It was certainly a misrepresentation, however, to make it appear as though the real problem was Clay's politics. The real problem was Joseph Smith had been personally offended and left stymied by the Kentuckian when he

⁹⁵ “A New Advocate for the National Bank”, *The Washington Daily Globe*, March 14, 1844. Reprinted in *The Times and Seasons*, April 15, 1844.

⁹⁶ *Green Bay Republican*, February 27, 1844.

refused to assist the Mormons in their plight. Smith saw Clay as a moral coward, refusing to stand up for a principle he pretended to espouse.⁹⁷

Not every paper was denunciatory. One small, local paper outside of the Mormon enclave in Nauvoo announced that it would be supporting the Smith in the upcoming campaign, a position which earned it scoffs from the more established paper in the neighboring city.⁹⁸

Joseph Smith resisted the attempts to consign his views to either the Democratic or Whig Party. He responded to one castigating editorial with indignation that it was “extraneous, irrelevant and kick shawing to connect me or any part of my ‘Views on the Powers and Policy of the Government,’ with Mr. Clay, Mr. Webster, Mr. Adams, Mr. Benton, Mr. Calhoun, Mr. Van Buren, or any of their galvanic cronies.” He took the opportunity to again mock the fact that the nation claimed to be a land of liberty and yet “at the same time in the face of these truths, slavery is tolerated by law.” Men could denigrate Nauvoo all they wished, but he reminded them that there at least no slave would ever “raise his rusting fetters and chains, and exclaim, O liberty where are thy charms?” Summarizing his views on American government, he wrote:

As the ‘world is governed too much’ and as there is not a nation or dynasty now occupying the earth which acknowledges Almighty God as their law giver, and as ‘crowns won by blood, by blood must be maintained,’ I go emphatically, virtuously, and humanely, for a Theodemocracy, where God and the people hold the power to conduct the affairs of men in righteousness. And where liberty, free trade, and sailors’ rights, and the protection of life and property, shall be maintained inviolate, for the benefit of ALL. To exalt mankind is nobly acting the part of God – to degrade them is meanly doing the drudgery of the devil.⁹⁹

While Smith thought a call to a theodemocracy was what the nation needed, such rhetoric was not calculated to placate fears Americans already held about Mormons’ lack of attachment

⁹⁷ “Another Locofoco Candidate for President”, *The Huron Reflector*, March 19, 1844.

⁹⁸ “The Politician”, *The Alton Telegraph and Democratic Review*, April 27, 1844.

⁹⁹ “The Next Presidency – Joe Smith, the Mormon Prophet, defining his Position”, *The New York Herald*, May 17, 1844.

to traditional republican government. Still, Smith did not believe his views alienated him from American democracy, rather he saw himself as a patriotic American following in the pattern of other great founding fathers, concluding his remarks by saying that he was “an advocate of unadulterated freedom.”¹⁰⁰

Though editorialists and local politicians looked unfavorably upon the Mormons there is evidence that the general public received Smith’s ideas with at least some acceptance. If the experiences of those he sent out to electioneer are any indication, many people, at least throughout the Midwest, were willing to listen to what the prophet’s stump men had to say.

Mormon Electioneering for Smith

No less than 329 Mormon elders were appointed to carry the message of Mormonism and Smith’s political views to every state in the nation. The mission was to be quasi-theological and quasi-political. Brigham Young’s published charge to the men was to “preach the truth in righteousness, and present before the people ‘General Smith’s views of the power and policy of the General Government;’ and seek diligently to up electors who will go for him for the presidency.”¹⁰¹ The very nature of these electioneering Mormons reflected by the dynamics of Mormon views toward government and the causes of concern Americans held for the Mormon brand of American republicanism. These men were called by their ecclesiastical superiors to simultaneously preach the Mormon gospel and sway people to Smith’s political persuasion. Such a melding of the esoteric religious and demonstrable political realms of American life was unsettling to Americans who came to believe that Mormon views were radical and dangerous.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ “Special Conference”, *Times and Seasons*, April 15, 1844, Vol. 5, No. 8, 504-506.

The bulk of this electioneering effort was directed at the free states of the North. Only 87 of the elders were dispatched to southern/slaveholding states, and these efforts were primarily focused in Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky.¹⁰² The sizeable majority of elders was assigned to electioneer in the Northern states from which so many Mormon converts hailed. Thirty-seven were sent to Illinois, 31 to Ohio, and 23 to Indiana. A disproportionate number were sent to Vermont where 17 elders would carry Smith's message, while only two were sent to the more populous state of New Jersey.¹⁰³ While the number of elders per capita to the population was highest in Vermont and Illinois, the largest body of elders was sent to New York. Nearly 50 Mormon elders were sent to electioneer and preach in this state which would eventually play the deciding role in the 1844 election between Polk and Clay.

Apostles Wilford Woodruff and Joseph Smith's cousin, George A. Smith, left in early May, 1844 on an electioneering mission to the "Eastern States" in company with future apostle, Jedediah M. Grant. They were determined to hold "great meetings in every place" they could to promote Joseph Smith's presidential bid. They would outline Smith's aggressive foreign policy as well as his domestic positions. As much as it was possible, the group stayed in the homes of various fellow Mormons who were living in the cities and towns where they traveled.¹⁰⁴ The Mormon Church's network that had established branches, or small congregations, in many of the small cities and towns of the Midwest served as a logistical prop to the electioneering efforts. Members of local congregations, or branches, were often the primary means of lodging and food for the missionaries/political stumbers.

¹⁰² Ibid. Tennessee had 24 campaigners assigned; Virginia and Kentucky had 14 and 13 respectively. States in the deep South, such as Georgia and Alabama only had four elders assigned to each.

¹⁰³ There was roughly one Mormon elder sent for every 17,000 people living in Vermont, and one for every 13,500 people living in Illinois.

¹⁰⁴ George A. Smith Papers, MS 1322, Box 1, Folder 1, 3, LDS Church Archives.

While still in western Illinois, the group was received by relatively large audiences. In the small town of La Harpe more than two hundred people congregated to hear Wilford Woodruff expound upon Joseph Smith's political views, and appeared "anxious to hear." Moving quickly, the trio held political meetings four days later in the courthouse of the town of Toulon, Illinois, and then made their way to the larger city of Ottawa. There, George A. Smith recorded that he had spoken to "a large assembly of five hundred people" who reacted quite favorably to the stump speech. In fact they "applauded the sentiment very highly and seemed much pleased." The lack of forceful opposition to their electioneering efforts surprised the group. The men had been the objects of persecution at many times and places since they had joined themselves with the Mormon movement. George A. Smith remarked in his journal, "After [the] meeting all quietly dispersed without the least sign of any unfriendly footing."¹⁰⁵

At the same time George A. Smith and his colleagues were traveling toward Ohio, a future apostle, Charles C. Rich was making his way to Michigan with his missionary companion, David Fullmer. Again there is some indication that abolitionists saw Smith's candidacy as positive, as Rich recorded that an abolitionist proffered them a place to stay in Indiantown, Illinois. Rich gave political lectures in Princeton, Troy Grove, and Ottawa before meeting up with George A. Smith's group in Newark, Illinois.¹⁰⁶ In Newark, a political meeting highlighted just what a fine line the Mormons were walking in the bitter partisan politics of the day. After several Mormons addressed the audience, a sympathetic voice called out that the Mormons ought not to have received the type of treatment they had in the past. Democrats perceived this as a remark directed at Van Buren for his refusal to help the Mormons in Missouri. A war of words broke out between rival Whigs and Democrats and George A. Smith recorded that the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Charles C. Rich Collection, MS 889, Box 1, Volume 6, 1-3, LDS Church Archives.

“Democrats became very agitated.” Ironically, despite Joseph Smith’s anger toward Henry Clay which had in part prompted his campaign, one of the Mormons found themselves defending Clay against the attacks of the incensed Democrats in the room. Yet the disturbance did not escalate into violence, the meeting ended peaceably, and the Mormons spoke in a schoolhouse full of “attentive” listeners the very next night.¹⁰⁷

Making their way through northwestern Indiana, George A. Smith’s party along with Rich’s eventually began electioneering in southern Michigan in late May 1844. In the Kalamazoo area, the stumpers held a large meeting to inform the locals of Joseph Smith’s views. Again George A. Smith related that the various speeches were received well and that “a good feeling prevailed among the congregation. They gave good attention and seemed pleased.”¹⁰⁸

Other missionaries preached the message of Joseph Smith’s candidacy throughout the northern states. Most were received in a similar manner, by Americans who were quite curious about this strange sect and the infamous, despotic Prophet. The spectacle of Mormonism was the subject of rumor and gossip. Joseph Smith was regularly regarded in the same light as was apocalyptic preacher William Miller. While both Mormons and Millerites preached a radical eschatology which held the second advent of Christ was imminent, Mormon communalism, temple building, acceptance of the “Golden Bible”, and regard for Smith as a prophet set the latter sect even further apart, making the men a curiosity wherever they went.

Unlike Mormon theology, Smith’s political views were such a compromise between the two major parties that they were generally accepted as interesting, or at the very least tolerable. The Mormon political platform was very much American, from its expansionist platform to their position on the banking controversy. These topics were familiar to Whig and Democrat alike.

¹⁰⁷ George A. Smith Papers, MS 1322, Box 1, Folder 1, 3, LDS Church Archives.

¹⁰⁸ George A. Smith Papers, MS 1322, Box 1, Folder 1, 4, LDS Church Archives.

Smith's willingness to confront slavery in the platform was further than either party had been willing to go. While in the latter stages of the 1844 campaign slavery would become an issue brought to the surface by the Texas imbroglio, in early 1844 both Democrats and Whigs instead argued about tariffs, taxes, and banking. It is likely that these gradual emancipation sentiments partially caused the poorer reception some Mormons received in the South. One Mormon missionary in New Orleans was reportedly "pelted with decayed apples and oranges until he was compelled to leave the place."¹⁰⁹

Interest in Mormon Votes

While Smith's devout followers were holding political meetings across the Northwest his candidacy had prompted a visit from curious Eastern politicians as well. Josiah Quincy and Charles Francis Adams, along with several traveling companions, came to Nauvoo on May 15, 1844. Charles Francis Adams was the son of former president, and current Whig leader in the house, John Quincy Adams. He had already served in the Massachusetts state senate and four years after his visit to Nauvoo would be the Vice Presidential candidate of another third party ticket, the failed Free-Soil Party. Josiah Quincy was the member of the famed Quincy family of Massachusetts. Coming from a long Federalist/Whig tradition, his father, also named Josiah Quincy, had at one time been the minority leader of the Federalists in the House prior to the War of 1812 and had become a bitter opponent of the War, voicing the opposition of many of his fellow Federalists. The elder Quincy had also subsequently served as the Mayor of Boston in 1823 and was currently acting as the President of Harvard University. The younger Josiah Quincy would follow in his father's footsteps and also serve as the Mayor of Boston a year after

¹⁰⁹*The Adams Sentinel*, April 1, 1844.

his meeting with Joseph Smith in Nauvoo. They were accompanied by a Dr. W. G. Golforth who apparently intended to try to lobby the Mormons back into the Whig camp of Henry Clay.

The men were cordially and heartily received by Smith. He had great admiration for John Quincy Adams, and had taken note of his efforts to end slavery in the United States.¹¹⁰ The Church-published newspaper, the *Times and Seasons*, had referred to the former president as a “fearless champion of liberty and the right of petition.”¹¹¹ As such, Smith welcomed Charles Francis Adams with an exultant “God bless you to begin with!” Josiah Quincy and the others were also well received, but Quincy seemed a bit put off by the fact that Adams, would be greeted “as a crowned head might” receive his heir in a royal court. Meanwhile, while Quincy was treated cordially and respectfully, he noted that it was “with that sort of cordiality with which a president of a college might welcome a deserving janitor”, a fitting analogy given Quincy’s father’s current position at Harvard.¹¹²

During the course of their visit, the travelers engaged Smith in political discussion. The conversation revealed the uniqueness of Smith’s political position. Quincy related that, “Smith recognized the curse and iniquity of slavery, though he opposed the methods of the Abolitionists.” Smith described his plan of indemnification of owners by the government to gradually end slavery. Writing with the benefit of hindsight, and a daily journal of the visit, decades later, Quincy argued that such a course might have prevented the devastating and bloody Civil War. In his estimation, Smith’s early argument for the end of slavery under these terms was quite “statesmanlike.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰Joseph Smith, Journal, February 20, 1843, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 5, 200.

¹¹¹*The Times and Seasons*, March 15, 1842.

¹¹²Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past from the Leaves of Old Journals* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 380-81.

¹¹³*Ibid*, 398. Quincy’s rhetoric on this point was much inflated. During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln attempted a similar scheme to purchase slaves in Delaware, where the economy was not based upon slave labor and freed blacks greatly outnumbered slaves. Lincoln met with staunch resistance even here. Purchased emancipation was never a viable solution to the slavery crisis.

Smith explained that he thought the Missouri Compromise was “an unjustifiable concession for the benefit of slavery.” It was yet another reason he had grown to despise Henry Clay. He told Dr. Golforth, who had come seeking Mormon votes for Clay, that he might have saved himself the trouble in coming. Beyond his usual complaints about Clay, Smith harangued Henry Clay further for being willing to shoot at John Randolph in their famous duel to protect his own personal honor, but was “not brave enough to protect the Saints in their rights as American citizens. Clay had told his people to go to the wilds of Oregon and set up a government of their own. Oh yes, the Saints might go into the wilderness and obtain justice of the Indians, which imbecile, time-serving politicians would not give them in the land of freedom and equality.”¹¹⁴

Smith had reiterated his beliefs in a strengthened executive branch of the federal government, and a reduction in the number of legislators. Impressed by many of Smith’s views and achievements, Quincy explained that Smith “mingled Utopian fallacies with his shrewd suggestions.” Though Smith did not claim to the travelers that he thought he would win the coming election, he did give the impression that he thought he would eventually grow in political power, and perhaps one day hold key swing votes in his hand that would make the Mormons politically vital in any election. The record Quincy leaves makes it clear that the Mormon leader, and the Mormons who followed him, were not seeking any kind of disassociation from the United States. On the contrary, Smith envisioned an ever-growing church with subsequently ever-growing political power.¹¹⁵

Darkening Clouds of Anti-Mormonism and the Planned Move West

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 398-399.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

The desire of Mormons to be integrated into the fabric of American society, and to have their hand in shaping the nation, would soon become lost in the events that followed this friendly meeting with Quincy. Anti-Mormon sentiment in the counties surrounding Nauvoo was growing at an alarming rate. Economic, religious, and social factors all played a role.

Worse for Smith, several of his close associates became offended by Smith both personally and doctrinally. Smith had begun to teach the extraordinarily controversial doctrine of plural marriage among his closest followers. Whispers of the practice had escaped Nauvoo from other fallen members of Joseph's inner circle, such as the claims of John C. Bennett in 1842. Bennett had soared like a rocket to the top of the Mormon hierarchy and just as quickly plummeted out of favor with the Church. Upon his apostasy from the sect, Bennett published a series of damning articles claiming that Smith was attempting not only to practice plural marriage, but was also an outright "seducer of hundreds of both single and married females."¹¹⁶ Bennett traveled the nation giving speeches which highlighted Mormon immorality and the practice of polygamy. Rumors of "spiritual wifery" enflamed local sentiments against his followers even more. Bennett also once again attempted to have Joseph Smith extradited to Missouri on charges related to the attempted murder of former governor Lilburn Boggs, even though previous extradition attempts had ended in failure.

Though Smith was embittered by suggestions, from people such as Clay, that the Mormons leave the country altogether and seek refuge in Indian territory, he was also practically considering matters as the threats from the anti-Mormons in the area mounted. It appears that he came to the reluctant conclusion that his people would have to leave the United States in order to gain any respite from persecution. As early as February of 1844, just weeks after he announced his candidacy for the Presidency, Smith's diary records, "I instructed the 12 [referring the

¹¹⁶John C. Bennett, *The Experiment*, Norwalk, Ohio, August 2, 1842.

Twelve Apostles] to send out a delegation & investigate the locations of California and (the transcriber began to write Mexico here, but the word was scratched out) Oregon to find a good location where we can remove after the Temple is completed & build a city in a day and have a government of our own—in a healthy climate.”¹¹⁷

This was not just idle prattle on the part of Smith. Three days later, in a meeting with the Twelve Apostles, he called for men to go on the Oregon Expedition. He wanted “an exposition of all that country.” He strictly admonished the ready volunteers that they were to preach the gospel as they went and be worthy to speak with God on the tops of the mountains. Several prominent men volunteered for the mission.¹¹⁸

Later, he appears to have also seriously considered a suggestion from Apostle Lyman Wight to remove his people from Illinois to the Republic of Texas. Perhaps Smith was reacting to the commonly held belief that Henry Clay and the Whig party would win the presidential election. The Whigs seemed set against annexation at least any time in the near future, so Smith would be in effect moving the Mormons to a different country. On March 10, 1844 he instructed some other church leaders to prepare to send 25 men as a scouting party to Texas, though they were to take a circuitous route through Santa Fe in Mexican territory. However, Joseph’s journal records two prerequisites to Mormon settlement in Texas. First, Sam Houston needed to “embrace the Gospel” and second, the Constitution of Texas needed to be amended, though concerning what particulars needed to be changed his journal is silent.¹¹⁹

Though the Mormons would not end up heading to Texas (and Houston certainly never converted to Mormonism), it is clear that Joseph was searching for solutions for his people that included leaving the United States itself, or at the very least moving to a distant western territory

¹¹⁷ Joseph Smith, Journal, February 20, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 7, 276.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Smith, Journal, February 23, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 7, 279.

¹¹⁹ Joseph Smith, Journal, March 10, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 8, 38.

of the U.S. It is no coincidence that at this same time Smith drafted the aforementioned petition to both the President and Congress to raise an army of 100,000 volunteers to protect Oregon and Texas from foreign invasion.¹²⁰

The Assassination of Joseph Smith

The Mormons' problems with internal dissention and outside mob violence grew steadily from March to June 1844. Indeed, one day after his meeting concerning a possible Texas move, a Pennsylvania paper reported on a meeting that had occurred in Carthage, Illinois, the county seat of Hancock County. The paper explained that "a probable Mormon War" between the non-Mormons in the area and the Mormons was on the verge of breaking out. The *Warsaw Message*, a local Illinois paper that was vociferously antagonistic toward the Mormons, openly stated:

We see no use in attempting to disguise the fact that many in our midst contemplate a total extermination of that people: that the thousands of defenseless women, aged and infirm, who are congregated at Nauvoo, must be driven out, aye, driven, scattered like the leaves before the autumn blast!¹²¹

The *Adams Sentinel* of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania outlined the "Schism among the Mormons" in a front page article. According to the newspaper's sources, one of Joseph Smith's counselors in the Presidency, William Law, had not only left the fold, but set up a church in opposition to Joseph Smith's. Law's new church did not differ materially from mainstream

¹²⁰ Joseph Smith, memorial to Congress entitled, "To the Honorable, the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America Assembled", March 26, 1844.

¹²¹ "Probable Mormon War", *The Adams Sentinel*, March 11, 1844.

Mormonism; it did not even deny that Smith had been a prophet. Law argued that Smith was now a fallen prophet and had lost his authority to lead the people.¹²²

Little did the paper know that tensions in Illinois had already reached the boiling point a few days earlier. Several of the most prominent apostates from Mormonism had determined to print a newspaper in Nauvoo “earnestly seeking to explode the vicious principles of Joseph Smith.” The *Nauvoo Expositor* assaulted the character of the Church officials, especially Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. In discussing the coming presidential election the writers said they favored Henry Clay over Joseph who they claimed had committed fornication, adultery, and perjury.

The bulk of the Mormon population reacted with great indignity. Published as it was inside the Nauvoo city limits, the city council of Nauvoo reacted quickly to proclaim the press libelous, and therefore a nuisance to the town. The extremely liberal charter that had been granted Nauvoo by Illinois when it was first founded allowed for the city council to remove a “public nuisance.” The city council ordered Joseph, as the Mayor, to lead men to destroy the printing press of the *Expositor*. The press was destroyed after only one publication.

The smoldering fires of anti-Mormonism in the area now struck up as though doused with gasoline. It was not the only time a city had determined to remove a press from its limits. In fact just a few short years earlier and not 200 miles away in Alton, Illinois, an enraged mob had three times destroyed the press of Elijah Lovejoy’s *Alton Observer* for publishing anti-slavery and abolitionist sentiments. While trying to protect a fourth press, Lovejoy was killed by a bloodthirsty mob, and the press once again destroyed. No one was brought to justice in the affair

¹²² “Schism among the Mormons”, *The Adams Sentinel*, June 10, 1844. Smith’s journal records a meeting of apostates and disaffected members who met together to plan the creation of this new church headed by William Law on April 28 1844, Joseph Smith, Journal, April 28, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 8, 103. The primary point of contention for most of the dissenters was apparently the secret practice of polygamy.

and according to published reports the mayor of the town had only tried to intervene to get Lovejoy to give up the press without forcing the mob to resort to violence.¹²³ No one was brought to justice in this extra legal press destruction, and it is possible that Smith had such in mind when he authorized a “legal” destruction of the press. Regardless, this move served to solidify anti-Mormon sentiment across Western Illinois. It appeared to many that the Mormon prophet, already accused of being a king or dictator, a papal figure and despot, had decided to enforce his views in Nauvoo by removing the freedoms of press and speech. Residents of Carthage and Warsaw and other neighboring communities demanded justice.

Governor Thomas Ford saw much of the hatred for the Mormons arising from political divisions. Laying some of the blame at the feet of the Mormons, as the *Saint Louis New Era* had earlier, Ford wrote, “It is indeed unfortunate for their peace that they [the Mormons] do not divide in elections according to their individual preferences or political principles, like other people.”¹²⁴

Ford concluded that the Mormons’ tendency to vote as a bloc enraged defeated politicians in Illinois, who could blame their loss on an absence of Mormon votes. Local Hancock County officials especially could not stand having to “court” Mormon influence. These local men fueled vindictive newspapers aided by the rhetoric of excommunicated Mormons from the religious hierarchy. The fall of such Mormons had been swift and bitter. Wilson Law had only a year earlier squared off in the street with a rowdy that had the audacity to impugn Smith’s character during one of Smith’s extradition trials. He had written a lengthy hymn to commemorate the victory Smith had gained over the attempts of Missouri to extradite him. Now

¹²³ *Alton Observer*, November 7, 1837.

¹²⁴ Ford, 231.

he was one of the publishers of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, broadcasting via print much more damning accusations than those of a garrulous courtroom onlooker.¹²⁵

Defiant Mormons and agitated locals gave birth to a spirit of mob violence, especially following the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*. Ford explained that these anti-Mormons hoped to foment a popular mob that “would result in the expulsion or extermination of the Mormon voters. For this purpose public meetings had been called; inflammatory speeches had been made; [and] exaggerated reports and rumors had been extensively circulated.” A public meeting in Warsaw had even passed resolutions determined to “exterminate the Mormon population.”¹²⁶

Although Smith and several of his associates were brought before the Nauvoo municipal court to answer the charge of destroying the press and released on several occasions by a non-Mormon judge, such trials would never satisfy the gathering mob in the surrounding communities.¹²⁷ Joseph Smith sent several letters to Governor Ford, asking him to come to Nauvoo to mediate the matter in person.¹²⁸ The governor, having received affidavits on the destruction of the press, determined that Smith and the Nauvoo City Council had exceeded their power and needed to be tried outside of Nauvoo in order to allay public sentiment. He requested that the accused come to Carthage to stand trial. He promised that he would protect them if they came.¹²⁹

The Mormon leaders balked. The Mormons had surrendered to state authority once before in Missouri, only to have Smith and others imprisoned for months without a trial and to

¹²⁵ Joseph Smith, Journal, January 3, 1843, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 5, 74-75.

¹²⁶ Ford, 231.

¹²⁷ Joseph Smith, Journal, June 7, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 8, 155 and Joseph Smith, Journal, June 17, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 1, folder 8, 161.

¹²⁸ Joseph Smith to Thomas Ford, June 16, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 2, folder 8, 14.

¹²⁹ Thomas Ford to Joseph Smith, June 22, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 3, folder 8, 97-101.

watch as their homes, fields, and possessions were robbed or destroyed. Knowing the realities of mob violence from experience, Joseph wrote back the Governor Ford in frustration. He said that he and other Mormon leaders were more than willing to stand trial again for the destruction of the press, but they feared for their own lives. Joseph repeated several times, “We dare not come.” Smith pointed out that the Governor himself said that he thought it would be difficult to control the mob at Carthage. How could the Mormon leaders surrender themselves into the mouth of the lion’s den if the Governor himself thought the situation possibly untenable? “Sir”, he repeated again, “we dare not come.”¹³⁰

During the night, Smith determined that he had no choice but to flee westward across the Mississippi River with his brother Hyrum and several others of the accused. Carthage meant possible death at the hands of an angry mob. Joseph hoped that by fleeing to the West, out of the reach of state officials, he might again try petitioning the federal government for some type of intervention. However, several prominent Mormons in Nauvoo accused Joseph of cowardice. They claimed if Joseph was gone they would be at the mercy of the mob. Joseph reportedly replied to such reports, “If my life is of no value to my friends, it is of none to myself.” Consulting with his brother and confidant Hyrum, Smith said, “If you go back I will go with you,” but then added ominously, “but we shall be butchered.”¹³¹

Returning to Nauvoo, Joseph wrote another letter to Governor Ford, expressing his willingness to surrender to the governor’s forces as long as they were promised protection. John Taylor, Joseph’s close friend later wrote that as Joseph was leaving for Carthage he had solemnly told his associates, “I am going like a lamb to the slaughter; but I am calm as a summer’s

¹³⁰ Joseph Smith to Thomas Ford, June 22, 1844, JSC, MS 155, box 2, folder 8, 58.

¹³¹ HC, 549-550.

morning; I have a conscience void of offense towards God, and towards all men. I shall die innocent, and it shall yet be said of me-he was murdered in cold blood.”¹³²

If Smith actually made this statement, it did prove to be prophetic. In the afternoon of June 26, 1844, while awaiting their trial in the upper room of the Carthage Jail, a mob gathered outside with faces painted black. The prisoners were not in a barred cell, but rather an upper bedroom of the jail with a wooden door and a window to the outside. Governor Ford had left the city along with most of the state troops in order to go to Nauvoo to see that all of the state’s arms, distributed to the Nauvoo Legion, were collected and confiscated. Leaving just the local Carthage militia to “protect” Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and their fellow captives John Taylor and Willard Richards, the governor had left the Mormons at the mercy of the mob.

The mob rushed the door of the jailhouse, brushing aside the jailor. Rushing up the stairs they began firing into the room where the Mormon leaders were staying. Hyrum was hit several times and collapsed dead. Joseph, in a vain effort to defend himself and the others in the room opened the door and blindly fired a six-shooter at the mobbers without the door. This gave the mob pause for just a moment before they began shooting through the door again and attempting to force an entry. Joseph, in desperation, attempted to leap from the window of the second story room. He was shot as he was jumping and lay mortally wounded on the ground below. He was shot again several times as well as stabbed to ensure he was dead.

Thus ended the life of the Mormon prophet. He became the first declared presidential candidate in American history to be assassinated. The Mormons reacted with understandable horror. Their founder and leader was dead.

Hiram Winters, one of the men out electioneering for the prophet, was expounding Joseph’s views to a large congregation when he was handed a paper which stated that Smith was

¹³² Doctrine and Covenants 135:4.

dead. He refused to believe the report at first until it was subsequently confirmed.¹³³ John Horner had a similar experience as he was leading a political oration in New Jersey. He related, “One night, while speaking to a full house of attentive listeners, I invited all to speak who wished to at the close of my lecture. One gentleman got up and said: ‘I have one reason to give why Joseph Smith can never be president of the United States; my paper, which I received from Philadelphia this afternoon, says that he was murdered in the Carthage jail, on June 27th.’ Silence reigned, the gathering quietly dispersed, but the grief and sadness of this heart was beyond the power of man to estimate.”¹³⁴

Many Illinois residents feared a swift reprisal from the Mormon forces in Nauvoo. The residents of Warsaw pled for surrounding counties to come to their aid when the supposed Mormon hammer fell upon them. Americans as far away as Norwalk, Ohio feared that they might factor into a Mormon reprisal for harboring some of the anti-Mormon leaders. It was presumed that the Mormons and the Nauvoo Legion would simply “exterminate the governor and his small force.”¹³⁵

Under the heading “The Mormon War”, the *Sandusky Clarion* reported on the “cowardly and lawless” manner that the “imposters” were murdered. Though the governor proclaimed hostilities were at an end as the Mormons were not going to retaliate, the residents of Warsaw insisted, “the war will not yet end; but that the Mormon population must be removed; that they and the other citizens could not live together in peace.”¹³⁶

¹³³ Untitled Manuscript, LDS Church Archives.

¹³⁴ "From the Autobiography of John M. Horner," in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 20 vols. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1958-77), 3, 549.

¹³⁵ “The Death of Joe Smith, the Mormon Prophet”, *Huron Reflector*, July 9, 1844, reprinted from the *Quincy Herald*.

¹³⁶ “The Mormon War”, *The Sandusky Clarion*, July 20, 1844.

Though the Mormons did not respond militarily, a part of their faith in the government died that day along with Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Many Mormons became embittered. John Taylor wrote indignantly of the murders of the Smiths that, “They were innocent of any crime...and their innocent blood on the floor of Carthage jail is a broad seal affixed to Mormonism that cannot be rejected by any court on earth, and their innocent blood on the escutcheon of the State of Illinois, with the broken faith of the State as pledged by the governor...and their innocent blood on the banner of liberty, and on the *magna charta* of the United States...will cry unto the Lord of Hosts till he avenges that blood on the earth.”¹³⁷

Mormon rhetoric following the assassination clearly blamed the United States government as well as the government of Illinois for the death of Smith. Though Mormons had regarded the federal government as deaf to their rights for years, the death of Smith convinced many Mormons of the deeper corruption in the nation. Mormons would never forget the way authorities allowed their founder to be gunned down by a mob after having surrendered himself to the state authorities. The emotional rift between the Mormons and the federal government persisted and affected Mormon relations with federal authorities in the decades which followed.

Smith’s death was a line of demarcation dividing Mormons from the United States. All future relations with the Mormons would take place in the context of Mormon leaders and laity believing the United States had been in some way complicit with the death of their founder and prophet. Though national politicians had not participated in Smith’s murder, Mormons believed that their inaction was calculated and premeditated. It was upon this faulty premise that Mormon/US relations were founded.

¹³⁷ Doctrine and Covenants, 135:7.

Chapter 3: “*They must be obliterated from the face of the earth*”: Mormon Fears of Federal Intervention

The death of Joseph Smith, and the manner of his demise, forever altered Mormon views of the United States government. Smith’s martyrdom sealed the Mormon belief that their community had been targeted for persecution by government officials as well as religious bigots. Leading Mormons who had been willing to trust in Smith’s admonition to seek legal redress for their grievances, lost substantial faith in those processes and the nation that theoretically defended them. This was, however, only a one-sided alienation. While the Mormons now exhibited a growing and palpable distrust of the federal government, the death of Smith did not further alienate the federal government from the Mormons. Federal policy had been one of non-intervention and the death of Smith, if anything, allowed US officials to assume that the Mormon experiment was soon to end in failure. Mormonism was still viewed as a domestic problem with which state authorities in Illinois were required to deal, not federal officials in Washington. The events which followed Smith’s death provided the catalyst for the Mormon mistrust of the United States and its officials.

In Nauvoo, the death of Smith occasioned uncertainty as to the direction and leadership of the church. A bitter power struggle ensued over what men would lead the church in Joseph’s absence. Brigham Young, as the president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostle, asserted that he and the Quorum were the designated leaders of the Latter-Day Saints. Young was able to withstand the succession claims of other prominents like Sidney Rigdon, who did not garner more than a small percentage of support. A much greater challenge to Young’s claims of

succession came from James Jesse Strang.¹³⁸ Though a recent convert to Mormonism, Strang had a letter purportedly sent from Joseph Smith shortly before his death, designating Strang as the successor. Though Strang did not enjoy overwhelming support among the Nauvoo Mormons, he did eventually succeed in attracting several thousand followers to his standard, including key leaders and even witnesses to the Book of Mormon. Even John C. Bennett joined Strang's movement for a time, though he would eventually be expelled from this variety of Mormonism as well. Despite Strang's success, a majority of the apostles and the members followed the leader of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Brigham Young, who had been out electioneering at the time of the murder.

The Mormons were not only trying to sort out their ecclesiastical leadership. Smith's death only months before the 1844 presidential election deprived the Mormons of their candidate. Smith's candidacy had been an attempt to keep Mormons nominally outside of the national political rivalries while asserting their political power and franchise rights. With the champions of each party refusing to commit to the Mormon cause, Smith hoped that depriving both of the Mormon voting bloc would motivate greater national consideration. With Smith gone, the Mormon politicians stumbled blindly forward. They still convened their scheduled national convention in Baltimore on July 13, but adjourned without concluding any business of import.¹³⁹ No candidate was selected to replace the fallen Smith.

Mormon political power was considered a real problem by Illinois officials. In the months following the assassination, Governor Thomas Ford struggled to find a resolution to the Mormon/anti-Mormon conflict. His desire to prevent further outbreaks of violence trumped his

¹³⁸ Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri: Winter Quarters, 1846-1852* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 18.

¹³⁹ Oscar Lambert, *Presidential Politics in the United States, 1841-1844* (Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press), 1936, 161.

feeling that the rights of Mormons needed to be protected. After Smith's lynching Ford, by his own account, "was most anxious that the Mormons should not vote at this [1844] election, and strongly advised them against doing so."¹⁴⁰

Ford believed most of the anti-Mormon sentiment in Illinois was based upon reaction to Mormon political power, but the Latter-day Saints were not willing to give up the most outward sign of their American citizenship. Most Mormons did not heed Ford's advice and voted in the state and presidential elections, still determined to exercise their rights as American citizens. James K. Polk, the surprising dark horse Democratic nominee, had not yet openly disavowed the interests of the Saints and as a result many Mormons voted for the Tennessee politician.¹⁴¹ The Whig forces in the state, as Ford had warned, became even more embittered. Though many factors occasioned the renewed hostilities between Mormons and non-Mormons in Illinois, Ford believed the most pressing factor was the malleable Mormon political allegiance. Since 1840, the Mormons had variously allied with Whigs and Democrats in their search for federal and state political patronage. The death of Smith did not destroy the Mormon movement, and consequently its voting bloc in Illinois remained intact. Economic, religious, and legal differences with the surrounding communities remained alive as well. By 1845, mobs began harassing the Mormons again in an attempt to force their removal from the state.

Desperate, the Mormons not only sought help from Illinois authorities, they also tried once again to enlist the great national statesmen for help. After the Illinois state legislature in

¹⁴⁰ Ford, 255. Ford was not alone in placing political conflict at the heart of the animosity toward the Mormons. The *Cincinnati Gazette* chastised the local Illinois politicians for playing politics in creating the Nauvoo city charter in the first place. The commentator was happy that the charter would soon be gone, but in his view the Mormons' had been "led on" by the Illinois politicians who used them for votes. Afterward the Mormons were "tossed overboard without a passing sympathy." *Cincinnati Gazette*, December 29, 1844 reprinted in *The Weekly Herald*, January 4, 1845. Ford believed that Whig opposition was the driving force behind the final removal of the remnant of Mormons from the state in 1846. The Whigs were once again angry that the remaining Mormons had voted the Democratic ticket. Ford, 414-415.

¹⁴¹ "Illinois", *The Daily Atlas*, August 21, 1844; "The Mormon Vote", *North American and Daily Advertiser*, November 27, 1844.

late 1844 voted to repeal the Nauvoo city charter, the Mormons sought help from Whig leader Daniel Webster, imploring him to help guide them legally.¹⁴² No help was forthcoming. National leaders failed to react with any visible indignation over the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. As mob violence and threats increased, Mormon animosity toward the United States government also grew.

While the national government appeared not to notice the Mormon issue, Illinois' leaders saw Mormon removal as the only way to end the conflict in the state. Not only did Governor Ford try to persuade the Mormons not to vote in the elections, he pressed the Mormons on the issue of their removal from Illinois and the United States itself on several occasions. In early April, 1845, Ford urged the Mormons to "move to some far distant country." Explaining that the newness and peculiarity of the Mormon religion incited great prejudice among the American populace, Ford chided Brigham Young for not following the intentions of the murdered Joseph Smith. He wrote Young, "I was informed by General Joseph Smith last summer that he contemplated a removal west; and from what I learned from him and others at that time I think if he had lived he would have begun to move in the matter before this time." Ford suggested that the Mormons occupy some of the Mexican territory in California, and wrest the land from the "physically weak and morally distracted" Mexicans.¹⁴³

As the threat of mob violence grew worse, Brigham Young wrote a pleading letter to President Polk himself, hoping that reports of Mormon votes in his favor might sway the executive to action. Begging for federal intervention, Young exasperatedly exclaimed, "Most of us have long been loyal citizens of some one of these United States...designing to make this Union our permanent residence. We...are a disenfranchised people. We are privately told by the

¹⁴² Brigham Young to Daniel Webster, February 1, 1845. *The Papers of Daniel Webster, Correspondence*, Vol. 6, edited by Charles Wiltse (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1984), 72.

¹⁴³ Thomas Ford to Brigham Young, April 8, 1845, *HC*, Vol. 7, 398.

highest authorities of this State, that it is neither prudent nor safe for us to vote at the polls; still we have continued to maintain our right to vote, until the blood of our best men has been shed, both in Missouri and the State of Illinois.”¹⁴⁴

Young listed the abuses the Mormons received at the hands of the state authorities, including the forced surrender of Joseph Smith and the governor’s seemingly purposeful abandonment of him to the lynch mob. Young concluded with a plaintiveness that is never generally recognized as a part of his character:

And now, Hon. Sir, having reached out our imploring hands to you, with deep solemnity, we would importune with you as a Father, a friend, a patriot, a statesman, and the head of a mighty nation; by the constitution of American Liberty; by the blood of our fathers; who have fought for the independence of this Republic; by the blood of the Martyrs, which has been shed in our midst; by the wailings of the Widows, and orphans; by our murdered Fathers and Mothers, Brothers and Sisters, Wives and Children; by the dread of immediate destruction from secret combinations now forming for our overthrow; and by every endearing tie that binds men to men, and renders life bearable; and that too, for ought we know, for the last time that you will lend your immediate aid to quell the violence of mobocracy, and work your influence to establish us as a people in our civil and religious rights where we now are, or in some part of the United States.¹⁴⁵

There is not a record of Polk responding to the letter. While Smith had been answered dismissively by Calhoun and Clay and Cass, Polk did not even deign a response to Young. There was no help forthcoming from the federal government. Young asked Polk to intervene by moving the Mormons to another part of the nation’s territory, if a workable solution did not exist in Illinois. The Mormons, despite their difficult history, still saw themselves as Americans, as a part of a thoroughly American church, and desired to stay within the United States if possible. When this option proved impracticable, the Mormons concluded that they would have to leave

¹⁴⁴ Brigham Young to James K. Polk, May 10, 1845. *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, edited by Wayne Cutler (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 362.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 364.

the country in order to find respite, though uncertainties existed about where to settle. Most discussions and suggestions leaned toward an unauthorized settlement in Mexican Territory.

In a final attempt to avoid an exodus from the nation, the Mormons petitioned multiple state governments, asking for asylum. One of the few sympathetic recipients was Arkansas governor Thomas S. Drew. Only Drew responded to the importuning Mormons. A Democrat, Drew was not in a powerful position as governor. He had been selected at the last moment to run as a replacement candidate in 1844 and had won with a mere plurality of 47% of the vote. He explained that he wished he could offer asylum to the Saints in Arkansas, but that prejudice against the Mormons in the state legislature was too great a thing to overcome. He also suggested that Mormons continue with their preparations to move to the western territories. He explained that not everyone in the nation was happy with the growing anarchy in Illinois, but the move west seemed to be the only option the Mormons had. A move west would demonstrate that the Mormons were the party seeking peace and “Should the Latter-day Saints migrate to Oregon they will carry with them the good will of philanthropists and the blessings of every friend of humanity.”¹⁴⁶

While the Arkansas legislature refused the offer aid to the Mormons, the reaction of the Connecticut legislature demonstrated what many Americans thought of this sect. No action was taken on the petition of the Mormons and it was referred to the “committee on Foreign Relations.”¹⁴⁷ Mormons’ foreignness was only too clearly demonstrated in their peculiarity of doctrine, their clannish city-building, and their claim to have a modern prophet at the head of the whole endeavor.

¹⁴⁶ Governor Thomas Drew to Brigham Young, May 27, 1845. Reprinted in B.H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, Vol. 2, 525-526.

¹⁴⁷ “Mormon Petition”, *New York Herald*, June 9, 1845.

The Mormon migration could not have come at a more volatile time in American foreign relations. Disputes with Mexico and Great Britain were threatening to lead to war. The ambitious congressman Stephan A. Douglas met with Brigham Young in October of 1845, and possibly seeking to use the Mormons as political pawns in the Democratic Party's "All Oregon" dispute with the British government, recommended that the Mormons move to Vancouver Island, clearly inside the British sphere of the disputed territory. If not Vancouver Island, he opined that they should at least remove to some part other part of Oregon Territory. No doubt Douglas and other leaders thought that the massive influx of tens of thousands of "Americans" would bolster U.S. claims to the area, and rid the country proper of the Mormons at the same time.¹⁴⁸ While federal and state officials were not willing to protect the rights associated with Mormon citizenship, their status as Americans could yet prove useful in expanding the American empire in the West. Such a paradox reflected the way Mormons operated in the borderlands of American identity. Their Americaness was a transitive quality, one that could be highlighted and defended and almost simultaneously rejected and scorned.

Faulty Mormon Intelligence of US Intentions

As the Mormons made their preparations to leave the country, one event led to greater Mormon mistrust of the federal government than any other. Brigham Young and his fellow apostles poured over maps and travelers' accounts of the areas west of the Rocky Mountains, trying to find a suitable habitation. Meanwhile, Governor Ford schemed to remove the sect before the mob violence escalated beyond his control, and possibly before Mormon votes could

¹⁴⁸ MHC, October 1, 1845, Vol. 14, 132.

be used against him in his 1846 re-election campaign.¹⁴⁹ To spur the Mormon exodus, Ford claimed that he had intelligence that the federal government was going to intervene in the Mormon issue, for the purpose of arresting Mormon leaders and breaking up their community. He urged them to understand that if they waited until the spring to depart, the federal troops would prevent them from leaving the country.¹⁵⁰ In his later book chronicling the events in Illinois during his tenure as governor, Ford admitted that “with a view to hasten their removal they were made to believe that the President would order the regular army to Nauvoo as soon as the navigation opened in the spring. This had the desired effect; the twelve, with about two thousand of their followers immediately crossed the Mississippi before the breaking up of the ice.”¹⁵¹ Ford’s machinations caused a panicked state of affairs in Nauvoo and led to the brutal winter exodus of many Mormons.

Ford’s dishonesty would probably not have carried as much weight with the Mormons had not Young just received a letter from a prominent Mormon authority in Washington D.C., who also warned of a coming military intervention. Samuel Brannan, President of the Eastern States Mission, wrote Brigham Young that he had learned some disturbing news. He related that the “secretary of war and other members of the cabinet were laying plans” to prevent the Mormons from moving west. He explained that, “They say it will not do to let the Mormons go to California nor Oregon, neither will it do to let them tarry in the states, and they must be obliterated from the face of the earth.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ MHC, December 31, 1845, Vol. 14, 320. Ford’s administration was plagued by internal dissension over patronage appointments. Ford claimed later that he never intended to stand for re-election, but it is likely that the growing opposition against him from the ranks of his own party facilitated that decision.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Ford to Sheriff J.B. Backenstos, December 29, 1845. *HC*, Vol. 7, 563.

¹⁵¹ Ford, 291. Not all of the Twelve Apostles left with Young as Ford intimates. It is possible here is referring to the Quorum of the Twelve as an organization, but not all twelve individuals.

¹⁵² MHC, December 11, 1845, LDS Church Archives, Vol. 14, 284.

Young had written to Polk hoping for some kind of respite from the executive branch. Brannan's news and Ford's communication must have chilled him more than the frigid temperatures. Rather than sending an army to aid the Mormons in their quest to maintain their lands and homes, the government was joining forces with those that opposed them. An army was en route, just as Young hoped, but its purpose was diametrically opposite than the one which motivated Young's letter to Polk. Mormons had long felt isolated and persecuted. They saw animosity from those outside their group as a type of proof of the validity of their religion. But the news that the federal government had finally intervened only to "obliterate" the Mormons was galling. Reports of federal forces were made more believable as prominent newspapers had earlier warned of an impending Mormon menace were the group allowed to leave the country. The Mormons, it seemed, had become enemies of the federal government, even before they had departed the national territory.¹⁵³

Of course, not every newspaper heralded the expulsion from Illinois with glee. Some were shocked and appalled by the forced removal of the Mormons from the country. The Mormons' status as citizens, in the eyes of some observers, had not been forfeited by their allegiance to their peculiar sect. One New York newspaper incredulously exclaimed:

A whole community of the people banished! Driven violently from their homes, their farms, and their Church; their blood shed by lawless adventures of Illinois and the State, either unable or unwilling to protect them! How are we as a nation to explain to a civilized world this dire calamity, this desecration of all that is free in our Government? Was it the religion of the Mormons to which objections were made? We have no right to interfere with the religion of any person, if the pursuit of that religion interferes with no man's rights or property. Were the Mormons a rascally, lying, thieving race of people, as alleged? Then enforce the laws against all offenders. But to drive them, their wives and children beyond the Rocky Mountains, beyond the barriers of civilization, to take lawless possession of their farms and property, exceeds in iniquity everything that has been done in any country since the reign of the Goths and Vandals!¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ *The New York Sun*, October 27th, 1845.

¹⁵⁴ Reprinted in the *Times and Seasons*, Nov. 15, 1845.

Another paper marveled that the anti-Mormons were still harassing the Mormons even as they were trying to leave the country, attacking farms and houses and burning Mormon settlements. The paper argued that the actions of the mob against the Mormons would “tear down the fabric of society...in violation of all private rights.”¹⁵⁵

Growing Alienation of Mormons

Despite these small showings of support, no amount of moral sympathy was going to change the cold reality the Mormons faced. They had few options. They believed they were being forced out of Illinois by authorities of the state and yet were being prevented from fleeing by authorities of the United States. They had sought federal intervention that would guarantee them their safety. Now it appeared that intervention would come, but it would be for the purpose of further persecuting the sect. As Mormons prepared for their exodus, their bitterness grew toward the nation that had turned its back on them.

One young Mormon man wrote his parents of his fellow Americans, “they will not let us live in peace, and so we must go elsewhere, at least they say we must, or they will drive us. This has hastened the move; but whether they did so or not we intend to go away for a time, and leave this abominable people of blood.” Though confident in his choice to remain true to his religion, he also added his uncertainty of what the future would bring, writing, “...we leave Nauvoo and the United States next Spring for some remote place, where, exactly, I don't know.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ *Zanesville Weekly Courier*, September 12, 1846.

¹⁵⁶ John Needham, letter to parents, November 17, 1845. Reprinted in *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. VII, No. 3, February 3, 1846.

It was not just shared experience that led Mormons to lose faith in the United States. Mormon leaders directed harsh rhetoric toward the government and condemned the nation as a whole for the unfolding human calamity. Apostle Orson Pratt wrote a letter of farewell to the Mormons living in scattered branches in other states which captured his views of the United States:

The time is at hand for me to take a long and lasting farewell to these Eastern countries, being included with my family, among the tens of thousands of American citizens who have the choice of DEATH or BANISHMENT beyond the Rocky Mountains. I have preferred the latter. It is with the greatest of joy that I forsake this Republic: and all the saints have abundant reasons to rejoice that they are counted worthy to be cast out as exiles from this wicked nation; for we have received nothing but one continual scene of the most horrid and unrelenting persecutions at their hands for the last sixteen years. If our heavenly father will preserve us, and deliver us out of the hands of the blood-thirsty Christians of these United States, and not suffer any more of us to be martyred to gratify their holy piety, I for one shall be very thankful. Perhaps we may have to suffer much in the land of our exile, but our sufferings will be from another cause-there will be no Christian banditti to afflict us all the day long-no holy pious priests to murder us by scores-no editors to urge on house burning, devastation and death. If we die in the dens and caves of the Rocky Mountains, we shall die where freedom reigns triumphantly. Liberty in a solitary place, and in a desert, is far more preferable than martyrdom in these pious States.¹⁵⁷

A Mormon publication, edited by Apostle John Taylor, exclaimed, “We owe the United States nothing. We go out by force, as exiles from freedom. The government and people owe us millions for the destruction of life and property in Missouri and in Illinois. The blood of our best men will preserve it till God comes out of his hiding place, and gives this nation a hotter place than he did Sodom and Gomorrah.”¹⁵⁸

While such vitriol was picked up and widely reported by the national media, other published sentiments from Mormon leaders revealed a schizophrenic view on their Americanism.

¹⁵⁷ Orson Pratt, “Farewell Message of Orson Pratt”, *Times and Seasons*, Dec. 31, 1845.

¹⁵⁸ “To Our Patrons”, *Nauvoo Neighbor*, October 29, 1845.

The High Council of the Church published a lengthy letter directly addressing the Mormon relationship to the federal government:

We also further declare for the satisfaction of some who have concluded that our grievances have alienated us from our country; that our patriotism has not been overcome by fire-by sword-by daylight, nor by midnight assassinations, which we have endured; neither have they alienated us from the institutions of our country. Should hostilities arise between the Government of the United States and any other power, in relation to the right of possessing the territory of Oregon, we are on hand to sustain the claim of the United State's Government to that country. It is geographically ours; and of right, no foreign power should hold dominion there: and if our services are required to prevent it, those services will be cheerfully rendered according to our ability.¹⁵⁹

This dialogue viewed Mormon/US relations in terms of unrequited love rather than bitter hostility. Though the Mormons had moral justification to feel alienated from the government, they averred that their loyalty was undiminished. The High Council's affirmation was quite different than the sardonic Pratt and the bitter Taylor. While others believed the governments' inaction had severed the ties to the nation, the Council explained, "We feel the injuries that we have sustained, and are not insensible of the wrongs we have suffered; still we are Americans."¹⁶⁰

Although the Mormons were embittered toward the United States, it did not change the fact that most were citizens of the United States. Joseph Smith had tried for years to get the federal government to step in and protect the Mormons rights as American citizens. Petition after petition failed, and mobs continued to hound the Mormons. Though their views were greatly at variance with most Americans, politically and culturally, the Mormons considered themselves patriotic Americans and almost invariably reacted with surprise when such feelings were not reciprocated. The Mormons had sent memorials to Congress and the president, begging

¹⁵⁹ "A Circular of the High Council", *Times and Seasons*, January 15, 1846.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

for federal intervention. Smith and Young had attempted to gain the support of the great statesmen of the time, earnestly seeking someone who would back the Mormons' cause. John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, Martin Van Buren, James K. Polk, Daniel Webster, and a host of other powerful American leaders all refused to intervene on the behalf of the Mormons. While some publications and politicians expressed dismay at the removal, there were no steps taken to stop it, and the Mormons exited Nauvoo with a literal belief that a federal army was marching to stop them and arrest Brigham Young at best and "obliterate" them at worst.

Amos Kendall and the Covenant With Death

After his first warnings of federal intervention in December, Brannan sent more in January. He sounded increasingly desperate about the Mormons' chances of escaping federal intervention in the exodus out of the country. He explained that the justification for stopping the Mormons would be that treaty stipulations between the United States and Mexico required the former to prevent "an armed force of men" from invading the latter's territory.¹⁶¹

Brannan had become acquainted with one of the more prominent members of Andrew Jackson's and Martin Van Buren's cabinet, Amos Kendall, former Postmaster General. Kendall had been appointed in 1835 by Andrew Jackson to replace the scandal-plagued generalship of William T. Barry and was widely regarded for his influence on Jackson's domestic policies. Kendall was credited with formulating policy and crafting speeches. In an effort to prevent agitation over the slavery issue, Kendall had begun censoring mail bound for southern post offices, preventing abolitionist literature from causing outbreaks of mob violence against the

¹⁶¹ Samuel Brannan to Brigham Young, January 12, 1846, MHC, Vol. 15, 42.

mails.¹⁶² More recently he had taken over many of the business operations for telegraph inventor Samuel B. Morse in 1845 as Morse struggled to win governmental sponsorship for the nearly instantaneous form of long distance communication.¹⁶³ Well-acquainted with the seedy practices of land/business speculation, Kendall determined that the Mormons, in their desperation, presented a ready economic opportunity. He fed false information to Samuel Brannan about the prospects of a peaceful Mormon exodus from the country.

Kendall was joined in his scheme by a powerful businessman, Alfred Grenville Benson (often referred to as simply A.G. Benson). Benson had built up a formidable cross-continental shipping company. By 1841, on the recommendation of then Secretary of State Daniel Webster, Benson was benefitting from an exclusive and covert government contract to convey passengers and supplies in his company's ships around Cape Horn to Oregon Territory in return for guaranteed rates and rights to government freight.¹⁶⁴ Though the Polk administration had terminated the federal contract, Benson was still one of the major shippers to the disputed Oregon Territory and was still hauling supplies for the US Navy at the outbreak of the Mexican War.¹⁶⁵ In fact only a few years later when the California gold rush began drawing thousands to the West, Benson operated a "fleet of sailing vessels."¹⁶⁶ He became much more famous, however, for his guano mining, as one of the early pioneers of the practice and founder of the

¹⁶² David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 263.

¹⁶³ Amos Kendall, *Autobiography of Amos Kendall*, Edited by William Stickney (Boston: Lee & Shepard, Publishers, 1872), 527.

¹⁶⁴ The contract was concealed from the public in order to prevent the British reaction that might have resulted from an open government bidding process among contractors to take settlers and supplies into a territory that was still very much claimed by the British, the joint occupation agreement between the two countries notwithstanding.

¹⁶⁵ Jimmy M. Skaggs, *The Great Guano Rush: Entrepreneurs and Overseas American Expansion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 17-18.

¹⁶⁶ "Other Deaths: Mr. Alfred G. Benson", *The New York Times*, April 20, 1878.

United States Guano Company. He became notorious because of his primary role in the 1852 Lobos Islands affair, which tarnished the stately image of Daniel Webster irreparably.¹⁶⁷

Given that Brannan was looking to charter passage for more than two hundred Mormon emigrants from New York to California, he no doubt became acquainted with Benson as one of the largest shippers to the Pacific coast. It is uncertain how Kendall and Benson came to know one another, one an ardent Jacksonian Democrat and the other a client of Whig politicians, or how they agreed upon their scheme to defraud the Mormons. But for Benson land speculation was nothing new, having involved Daniel Webster's son in a speculative land scheme in 1837.¹⁶⁸

Kendall and Benson eventually determined to scare Brannan into signing away thousands of acres of land wherever the Mormons ended their emigration, on the grounds that only they could keep the administration from carrying through on its promises to stop the Mormon migration. By January, Kendall had informed Brannan that the federal government was preparing to send forces to "intercept" the Mormons as they left the city of Nauvoo, to prevent them from "going to join another nation."¹⁶⁹ Brigham Young readily accepted Brannan's intelligence reports, sourced as they were to "Mr. Kindall of Washington the celebrated Postmaster general." Brannan's communications convinced Young that the "Government intended to intercept our movements – by placing Strong forces in the way to take from us all firearms on the grounds that we were going to another Nation." This move to block the

¹⁶⁷ Benson claimed he had received Daniel Webster's backing in 1851-52 to mine guano on the uninhabited Lobos Islands approximately 20 miles off the coast of Peru. Benson was either unaware or unconcerned that the islands had been claimed by Peru and closed off to foreign drilling in 1842. Peru enforced its claim to the islands with its navy. In the resulting fiasco, 80 of Benson's guano hauling ships were variously turned away, captured, or sent home empty. The resulting loss for the speculator was catastrophic, and he argued the government should indemnify him because the Secretary of State had granted inceptive reassurances. The allegations of Webster underhandedly "speculating" in guano with Benson, using his high cabinet position for reckless personal ambitions, came just as Webster's health was deteriorating; he would die in October of 1852. Benson was still petitioning Congress for a redress of his financial grievances in 1855.

¹⁶⁸ Skaggs, 19.

¹⁶⁹ MHC, January 29, 1846, Vol. 15, 28.

Mormons was an “expected” one in Young’s eyes because of the wickedness of the government.¹⁷⁰

Brannan had been attempting to disabuse politicians in the East of the Mormons’ intentions to cross into Mexican territory in an attempt to prevent the federal intervention promised by Ford. He wrote Young that he was declaring “to all that you [the Mormons] are not going to California but Oregon, and that my information is official.”¹⁷¹ Since Brannan was scheming to land in California with his ocean-bound emigrant party, such protestations were obviously false. He designed his misinformation campaign to prevent US reaction. Brannan later explained to Young that his deception would go so far as to “hoist a flag with Oregon on it” when his immigrant company sailed for the Pacific. Yet Oregon was never Brannan’s intention, despite the pretense of the flag, and he affirmed to Young that he would “select the most suitable spot on the Bay of Francisco for the location of a commercial city.”¹⁷²

In order to persuade Brannan that attempts at emigration were futile without his help, Kendall even raised the specter of the Mormons’ chartered ship, *Brooklyn*, being searched for arms before being allowed to sail, or being intercepted by Commodore Stockton of the Pacific Fleet. Kendall and Benson were convincing enough, or Brannan was gullible and frightened enough, that the latter believed that these two men actually were conduits to President Polk’s cabinet meetings. The information they provided gave Brannan enough confidence to proclaim to Young, “I now have in my power to learn every movement of the Government in relation to us...”¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Brigham Young Journals, January 29, 1846, MS 1234, 116-117, LDS Church Archives.

¹⁷¹ Samuel Brannan to Brigham Young, January 12, 1846, MHC, Vol. 15, 42.

¹⁷² Samuel Brannan to Brigham Young, January 26, 1846, MHC, Vol. 15, 44. Brannan also informed Wilford Woodruff who was then in England that, “the whole Church of the Saints will leave the United States in the spring & go to Callifornia.” Woodruff, Journal, January 21, 1846.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 43. As to Brannan’s state of mind, it is interesting to note that his distress over anti-Mormon sentiment was such that he feared his letters sent by mail were being “intercepted” before reaching Brigham Young. This is not a

Yet, Kendall and Benson were frauds. Polk, having read a letter from Governor Thomas Ford of Illinois, as well as having held interviews with both senators from that state, had determined it was not the place of the federal government to prevent the Mormons from leaving the nation.¹⁷⁴ While Benson and Kendall reported widely circulated rumors to Brannan, they certainly did not have a window to the actual federal discussions concerning the Mormon migration. Despite this, they not only claimed to have the information from the highest levels of the cabinet, but that they had the power to effect changes in Polk's policy toward the Mormons. As their grandiose land grab plan began to unfold, Kendall and Benson convinced Brannan that the two were "friends" of the Mormons, and would exert all of their influence to prevent the supposed governmental intervention, if the price was right.¹⁷⁵

Having laid the groundwork for a real and potentially devastating plan of the United States Army to hinder or prevent the Mormon emigration, and even arrest and imprison Young and certain members of the Quorum of the Twelve, Kendall claimed that he could "use his influence on [the Mormons'] behalf in connection with twenty five of the most prominent" politicians in the country to ensure that the thousands of Mormons would be "permitted to pass out of the States unmolested." However, Benson and Kendall, as "true friends" of Brannan and the Mormons, required that an official contract, guaranteeing the duo a profitable return, be signed between the Mormons and themselves before they would exert their influence.

Brannan recognized the contract would be incredibly difficult for the Mormons to bear. Using the words of Isaiah, he characterized the proposed agreement as "a covenant with death" in his explanation to Young. Still, Brannan seemed to believe that the Mormons would either not

wholly unjustified fear, but Brannan's belief that conspiracy swirled around the Mormons at both local levels and the highest levels of government caused him to accept information with little hesitation from sources in the East that he considered credible.

¹⁷⁴ James K. Polk Papers, Library of Congress, Diary, January 31, 1846, 123-124.

¹⁷⁵ Samuel Brannan to Brigham Young, January 26, 1846, MHC, Vol. 15, 44.

honor the pact or that divine intervention would sever it. He assured Young that like the covenant with death Isaiah spoke of, God was also able “to break” this one as well.¹⁷⁶ In return for preventing the “interference” of the United States government, the contract required the Mormon Church to sign over to Benson and “others” fully one half of all land the Mormons colonized in the West. Benson wrote the contract with allowances for the possibility that the Mormons might not settle in the United States territory. With his Pacific-oriented shipping company, Benson recognized the potential value of lands around San Francisco Bay, where Brannan was planning to relocate his group. Regardless of the Mormons’ final destination, every even numbered lot would go to the Mormons, and every odd numbered lot would remain in Benson’s hands.¹⁷⁷

Kendall, who unlike Benson had his political reputation to protect, deliberately kept his name out of the contract. Instead, the contract alluded several times to the fact that Benson had an unnamed partner. Brannan had been charged to keep Kendall’s name under wraps, and Brannan wrote Young explaining, “everything must be kept as silent as death on our part – names of the parties in particular.” In fact, though Benson was represented throughout the contract as the primary party, Brannan affirmed to Young that the entire contract had been “drawn up by Kendall’s own hand.” Still, he quickly reminded the Mormon leader that “no person must be known but Mr. Benson.”¹⁷⁸ Willing to reap the possible benefits of the contract, the shrewd Kendall was unwilling to risk his good name should the scheme fail or become a public debacle.¹⁷⁹ An alliance with Mormonism, even a self-aggrandizing one, was not good politics.

¹⁷⁶ Samuel Brannan to Brigham Young, January 26, 1846, MHC, Vol. 15, 43-44. See Isaiah 28: 15, 18.

¹⁷⁷ MHC, February 17, 1846, Vol. 15, 48.

¹⁷⁸ MHC, February 17, 1846, Vol. 15, 49.

¹⁷⁹ Samuel Brannan to Brigham Young, January 26, 1846, MHC, Vol. 15, 45.

The potential profits for Benson and Kendall were astronomical. Not only would the Mormons settle in prime California land, both men knew that the land titles they held would be prized by the thousands of Mormons who were to follow the initial migration. For Benson, the land speculation alone was worth millions, and he and Kendall took pains to make sure the contract included a proviso preventing the Mormons from levying taxes against their vacant lots. Yet the contract also served Benson in the business in which he was already engaged, namely the shipping of both people and supplies to the newly-established Mormon settlements. Benson would be creating an entirely new market made up of thousands of people on the Pacific Coast. He would thus profit several times from the Mormons, first in taking them to California aboard his ships, then in selling them the plots of land that the contract granted him, and third in selling supplies to the Mormons who had already arrived on earlier voyages. Benson envisioned a monopoly. This was the cost of having Benson “correct any misrepresentations which may be made to the President of the United States.”¹⁸⁰

The Kendall-Benson ruse could not have been more ill-timed to aggravate Mormon distrust and their alienation from the federal government. They played upon the fears that Mormons already harbored. Rumors swirled that the federal government was going to harass the Mormon emigration. The main body of Mormons was over a thousand miles removed from Washington, and intelligence was sporadic and dubious at best as to the United States’ intentions. Ford’s duplicity in representing that the federal government had an army en route was magnified by Brannan’s reports. This combined with the suffering inside the Mormon camp and the shared Mormon memory of persecutions to elevate the already manifold distrust. The Mormons had been continually disappointed in their expectation that the federal government would eventually intervene and prevent their forced removal from their lands in Missouri and

¹⁸⁰ MHC, February 17, 1846, Vol. 15, 48.

Illinois. They blamed much of their misfortune, therefore, on the corrupt and wicked American government, a position that fit naturally with the premillennial eschatology Mormons espoused.

In this context, Brannan signed the “covenant with death” and urged Brigham Young and the other apostles to quickly sanction his actions. Brannan was so impatient that he sent another request the next day, in which he reminded Young that if he ratified the agreement “all would be well.”¹⁸¹ In hindsight Brannan’s acceptance of the claims made by Kendall and Benson was foolhardy and showed a lack of political acumen. Benson’s governmental influence had been tied to Daniel Webster and the previous Whig administration. He had lost his exclusive contract to supply Oregon with the incoming Polk administration; although Benson remained a powerful Pacific merchant, Brannan should have deduced he could not affect national policy. Kendall presented a more formidable presence. Still, despite Kendall’s status as a Democratic Party insider, Brannan should have been given some pause by the obvious question: If Kendall was so trusted by Polk as to have the power to effect changes in federal policy, then why was Kendall outside of formal politics? His willingness to accept the pretenses offered by both men not only speaks to Brannan’s shallow understanding of power politics, but more resoundingly to the real fear Brannan felt that the United States would in fact attempt to use military force against the Mormons. Brannan was ultra sensitive to published anti-Mormon sentiments. Papers regularly expressed sentiments such as the one that averred that the Mormons were “bitterly hostile to the Government of the United States, and many of them are Englishmen, and are likely...to act in concert with the British in all their designs.”¹⁸²

Mormon Fears and Reaction to Rumors

¹⁸¹ Samuel Brannan to Brigham Young, January 26, 1846, and Samuel Brannan to Brigham Young, January 27, 1846, MHC, Vol. 15, 45.

¹⁸² *The Adams Sentinel*, January 12, 1846.

When Young received the proposed agreement with Kendall and Benson from the excitable Brannan, he consulted several of the apostles. Young understood very well that federal intervention with the Mormons' emigration would come on the pretext "that it was the intention of the Latter day Saints to take sides with other nations against the United States." Given the volatility of relations with both Britain and Mexico at the time he received the contract, Young must have recognized what "other nations" were foremost on President Polk's mind.¹⁸³

Their fears notwithstanding, the apostles rejected Brannan's agreement as an "unjust and oppressive document." They determined that they would put their trust in God rather than agree to such an arrangement. While Brannan believed that Kendall and Benson were well-meaning, and even referred to the men as friends, Young rightly rejected them as frauds. He derided the contract as "a plan of Political Demagogues to rob the Latter-Day Saints of millions and compel them to submit to it, by threats of Federal bayonets."¹⁸⁴ The experience with Brannan and supposed political friends in the East only further pushed the Mormon leaders to regard the United States government as having greater potential to be an enemy than an ally. Young did not say that he thought the reports of intervention were spurious, just that he would not succumb to the demands made by the contract.

In fact, Young was so certain that the army was en-route as Ford had declared, that he had just days prior to receiving the contract from Brannan advised the Mormons that boats to cross the river were to be held at the ready. Every family was to be prepared to have their wagon ready to depart "within 4 hours at least." He explained, "it is my opinion that if we are here 10 days – that our way will be Hedged up." Young hoped to outpace his US Army pursuers by a leaving Nauvoo before they could be intercepted. He wanted "to be 500 miles from

¹⁸³MHC, February 17, 1846, Vol. 15, 40.

¹⁸⁴MHC, February 17, 1846, Vol. 15, 50.

[Nauvoo] before they are aware of our move.”¹⁸⁵ Kendall and Benson had solidified in the minds of Mormon leadership the idea that the United States government was an enemy bent on the destruction of their people and church. The absence of official federal actions did not lessen these fears because newspapers like the *Chicago Journal* reported:

It is to be expected, though the President did not make it a topic in his Message, that the contemplated removal of the Mormons west of the Rocky Mountains, will be made a subject for Government interference. The Washington Union expresses the opinion that it is the duty of the General Government to look in season to the expected removal of the Mormons, in order to prevent a hostile force, numbering many thousands, from taking a position which may prove seriously detrimental to *American interests in that quarter*.¹⁸⁶

The fear affecting Mormon leaders was very real, but it was also the manufactured by-product of newspaper hyperbole, Thomas Ford’s deception, Amos Kendall’s chicanery, and Mormon sensitivity. The dreaded United States army was not hunting them down with cannons and sabers. Governor Ford’s claim of impending federal intervention proved to have no substance, however not before dozens of Mormons died in their headlong attempt to escape Illinois in the middle of winter. Ford’s dishonesty had a lasting effect on Mormon/US relations. The incident with Samuel Brannan and Amos Kendall confirmed to Young that the representatives of the United States could not be trusted. Worse than an aloof government that did not care about their distress, was the one that appeared poised to interdict the Mormons before they could even flee the country. That Young concluded the United States was an enemy in early 1846 was evident from a letter he wrote as the Mormons struggled through the mud and

¹⁸⁵ Brigham Young, Journal, February 2, 1846, MS 1234, LDS Church Archives, 121-122.

¹⁸⁶ “Removal of the Mormons”, *Janesville Gazette*, December 12, 1845. Italics in original. Reprinted from the *Chicago Journal*.

muck of rain-soaked Iowa that “present appearances indicate that the United States will ere long find other employment beside hunting and murdering the Saints.”¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, Brigham Young did seek to mitigate federal intervention if possible. Elder Jesse Carter Little was called to preside over the Eastern States Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in January of 1846 to replace Samuel Brannan, who departed for his ocean-going voyage to the California coast. Brigham Young instructed Little to use his position in the East to attempt to influence the federal government to aid the Mormons in any way that he could. Little was also tasked with helping organize the newly arrived Mormon immigrants from Europe. He was to prepare the immigrants for the cross-continental trek, or a seaward voyage around South America, to the new place of settlement for the Church somewhere beyond the Rocky Mountains. Specifically Young counseled, “If our government shall offer any facilities for emigrating to the western coast. Embrace those facilities if possible. As a wise and faithful man, take every honorable advantage of the times you can.”¹⁸⁸

Fear of federal intervention was magnified by reported Mormon actions which were sure to draw the ire of federal officials. During the Iowa portion of the Mormons’ trek out of US territory, Mormon/Indian relations emerged as an issue which would become a recurring theme in the following decades and serve to further alienate Mormons from the United States. Mormons generally endeavored to maintain friendly relations with the Native American groups they encountered on their exodus route or that lived in villages nearby the temporary Mormon encampment in Council Bluffs and then later Winter Quarters. Brigham Young referred to the “friendly” nature of the Native Americans in a letter in June of 1846.¹⁸⁹ Mormon apostle Orson

¹⁸⁷ Brigham Young to John M. Bernhisel, June 22, 1846, MHC, Vol. 15, 210.

¹⁸⁸ Brigham Young to J.C. Little, January 20, 1846, Letters to J.C. Little, MS 14691, LDS Church Archives. Underlining in original.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 209.

Pratt also recorded several amicable interactions with groups of Pottawattamie Indians, including sharing meals with some.¹⁹⁰ Rather than expecting that their large numbers would dictate that the Native Americans would have to accept their presence as a *fiat accompli*, the Mormons sent a delegation to the local Pottawattamie band to ask permission to both traverse their territory and build a temporary settlement as they prepared for the arduous trek to the Rocky Mountains.¹⁹¹ The Pottawattamie “great chief”, met with the Mormons and graciously assented to the Mormons’ requests for an impermanent settlement.¹⁹² Although Mormon relations with Indians included tensions and conflict, the relative harmony caused federal officials some concern.

What the Mormons perceived as amity, some US military officials conceived as conspiracy. Fears that the Mormons would use the Mexican War to seek vengeance on Americans were regularly reported. In May Colonel Stephen Kearny at Fort Leavenworth reported to one anxious inquirer that the Mormons were “well provided with all needful munitions of war, including a train of artillery.”¹⁹³ By June 1846 Brigham Young was receiving reports that military officials believed the Mormons were “conniving with the Indians and had committed some depredations.”¹⁹⁴ Newspapers reported that the Mormons had fallen upon and attacked other American citizens who were emigrating to California in Kansas, particularly the wagon train of the former Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs, the man infamous for having signed the “Extermination Order” which had driven the Mormons from that state with numerous casualties. Again, inflammatory newspaper reports served to increase mistrust. The papers reported that Boggs and others had been killed and that settlers in Kansas were rushing to battle

¹⁹⁰ Orson Pratt, Journal, June 13, 1846, LDS Church Archives, 46.

¹⁹¹ MHC, May 20, 1846, Vol. 15, 39.

¹⁹² MHC, June 18, 1846, Vol. 15, 49.

¹⁹³ “California and Oregon Expedition-Santa Fe Trade”, *The Boston Daily Atlas*, June 4, 1846.

¹⁹⁴ MHC, June 25, 1846, Vol. 15, 211.

the Mormons to save the California emigrant trains.¹⁹⁵ Young was told that a company of dragoons was to be dispatched from Fort Kearny for the purposes of preventing the Mormons from “uniting with the Indians to fight the United States.”¹⁹⁶ No Mormon attack had occurred. There had not even been on confrontation, much less a massacre, but the threat of federal intervention was once again posed as a reality. Mormons were in a poor position to refute such defamatory reports.

This threat of military force was not taken idly by the Church authorities. Brigham Young dispatched Apostle Orson Hyde and Bishop Newel K. Whitney to meet with the federal Indian agent, Major Robert B. Mitchell, believed to have been the agent writing to the military authorities at Fort Kearny, to disabuse him of the idea that the Mormons were maliciously uniting with the Indians. They hoped to keep the threatened military action from occurring.¹⁹⁷ The resulting interview somewhat allayed Mormon concerns that the local US forces was about to strike. But the accusation that the untrustworthy and disloyal Mormons were in league with Native Americans and seeking to assault other Americans would be a charge leveled again and again at the Mormons in Iowa and following their settlement in the Utah Territory. It was not an utterly baseless charge. The Mormons would prove to indeed have better relations with Indians than many of their fellow Americans. The Mormons would in fact manipulate this relationship to their distinct advantage. Nevertheless, the narrative of marauding Indians and Mormons had much more to do with white Americans’ fears than reality.

While the Mormon exodus occasioned bitter sentiments directed toward the federal officials, Washington did not pay much attention to the fleeing Mormons. Uncertainty on the

¹⁹⁵ *The St. Louis Reveille*, reprinted in *The Milwaukee Sentinel and Gazette*, June 9, 1846. This rumor had legs and a week later was being reported as far away as Newport, Rhode Island in the *Newport Daily News*, June 16, 1846.

¹⁹⁶ MHC, June 25, 1846, Vol. 15, 211.

¹⁹⁷ MHC, June 26, 1846, Vol. 15, 212.

part of the Mormons voiced itself in the varying statements made by leading men, with Mormon leaders denouncing the United States in one moment and only days later proclaiming their loyalty. Because of the deceitful communications they received from Ford and Kendall the Mormons believed that their importance to the federal government far exceeded their actual standing. In the case of Kendall and Benson, their avaricious plotting effectually convinced Brigham Young that the federal government in fact regarded the Mormons as enemies, even though this did not reflect reality. This skewed view of federal intentions affected Mormon/US relations for the remainder of the decade.

Mormon sentiment toward the United States vacillated from fear to hatred to despondency. Mormon rhetoric blamed the nation for their misfortunes. Still, Mormons sought a solution that would allow them to remain in the United States. When this proved impossible, an exodus to foreign territory seemed the only viable solution. Illinois state officials, like Governor Ford, exacerbated Mormon fears and misgivings by deliberately deceiving Young and others as to the intentions of the United States. The further deceit of Amos Kendal and A.G. Benson caused Mormon leaders to view the United States as bent on the destruction of the Mormon people. The result was a growing culture of animosity and fear directed toward the American nation. The Mormons perceived the federal government to be seeking their destruction. But this was a false reality. It was the result of deliberate misinformation combined with the fears Mormons naturally felt for their own preservation. This was all complicated by the existential power differential between the two groups. The United States government had to be feared because of the potential power it could exercise. While Mormons were desperately concerned about the actions of the United States, the federal government in fact showed little interest in the Mormon migration throughout 1845 and early 1846. The Mormons were not yet

seen as a foreign threat, merely a domestic anomaly. Mormons, however, believed quite the opposite. They perceived the federal government to be actively engaged in the issue, just on the wrong side. But the reality was that President Polk had paid little attention to the affair and, far from ordering an army to Illinois, had rejected calls to intervene. All of this changed very quickly in 1846. International events altered federal relations with the Mormons from a position of cautious scorn to one which viewed the Mormons as threats to national security and American expansionist interests. Polk eventually characterized the Mormons as a threat to American positions and interests and would, during the course of the summer, take dramatic steps to diffuse that threat. In May of 1846, the long smoldering relations between Mexico and the United States finally erupted into war. And, only days after the Mormons feared US troops from Fort Kearny would be attacking them, Captain James Allen rode into one of the Mormon encampments for a radically different purpose. Shocked Mormons learned that Allen was seeking to enlist a large body of Mormons into the United States Army for the purpose of fighting the Mexicans. The Mexican War caused the Mormons to be viewed as a foreign entity by the federal government and Mormon fears became mingled with those at the highest levels of the Polk administration.

Chapter 4: “Prevent Them from Taking Part Against Us”: James Polk and the Raising of the Mormon Battalion

The year 1846 set the stage for Mormon/US relations for the remainder of the decade and beyond. In the midst of the Mormon exodus, believing that they were fleeing the armed intervention of which Governor Ford had warned, Mormon alienation from the government was shaped by both internal and external factors. It became nearly impossible to determine which government policies were actual, and which were the product of fear, rumor, or intentional misdirection. Simultaneously, international exigencies caused the Polk administration to cease viewing the Mormons as an oddity best ignored and start real attempts at negotiation and discussion. Misinformation contributed to the actions of both sides, as did the machinations of non-governmental entities which inserted themselves into Mormon/US affairs. The Mormon exodus occurred at a precarious time to both the United States and the Mormon Church, the former on the brink of war with two nations and the latter amidst an arduous, deadly trek out of the country. Rapidly changing international circumstances permanently altered relations between the two groups. Prior to the Mexican War, the Mormons were treated with disinterest by the federal government. Mormon attempts to enlist federal support for their sect met with abject failure. Following the outbreak of hostilities with Mexico, the federal government recognized the necessity of establishing and manipulating relations with the migrating Mormon group. While Illinois Governor Thomas Ford believed actions against the Mormons in that state were the result of domestic party politics, President Polk's motivation in calling the Mormon Battalion and establishing relations with the Mormons was decidedly motivated by foreign affairs.

James Polk won the 1844 election in part by taking a hard stance against Great Britain in the controversy over the Oregon territory. Heated rhetoric and blustering intransigence on the issue in 1845 alarmed the British government to the point that it began preparations for war. Simultaneously, after failed attempts to purchase California, Polk pursued an aggressive policy toward Mexico, also destined to lead to war.

The Mormon exodus took place at the moment that both of these international disputes were at their most volatile points. They appeared ready to enter Mexico and dwarf the existing population of both Mexicans and recent American settlers. This led the federal government to treat the Mormons as potential enemies, and attempt guileful negotiations with the sect in order to ensure the result of their migration was neither a strengthening of the Mexican control on the province nor an invitation to a British protectorate over California. The migrating Mormons revealed the fear Polk harbored that his expansionist plans might be crushed by outside interference. Though he portrayed a confident, almost reckless, grip on the unfolding events, Polk's quick reaction to the potential Mormon problem displayed a decisiveness equaled only by his uncertainty.

Prior to the Mexican War, the federal government had maintained a policy of calculated neglect toward the Mormons. The Mormon leaders harangued the federal government with petitions begging for intervention against the state and mobocratic powers of Missouri and Illinois. But each petition was brushed aside as belonging outside the purview of the federal government. This radical sect was viewed as a local, domestic problem. While the violence perpetrated against them might have been regrettable, in federal eyes it seemed little different than the frontier violence and vigilante justice that occurred regularly on a smaller scale elsewhere. Following the outbreak of the Mexican War, federal interest in Mormons

dramatically increased and Polk's policy set the standard for following administrations. Polk chose not to accept Mormon claims of loyalty and citizenship and instead pursued measures designed to both manipulate and deceive the Mormons in order to maintain control over them. Polk's administration set the tone for relations between the two groups for decades in terms that were decidedly imperialist. The power center in Washington strove to contain, direct, and control the Mormon polity, as the latter became increasingly relevant to the process of American continental expansion. Though Polk had initially shown no interest in the Mormons and their eviction from Illinois, he came to believe that Mormons posed an existential threat to the realization of his vision of Manifest Destiny.

As an end result of the Mormon/United States exodus crisis, in June of 1846 the US army raised the most unique fighting force of the Mexican War. While thousands of volunteers, primarily from southern states, swelled the ranks of the small US army after the outbreak of the war, this group stood out among the rest. Rather than the other forces organized according to the states or territories from which they hailed, this battalion was organized according to the volunteers' religion. The Mormon Battalion is one of few instances of Mormon history that has made its way into the mainstream discourse of American history. Even so, the calling of the Battalion at the outset of the Mexican War is often relegated to the position of an interesting footnote in histories of the war. That this detachment of over 500 men was formed entirely from a universally despised religious group and that it carried out a march of more than 2000 miles across the American Southwest is generally all that is mentioned about the event. The causes behind the calling of the Battalion have been lost in larger histories of the war.

Treatment of the Mormon Battalion in Histories of the Mexican War

When it is covered with any specificity at all, such as in Karl Bauer's standard text, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*, the reasoning behind Polk's decision to call the group to arms is only partially accurate. Bauer saw Polk's actions as born of his impetus to quickly raise troops for the war. The picture painted by Bauer is one in which Polk and his cabinet were desperate to quickly outfit an invasion force. As such he took drastic measures to fill out the ranks of the Army of the West, even recruiting Mormons, so it could hastily secure California and New Mexico before Polk's Mexican conflict came to an end. Polk anticipated a brief war and hence needed ready volunteers. Bauer writes that the Mormons agreed with the scheme because "the arrangement represented a workable answer for their request for government assistance" to cross the plains.¹⁹⁸ They needed the income the 500 plus volunteers could provide and would use it to help outfit the remainder of the mostly destitute group for its overland journey into the same Mexican territory that was being invaded. More recently, historians Jeanne and David Heidler referred to the episode even more obliquely by saying that the Mormons were "persuaded to join the American forces to prepare the way for Mormon immigration to California." They provided no specific explanation of the government's purposes in raising them.¹⁹⁹ These views center on

¹⁹⁸ Karl J. Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1974), 129. Bauer does briefly mention that the calling of the Battalion was "ingenious" as a way to both raise troops and "placate" the Mormons, but provides no details as to why this group needed placation, or more importantly why Polk would bother to placate them in the middle of a raging war.

¹⁹⁹ David S. and Jeanne T. Heidler, *The Mexican War* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006), 70. In fact the Heidler account involves some great confusion over the terminology "California", explaining that even though the Mormons had signed on because the Battalion would be mustered out of service in California the main Mormon body instead decided to settle in the Great Basin at Salt Lake. The authors here have both confused the understanding of the terminology "California" and the Mormon intentions for settlement. First, the authors have assumed that "California" in the Mormon understanding only referenced what is today encompassed by the present state of California. Yet the entirety of Northern Mexico, aside from New Mexico was called California by both the Mexicans and the Americans. Thus the Mormons, in moving to the Great Basin, were in fact moving to California, and as such the area in which the Battalion was mustered out of service following their enlistment was not a concern to the Church particularly. Secondly, while the final destination of the Mormon migrants had been up in the air for

Polk's desire to put troops quickly into the field. This explanation is widely accepted as is evident in Daniel Walker Howe's synthesis *What Hath God Wrought*. Howe asserts that the raising of the battalion "represented a bargain struck between James Knox Polk and Brigham Young." The Mormons wanted the goodwill of the Polk administration as well as the income from the soldiers' service and "Polk could use the troops."²⁰⁰ The idea that the Mormons represented ready military manpower to the desperate Polk has also been recently repeated in David Clary's popular history of the war.²⁰¹

However, the calling of the Mormon Battalion was not an attempt to quickly raise a fighting force. It was not troop levels which motivated Polk, but fear. The episode reveals key insights into American views of the Mormons as a foreign entity. Polk worried that the Mormons might upset his grand invasion of California. Foreign policy concerns, including the possible actions of the Mormons themselves as a non-American entity, were the primary motivation for Polk's actions. The calling of this group represented a spur of the moment reaction by Polk when he felt that his war plans might be put in jeopardy by the thousands of immigrating Mormons. In broader terms, the calling of the Mormon Battalion not only demonstrated Polk's willingness to use duplicitous means to achieve his foreign policy goals, but also how genuinely he feared a possible British intervention in the Mexican War.

years, by the time of the Battalion's calling, only Oregon and the Great Basin were being discussed as possibilities, with the mountainous Great Basin by far the choice most referenced. There was no sudden decision to relocate the Church in Salt Lake instead of their intended destination to California, as the Heidler representation suggests. In fact, the Mormons had long been planning of moving to California, but it was just the Great Basin portion of California that would eventually come to be called Utah years later.

²⁰⁰ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 758. Norman Graebner's *Empire on the Pacific* does not mention the Mormon Battalion and the only reference to Mormons is the perceived thought among government officials that the Mormons might strengthen US claims to Mexican lands in California.

²⁰¹ David A. Clary, *Eagles and Empire: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle for a Continent* (New York: Random House, 2009), 152. Clary maintains that Polk's "eyes lit up" at the idea of bolstering American forces with hundreds of Mormons. While popular and oft repeated, this view ignores the documents surrounding the incident.

Polk's Indifference to Reports of Mormon Treason

The calling of the Mormon Battalion has its roots in the Mormon exodus from Nauvoo and their contemplated march across the continent. Polk had been receiving various forms of counsel about the Mormons in the winter of 1845-1846. One citizen offering his thoughts to the President, John McNeely of Dresden, Tennessee, utilized his Christmas Eve to write a letter of warning to Polk. McNeely had recently spoken with a local convert to Mormonism, Williams Washington Camp, who was then in the process of selling all of his property in Tennessee in order to move west with the main body of Mormons leaving Nauvoo.²⁰² McNeely was greatly concerned that Camp had told him that the Mormon leadership had been in contact with both the Mexican and British governments in order to secure permission to settle in Mexican California. Mincing no words, McNeely wrote, "I am of [the] opinion that the Mormons are engaged in a treasonable movement against the government of the U.S. and that they should be closely watched." One of the reasons McNeely felt this way was that Camp had repeated "some most angry invectives against our government."²⁰³

Polk was also receiving warnings about the Mormons though from much more important sources in January 1846. Democratic senators from Illinois Sidney Breese and James Semple

²⁰² Camp is a colorful figure in Mormon history. He was a slave owner prior to his conversion to Mormonism, and Camp was one of the few Mormons to migrate West with his slave property in tow.

²⁰³ John McNeely to James K. Polk, December 24, 1845, James K. Polk Papers. A notation on the letter indicates it was received by Polk January 7, 1846. McNeely appears to have some local political influence in Dresden as he is appointed postmaster in 1849. Americans were aware that the possibility of the British government obtaining land grants in California to cover Mexican debts was something that was being widely as either an actual fact or a real potentiality. Either Camp or McNeely erroneously believed that the British had in fact obtained "a mortgage on that country." Thus the Mormons had to gain permission of both the Mexicans who nominally held the territory and the British who possessed it through the recent debt negotiations. There is no evidence that the Mormons even contacted Mexican officials, much less secured their blessing to settle in California. While the Mormons did in fact approach the British government in late 1846 about the possibility of settling Mormon migrants on Vancouver Island as discussed in the following chapter, there is no indication that the Mormons discussed their move into Mexican California with British officials; this comes as no surprise as the British had not in fact agreed to the land transfer arrangement with the Mexicans, despite what either Camp told McNeely or McNeely embellished in his account to the president.

met with Polk January 30 and hand delivered a message from Illinois Governor Thomas Ford urging the federal government to take action against the Mormons. This letter represented the ultimate in Ford's duplicity in dealing with the Mormons. Ford had warned the Mormons that a federal army was en route to Nauvoo in early 1846 and that if they did not leave. This information scared Mormon leaders into leaving the state in the middle of winter. In fact, not only was there not a federal intervention underway, it was Ford himself that was trying to provoke a United States response to the Mormon problem.

On the January 31, Semple returned to get the Polk's feedback on the Ford letter. In particular he discussed with the President whether or not the federal government was going to intervene to prevent the Mormons from leaving his state and the territory of the United States. Though Polk had read the damning letter from Governor Ford, and despite rumors that the Mormons were encouraged to believe to the contrary, Polk explained to Semple "that as President of the U.S. [he] possessed no power to prevent or check their emigration." In fact, according to his journal entry of the meeting, Polk waxed quite philosophical on the reasons why he could not interfere. Lecturing the senator, he explained in his diary:

I told him I could not interfere with them on the grounds of their religious faith, however absurd it might be considered to be; that if I could interfere with the Mormons, I could with the Baptists, or any other religious sect; & that by the constitution any citizen had a right to adopt his own religious faith.²⁰⁴

Polk's response to Semple demonstrates that in January 1846, he considered the primary difficulty concerning the Mormons to be a religious one. He believed that the invitation to intervene was primarily based on religious bigotry directed toward the Mormons, not on sincere fears about United States national interest. The Semple interview reveals that in January 1846 Polk saw Mormons as the Mormons saw themselves: as a hated American religious sect.

²⁰⁴ James K. Polk Papers, Library of Congress, Diary, January 31, 1846, 123-124.

However, Mormons were not Baptists. And despite his pretensions to the contrary President Polk would not see them as simply “any other religious sect.” Instead, weighed by foreign pressures, Polk eventually came to view the Mormons as a potential security threat to the expansionist interests of United States.

However, in January perhaps Polk still hoped, as had his rival for the presidency, Henry Clay, that the Mormons could be used to benefit the American position on the continent. The group could greatly strengthen the American hand in the ongoing, and increasingly volatile, dispute with Great Britain over the Oregon Territory, the assumed destination of the Mormon émigrés. One political scientist has recognized January 1846 as the time when “the [Oregon] crisis reached its most dangerous point.”²⁰⁵ War was being threatened on both sides, though both sides wished for a diplomatic solution if their constituencies could be persuaded that the resolution was one that favored their own nation. Piero Gleijeses has explained that in the waning months of 1845 and early 1846, it was Britain, not Mexico, that was seen as the greatest threat to American expansionists. In January, most Americans saw the rhetoric emanating from Washington as more volatile concerning the Oregon issue. At the time it appeared Polk was then pursuing a seemingly more conciliatory stance with Mexico, the plenipotentiary mission of John Slidell to negotiate with the Mexicans being the chief evidence.²⁰⁶

Facing a possible war with Britain at worst, and difficult negotiations for American claims in Oregon territory at best, Polk saw the Mormons in January of 1846 as relatively unimportant. If the thousands of Mormons, American citizens, indeed settled in Oregon, the British claim to the territory would be further strained. Newspapers carried stories supporting

²⁰⁵ Scott A. Silverstone, *Divided Union: The Politics of War in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 144.

²⁰⁶ Piero Gleijeses, “A Brush with Mexico”, *Diplomatic History*, Volume 29, April 2005, 230-231. Slidell was attempting to negotiate a purchase of California from Mexico.

just such a belief. The *Quincy Whig* reported in a widely reprinted article that Vancouver Island was the final destination of the Mormon emigrants, a place that at present contained no American settlers, though it was in the Oregon Territory that the 54°40° hardliners claimed.²⁰⁷ More directly, the Mormon apostle Orson Hyde had himself declared in a letter to Polk the Mormon intention to settle in southeastern Oregon Territory as a consequence of reading Polk's "bold and patriotic tone in relation to Oregon and the west." Hyde explained that Polk's annual message that encouraged the Congress to provide liberal grants for settlement in Oregon had "induced" the Mormons to make Oregon their destination in order to "join heartily in the spirit of your message to carry out the just and bold design."²⁰⁸ Thus, Polk's most recent information from the Mormons was that they were planning a settlement in the disputed Oregon territory and would therefore strengthen US claims to the area vis-à-vis the British. If they did not settle in Oregon in the end, but rather in Canada or Mexican territory, they were no longer the problem of the United States. It was a zero loss scenario for Polk.

However, only five months later, the international situation had radically changed. Polk had lost the battle in the Congress against those who opposed his hard line rhetoric against Great Britain. The Whigs and defecting Southern Democrats sought a more conciliatory approach with the British, the former to avoid a costly commercial war and the latter to prevent the war from distracting the South's real interests in Texas. Both the Southern cotton exporters and the New England businessmen could not see expending the treasure and lives necessary to win a war against the world's most powerful empire, and their primary trading partner, for a return on Oregon territory that did not seem to justify the cost. Regional factions dominated the debate

²⁰⁷ "The Future Home of the Mormons", *Quincy Whig*, reprinted in *The Mineral Point Democrat*, November 19, 1845.

²⁰⁸ Orson Hyde to James K. Polk, December 28, 1845, James K. Polk Papers, LOC.

over Oregon more so than did party affiliation.²⁰⁹ By April, the war of words with the British over the Oregon territory had been replaced by a somewhat more amicable invitation to negotiate a settlement, though Polk doggedly refused to make the first overture. Meanwhile, relations with Mexico had worsened and by April 25, Mexican troops had crossed the Rio Grande and ambushed American troops on what Polk claimed to be “American soil.”²¹⁰

Having tentatively settled the Oregon dispute with Britain, though the matter was not yet formalized by treaty, the United States could direct more attention to Mexico. With hostilities erupting, Polk, whose sensational rhetoric was often followed by much more pragmatic actions, could no longer afford to look at the Mormons as merely a radical sect that the country would best be rid of with little US interest as he had in January 1846. The Mormons numbered in the thousands and their alienation from the federal government and the United States could only be exacerbated by their removal from the country entirely as they prepared for their cross-continental march at the limits of organized US territory in Iowa.

Jesse Little’s Mission and Thomas L. Kane

Despite these factors, there was actually a Mormon catalyst that sparked Polk’s change in stance toward the Mormons. By May 30, Polk was already deep in cabinet discussions about how the United States could wrest the provinces of Northern Mexico away from the Mexicans. He pushed strongly for the outfitting of an army to occupy Mexican possessions in western North America, naming New Mexico and California in particular.²¹¹ He vigorously outlined his

²⁰⁹ Silverstone, 150.

²¹⁰ Gleijeses, 232.

²¹¹ It should be noted that it is quite difficult to tell with any certainty what specific areas are being spoken about when the term “California” is used. Mexicans referred to much of this northern territory of Mexico as Alto

plan for raising volunteers in Missouri under the command of Colonel Kearny to make the long march through Mexican territory to California. At first, the Mormons did not factor into his plans to conquer California and New Mexico, despite the rumors and public animosity surrounding the Mormons.²¹²

The Mormons' emissary in the East, Jesse Little, had not been idle since receiving his commission and instructions from Brigham Young. He had immediately set about the task of trying to secure the government's help at best and, failing that, at least Polk's assurance that no army was coming to "obliterate" the Mormons or keep them from leaving United States territory. Little concluded to appeal directly to the Commander-in-Chief for assistance in the hopes Polk would "stretch forth the federal arm" to help and protect Little's "persecuted brethren."²¹³

Rather than attempting to plead his case alone, Little wisely sought recommendations from respected politicians. First, he contacted the outgoing Democratic governor of New Hampshire, John Hardy Steele. Steele had known Little for decades and wrote him a letter of recommendation to the Secretary of the Navy, George Bancroft. Little hoped to take advantage of the late outbreak of the hostilities with Mexico to benefit the Mormons. He sought to charter

California. American maps of the area produced in 1846 often termed the whole of Mexican territory north of Chihuahua and Sonora as Upper California, including much of present day New Mexico. This was manifested in the popular maps of S. Augustus Mitchell. In fact, Brigham Young specifically requested Mitchell maps for the purposes of the Mormon migration West. Thus, prior to the war, references to "California" by Polk and others can possibly mean different things at different times. In fact in this particular cabinet meeting, he seems to reference California in much the way it is thought of today, as the Mexican land bordering the Pacific, including San Diego and San Francisco. This is also true of the Mormons. In their references to "California" prior to and during the move West, it is often difficult to discern specifically what area the person is talking about, though Brigham Young refers to the Great Basin as part of California. This ambiguity is of course removed following the war when the captured territories are divided up into specific territories. When Polk or other Americans speak of acquiring California and New Mexico prior to the war, while the Great Basin area was not the prize desired, it was included in the territory Slidell sought to purchase from Mexico, for practical purposes of granting American territory continuity. While the land and specifically the ports in what would become California were highly prized by both Democrats and Whigs, the land the Mormons would eventually settle upon in Utah was widely regarded, with what little was known about it, as worthless territory.

²¹² James K. Polk Papers, *Diary*, May 30, 1846, 109-114.

²¹³ MHC, Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6 1846, Vol. 16, 11.

a vessel for the dual purpose of carrying Mormon immigrants around Cape Horn to the Pacific coast and carrying military men and supplies to further the American war effort there.²¹⁴ As such, an interview with Bancroft seemed most beneficial.

Little also secured the endorsement of Dr. Luke Miller, a dentist/physician respected in the Petersborough, New Hampshire community. Carefully wording his letter so it would not be interpreted as an approval of the hated religion, Miller commended the character of Little to New Hampshire Democratic congressman Mace Moulton. He explained to Moulton that despite “his religious views” Little was known to be a man of character.²¹⁵

Another letter of recommendation was written for Little by Alfred Benson to Amos Kendall. With Brannan gone, Benson and Kendall sought to manipulate Little in much the way they had his predecessor. Despite the lack of response heretofore from Brigham Young as to the proposed treaty, Benson must have believed that maintaining the charade certainly carried with it more potential than abandoning it.

Perhaps the most important connection Little made for the future of Mormon/US relations was with Thomas Leiper Kane. Kane was a colonel in the army, the son of a prominent Philadelphia judge, and a man acutely curious about Mormonism.²¹⁶ After hearing Little preach at a Mormon conference in Philadelphia on May 13, the same day Congress approved a declaration of war against Mexico, Kane had requested to be introduced to Little. Over the next few days, Kane spent hours conversing with Little about Mormon history, the peculiarities of the

²¹⁴ Governor John Hardy Steele to Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft, May 4, 1846 included in Jesse Carter Little to Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 11-12.

²¹⁵ Luke Miller to Mace Moulton, May 4 1846, reported by Jesse Carter Little to Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, Vol. 16, 12. Biographical information about Luke Miller was taken from A. M. Claverly, *An History of Troy (New Hampshire), and Her Inhabitants, From the First Settlement of the Town, in 1764, to 1855* (Keene, New Hampshire: Printed at the New Hampshire Sentinel Office, 1859), 221 and John F. Norton, *The History of Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire, from 1752 to 1887* (New York: Burr Printing House, 1888), 432.

²¹⁶ For an excellent examination of Thomas Kane and his life, see Matthew Grow, *Liberty to the Downtrodden: Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

religion, and in particular the plans of the Mormons to move to some part of Mexican territory in California. Kane was so interested in speaking with Little that on one occasion he even forced himself to get up from his sick bed when Little called and commenced a three hour conversation with him. Kane explained that not only did he want to know about the Mormons' travels to the West, he wanted to go and meet the main body of Saints and travel with them to their destination. In a strange turn of events, and pursuant to his goal of going to California with the Mormons, Kane asked Little for a letter of recommendation of his own, to none other than Brigham Young.²¹⁷

Kane's letter of recommendation for Little was addressed to the highest government official outside of Polk himself, Vice President George M. Dallas. A native of Philadelphia, Dallas was well acquainted with Thomas Kane's father.²¹⁸ Fearing that the government was wary of the Mormons and their movement into Mexican territory in the midst of a newly-declared war with that country, Kane made the Mormons' loyalty the main point of his letter. After vouching for Little's personal integrity, Kane explained that the Mormons had been "forced by persecution to found a new commonwealth in the Sacramento valley." But Kane insisted that the Mormons "still retain American hearts, and would not willingly sell themselves to the foreigner, or forget the old commonwealth they leave behind them."²¹⁹

Kane's letter not only illustrates the ambiguous relationship the Mormons shared with the federal government, it also revealed that Americans in general were not certain what spoils would be taken from Mexico in the ongoing war. Given the decade-long independent status

²¹⁷ MHC, Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, Vol. 16, 13-14.

²¹⁸ John Kintzing Kane had been appointed to several positions by Andrew Jackson and had taken an active part in supporting Jackson in the Bank War, even though Philadelphia, with its commercial interests, generally favored the national bank.

²¹⁹ Thomas L. Kane to Vice President George M. Dallas, May 18, 1846, included in Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, 15.

previously enjoyed by Texas, believing that the Mormons would set up their own “commonwealth” in the sparsely occupied Mexican territory, was not only plausible, but probable. Such talk of independence may have had the opposite effect, however, when it reached the ears of Polk’s expansionist administration.

Armed with letters in hand, Little headed for Washington D.C., arriving on the 21 of May. He went to the congressional session meetings the next day and heard the current debate in the Senate, led by Missouri Democratic senator Thomas Hart Benton, surrounding a bill that would provide both troops and forts to protect American settlers in the disputed Oregon Territory. Benton, long considered an enemy of the Church in his efforts to prevent the Mormons from receiving redress for their grievances against that state, was an expansionist at heart, but was arguing for a moderate stance to be taken in the dispute with Great Britain over the Oregon territory.²²⁰ Little would again hear Benton just a few days later argue for moderation and to settle the territorial dispute with “reason and judgment, or it will soon settle itself by chance and arms.”²²¹ The still volatile relationship between the United States and Britain surrounding the Oregon dispute, if at all possibly lost on Little despite the reports in newspapers, was certainly brought home by Benton’s speech.

After a day watching the workings of Congress, Little got his chance to go to the White House. Accompanied by Daniel Putnam King, Whig representative of Massachusetts, Little was formally introduced to President Polk. However, it does not appear that Polk made any attempt to speak in earnest with Little and he made no mention of the meeting in his diary. The Mormon emissary seemed to arouse no particular interest in the Commander-in-Chief.

²²⁰ MHC, Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, Vol. 16, 15. H. R. 7, House of Representatives, 29th Congress, 1st Session (1845). *Senate Journal*. 29th Cong., 1st Sess., May 22, 1846, 310. *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 29th Cong., 1st Sess. May 22, 1846, 851.

²²¹ *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 29th Cong., 1st Sess. May 25, 1846, 862.

Amos Kendall's Continued Manipulation

The next day, May 23, Little finally met with Amos Kendall. Kendall's goals in his conversations with Little are very difficult to discern with certainty. Yet Kendall and Benson had only a few short months earlier been willing to exaggerate the threat posed by the United States for the purposes of getting Samuel Brannan to agree to the terms of their land grab deal. Still laboring under the possibility that any Mormon settlement in the East would yield to Kendall and Benson vast swathes of land for speculative purposes, Kendall was more than willing to encourage and help Jesse Little in his efforts to secure help for the Mormon move west. While Little had already proposed a joint venture with the US military in which Mormons would convey arms and supplies to US forces on the Pacific coast, Kendall suggested a much more militaristic solution. He argued that enlisting one thousand Mormons in the military, and charging them with "defending" California would have the affect of procuring the necessary aid, and federal approbation, for the Mormons emigrating west. Kendall told Little that he would pitch his plan to the president and have an answer for him Tuesday morning, May 26, as he apparently already had an appointment scheduled with Polk on Monday night.²²²

In the interim, Little met once again with Kendall, who directed him to visit his telegraph office for a demonstration. Little was much impressed at the new form of communication, having had his name sent to Baltimore from Washington, D.C., and receiving it back in twenty seconds.²²³

Kendall, in the company of Arkansas congressman and former governor Archibald Yell, met with President Polk on the night of May 25. Yell would shortly become a mortal casualty of

²²² MHC, Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, Vol. 16. Little had tried to meet Kendall on May 22, but the latter had been ill.

²²³ Ibid.

Polk's War as he attempted to stop a Mexican charge at Buena Vista. Given Kendall's willingness to claim falsities to Samuel Brannan, historians are forced to question what actually was the substance of this interview. Though Kendall represented to Little that "the President...had determined to take possession of California, and also employ [Mormon] men, who would receive orders to push through and fortify the country," there is no way of knowing whether or not Kendall even pitched the idea to Polk.²²⁴ Polk's diary records the meeting with Kendall and Yell, but makes no mention of the Mormons, or the supposed Kendall plan to have them assist in the capture of California. In fact, Polk records the meeting as if he was the one pitching the invasion of California to his guests, who, upon hearing it, "were both in favor of it."²²⁵

Yet Kendall assured Little that the President was going to lay the Mormon plan before the cabinet the next day, and that by the night of May 27 Kendall should know Polk's decision. When Little met with Kendall on May 27, the latter explained that the cabinet had not fully made up its mind but that "the plan offered was to have [Little] go directly to the Camp (the Mormons encampment in Iowa), and have one thousand men fitted out and plunge into California, officered by our own [Mormon] men, the commanding officer to be appointed by President Polk." Not only would the Mormons in Iowa raise a force, according to Kendall, the plan entailed sending another 1000 Mormons around Cape Horn with cannons and supplies to fortify California after the Mormons took it, a regurgitation of Little's original plan.²²⁶

The pronouncements by Kendall appear even more dubious given the decisions concerning the Mormons which Polk eventually made. Polk held a meeting with the Secretary of

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ James K. Polk Papers, Diary, LOC, May 25, 1846.

²²⁶ MHC, Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, Vol. 16, 16.

War William Marcy on the May 29, for the purpose of planning an invasion of California, yet Polk made no mention of the Mormons and their role in the invasion. In the massive war meeting the next day on May 30, in which the plans for the invasion of California were spelled out, including the forces to be used, again no mention was made of the Mormon emigrants. When Polk raised the matter again with Marcy on June 1, there was again no particular mention of the Mormons, though Kendall had claimed the cabinet was discussing the matter with the president. Given the fact the entire invasion force was planned to range between 1500 and 2500 men, one would expect that a plan entailing two thousand Mormons would at least be part of the discussion, yet there is no record of it. And, while there is always a possibility that Kendall in fact had pitched the plan to the President and that the cabinet was discussing it, there is not evidence to sustain such a view with any certainty. It appears far more likely that Kendall was telling the Mormon emissary whatever he thought Little wanted to hear. He may have attempted to sway Polk's opinion, but only in ways that benefitted his land scheme with the Mormons, and never to the point that he jeopardized his political standing within the Democratic Party.

Little Takes Action

As the days went by and he waited in vain for word from Polk about the proposed Mormon military expedition, Little apparently grew frustrated. Kendall had little news, and what he did have was vague and inconsistent. Four days passed without any word from Kendall or the president. Though he had only been in Washington a few days, Little was eager to conclude the

business at hand, as he wrote to another Mormon leader, asking him to procure transportation for him so he could join the main body of Mormons.²²⁷

By June 1, Little had determined to write to President Polk himself, and explain his situation. Little's letter presented the case of the Mormons and their reasons for needing federal aid from the Executive. Little wrote with great eloquence, but perhaps less tact than the precarious international scene demanded. He began by giving his credentials as an American citizen. He had been "native" born in Maine, his family had fought in the Revolutionary War against British oppression, and his blood was filled with the same revolutionary fervor as theirs had been. Having established his claim to American nationalism, he proceeded to explain that the Mormon people, of which he was part, had been "driven from town to town, from city to city, from state to state, and last of all compelled to leave their homes and firesides and seek shelter in a howling wilderness, over the Rocky Mountains" where both wild animals and Native American warriors could prey upon them. Mormon property had been taken by mob violence, multiple times, without any sort of remuneration and the people themselves had been "whipped and stoned, butchered and murdered" because they practiced a different form of religion.²²⁸

Worse still, Little continued, the Mormons had been slandered by their enemies with specious accusations. He proffered his various letters of recommendation that he had secured as proof of his "high moral character" and insisted that by association the leaders of the Mormon Church should also be thought of in such a light. Thousands of Mormons had either already begun to cross the plains or would soon arrive from Europe and other parts of the US to also cross the vast prairies; some had already begun to sail around Cape Horn, as Samuel Brannan

²²⁷ MHC, Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, Vol. 16, 16.

²²⁸ Jesse Carter Little to James K Polk, June 1, 1846, MHC. Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, Vol. 16, 18.

had, with the intention of landing in San Francisco. Little asked the President if he could give even the slightest help to these relocation efforts. Many of the families forced out onto the prairies by mob violence lacked even the basics of life. Even critical newspapers that considered the sect “fanatical” appealed for aid to allow the people to leave the country in peace.²²⁹

His importuning did not come without a tacit warning, however. Little insisted upon the loyalty of the Mormon people. They were “true-hearted Americans, true to our country, true to its laws, true to its glorious institutions and...have a desire to go under the outstretched wings of the American Eagle.” But, Little cautioned, while the Mormons would be loathe to seek any type of assistance from a “foreign power”, the Mormons might have no choice but to accept such assistance if the American government was not forthcoming with aid. If the American government refused to help, it would “compel us to be foreigners.” Little was determined to receive some aid for the suffering poor, and he explained, “if I cannot get it in the land of my fathers, I will cross the trackless ocean where I trust I will find some friend to help.”²³⁰

Given the fact that most of the overseas converts to Mormonism hailed from Great Britain, Little’s reference to crossing the ocean could have but one meaning as Polk read the letter. Americans had recently feared that the independent Republic of Texas might, if spurned by the United States, become a quasi-British satellite state in the midst of American territory. Anglo-American relations were still unsettled by the unresolved Oregon issue. The possibility that the Mormons, many of them only recently arrived from Great Britain, might seek the aid of the seemingly all-too-willing to intervene British government worried Polk.²³¹ The burgeoning

²²⁹ “Threatened Outbreak at Nauvoo”, *Fort Wayne Times & Peoples Press*, June 6, 1846. The same article explained that more than 7000 Mormons were already on their way to California with many more readying to leave.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, 20.

²³¹ Edward Crapol has explained that Polk’s predecessor, John Tyler, was positively terrified that foreign intervention would either prevent or be the result of the failure to annex Texas. There was in fact an attempt to elicit French support for a joint effort to prevent the annexation. Tyler’s Secretary of War, William Wilkins, also spelled out the fears of the administration of Texas at least becoming a “commercial dependency” of Britain if the United

abolitionist bent of the British government had always been an impediment to such an arrangement with the Republic of Texas, whose citizens' desire to maintain their slaves had fueled the break with Mexico in the first place. But the Mormons did not have a slave society. Unlike the Texans that had voluntarily moved out of US territory in order reap the economic incentives offered by their immigration in the form of enormous land grants, the Mormons were being forced out by a combination of mob violence and both federal refusal to intervene. The Mormons' bitterness, a shade of which colored Little's letter, only served to strengthen the pragmatic view that the Mormons might become foreign enemies of the United States.

Little told Polk that he was certain that the president was personally willing to aid and assist the Mormons, because men such as Amos Kendall and Samuel Brannan had assured Little that Polk was in fact a "a friend." As much as Little's letter raised the specter of foreign entanglements, he also promised Polk that if federal aid to the Mormons was forthcoming, the Mormons as a body would side with the United States against Mexico or any other foreign power, "and should our territory be invaded we hold ourselves ready to enter the field of battle."²³² Little was, in effect, negotiating an alliance with the United States government.

While the disposition and questionable loyalty of the Mormons troubled Polk, the sheer numbers quoted by Little must have taken the President aback. The sparse population of Mexican possessions in the West was one of the most tantalizing aspects of what seemed to be a relatively easy conquest. The pre-war white population of California was estimated to be fewer than ten thousand people.²³³ The three largest cities in California would have been engulfed by

States did not quickly annex the republic. Edward Crapol, *John Tyler: The Accidental President* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 201-202, 217.

²³² Jesse Carter Little to James K Polk, June 1, 1846, included in Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, Vol. 16, 21.

²³³ Thomas Edwin Farish, lists this number in his *History of Arizona*, Vol. 1 (Phoenix, Arizona: State of Arizona, 1915), 122. This number reflects the feelings of prominent California resident and American merchant Thomas O. Larkin in 1845. David J. Weber has placed the number considerably less than that at 7,300. Using either estimate,

even the advanced parties of the Mormon emigration. At the time Monterey only had 750 residents, Santa Barbara 1000, and the largest city, Los Angeles, had only a meager 1,250 residents.²³⁴ By contrast the population of Nauvoo had reached a population peak of 20,000 just prior to the expulsion of the Mormons from the nation. Anywhere the Mormons settled in California, they would represent a vast majority, and hence a powerful polity.

Polk had contemplated Kearny's grand invasion of California with only between 1500-2500 troops.²³⁵ Fifteen thousand Mormons arriving anywhere in the embattled territory would be a force to be reckoned with, especially if the thousands more Little spoke of were anxious to follow the initial group to the Saints' new home in the West. No doubt Polk, after reading Little's letter, contemplated the drastic consequences that would result if, however unlikely he thought the eventuality might be, the Mormons were to throw their lot in with the Mexicans or attempt to establish their own nation out of the conquered territory, or even spurred Native American groups to acts of violence. British designs on California were well-established in the minds of the Polk administration, given the previous discussions that British agents had held with Mexico about settling Mexican debts with land titles in California. If Britain could cite protection of the Mormons, especially because many were British citizens, it could provide all the catalyst that was needed for a British intervention in the territory.

The modest US force would be very hard pressed if confronted with organized Mormon resistance, even more so if hostile Mormons were supported by local Mexican guerillas and/or

the Mormon migration was larger than the entire existing California population by at least 5,000 people. See David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque, New Mexico, University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 206.

²³⁴ Weber, 229.

²³⁵ As historian Brian DeLay has demonstrated, the devastation of much of Northern Mexico at the hands of raiding Native American groups allowed Polk to count on little resistance from the embattled Mexican citizens. Polk had explicitly instructed his generals in the North, including Kearny, to cast themselves in the light of gregarious protectors who sought to bring order to a lawless, Indian-dominated landscape. See Brian DeLay, "Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War", *The American Historical Review*, February 2007, 59. For the fuller treatment see Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Native American groups. The Mormons had already demonstrated their affinity with Native American groups while crossing Iowa, the nature of which had led to US army suspicion of a nefarious alliance between the two peoples. Each of those threats of course paled in comparison to the idea of British intervention either in the war directly or indirectly by proclaiming their intention to “protect” a newly proclaimed Mormon state in California. Colonel Kane’s letter to the Vice President had described precisely the possibility of a Mormon “commonwealth”. While the probability of such a Mormon problem was not quantifiable, the risks such an eventuality posed to Polk’s California scheme were similarly incalculable.

The military realities of the Mormon movement into sparsely populated California were openly recognized by international observers as well. *The Times* in London had reported months earlier that “if it be true that the United States are determined to on forcing the fanatical and powerful sect called the *Mormons* to take up a settlement in California, the Mexican Government must at last awake, or submit to the loss of one of its finest provinces.” The correspondent for *The Times* believed that the Mormon contingent was so powerful that the migration would directly correlate into a Mexican cession. The Mexican government was also aware of the potential immigration and the thought of it had “excited a strong sensation” in Mexico City. Mexican newspapers reported the possible Mormon invasion “with evident alarm.”²³⁶

Thomas Kane’s Fear of British “Tampering” and Meeting with Polk

Perhaps nothing magnified Polk’s reaction to Little’s letter more than an interview he held with Thomas Kane only days before he read it. Kane had obtained an audience with Polk May 28, through his connections to Vice President George Dallas. Following his discussions

²³⁶ “The Affairs of Mexico”, *The Times*, January 8, 1846.

with Little, Kane started to more greatly fear “English tampering” with Mormon leaders and so decided it was his patriotic duty to lay the matter before the president. He wrote a private letter to his brother Elisha, who would soon be famous for his arctic explorations, describing the meeting with Polk and his purposes in securing it. Kane recounted the interview with Polk as one in which candid speech prevailed and both men were “garrulous.” Kane held nothing back when it came to the Mormons and “told him (Polk) all – what I know of the people their leaders, and what I knew of H.B. Majesty’s interference.”²³⁷

Kane had apparently been concerned about the Mormon migration for some time, long before he ever heard Little preach or became acquainted with the movement. Indeed, his keen interest in Little seemed to be based on his pre-existing fears of the potential for Mormon treason. His nationalistic concerns might have been the motivating cause for his attendance at Little’s lectures in the first place. He told Elisha that it had “weighed upon my mind for months past whether it was not my duty to go with the Mormons.” He had only known Little for two weeks. The newspaper reports of the treasonous disposition of the Mormons certainly factored into the burden on Kane’s mind. His conversations with Little seemed to confirm that fear. Little was planning on seeking aid from Great Britain if the United States did not render aid. Apparently a letter the Mormon leader had received from agents of the Hudson’s Bay Company

²³⁷ Thomas L. Kane to Elish[a] Kane, May 29, 1846, Thomas L. Kane Papers, MS 16717, LDS Church Archives. Will Bagley and David Bigler have accused Thomas Kane of advising Jesse Little to threaten Polk with British intervention in order to motivate Polk’s response. However, this position lacks documentary evidence. Rather, Kane’s letter to his brother manifests a genuine patriotic concern as his motivation. Kane admitted that he was hoping the interview would raise his stature in the eyes of the administration, fulfilling his ambitions to gain advancement and fame. Still, there is no basis to conclude that Kane conspired with the Mormons to threaten President Polk with British intervention if he failed to respond to their demands. If it were true this is a charge that borders on treason. Kane saw himself as a mediator and a patriot, not as a Mormon mouthpiece. His letter to Elisha demonstrates a palpable fear of Mormon actions which motivated his meeting with Polk, not a conspiratorial agreement with Little. See David Bigler and Will Bagley, ed., *Kingdom of the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier*, Vol. 4, *Army of Israel: Mormon Battalion Narratives* (Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2000), 21.

finally pushed Kane's sense of honor over the edge and he took direct action.²³⁸ Kane felt duty bound to defend the interests of the nation first, and so sought an audience with Polk.

After detailing the British "tampering" with the Mormons, Kane explained that he had gained the confidence of the Mormon leadership and was in a position to influence Mormon actions. He offered to go as an unofficial representative of the government to the Mormon camp to ensure the loyalty of the group. Polk quickly accepted Kane's offer. The discussion with Polk revealed the president's fears of British power at the time. Polk lamented to Kane that "it was the misfortune of our government that it lacked power to oppose such a one as Great Britain." This was not only a commentary on the military inequities which existed. Polk explained further that the British government was organized in such a way that allowed it much greater power to advance the interests of their empire. While Polk lacked the power to personally appoint Kane as a United States ambassador or diplomat "in a country not recognized by it as existing individually", Great Britain "had a regularly organized system by which its foreign department acted wherever desirable with unlimited power." Because the executive branch in the United States was not clothed with similar power it was essential for "American citizens to render it important aid when in his power." Polk commended Kane on his offer to head to the Mormon camp and defend US interests as "one of the highest and most praiseworthy patriotism."²³⁹

Kane returned to meet with Polk again the next day along with the chairman of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, Lewis Cass. Polk arranged for Nicholas Trist to craft a letter for Kane which, though nominally unofficial, contained a clear understanding that Kane was on a mission from the executive.²⁴⁰ The letter, not written until after Polk had read Little's June 1 letter, recommended Kane to "all officers of the United States" that he might meet and instructed

²³⁸ Thomas L. Kane to Elish[a] Kane, May 29, 1846, Thomas L. Kane Papers.

²³⁹ Thomas L. Kane to Elish[a] Kane, May 29, 1846, Thomas L. Kane Papers.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

them to “render [Kane] all the aid and facilities in accomplishing the object of [his] journey.”²⁴¹

Polk was using Kane as an unofficial ambassador and negotiator to keep tabs on possible Mormon machinations.

Wilford Woodruff related Kane’s later explanation that his 1846 mission to the Mormons was actually one delegated to him by the highest powers in Washington. And, a little more than five years later, in an attempt no doubt to assuage the rumors that swirled about him and his relationship with this radical sect, Kane wrote a long letter to his fiancée, Elizabeth Wood. Unfortunately, several of the pages of the letter are missing and the result is an enigmatic communiqué about a man whose intentions were already fairly inscrutable. What seems clear by the letter, however, is that Kane himself explained that his mission was one given him by the United States government. After the missing pages, the letter abruptly picks up on the ninth page:

It was thus, after wasting no more time than was absolutely necessary to ingratiate myself with some Mormons in Philadelphia and procure my purposes to be misrepresented; invested with amazingly plenipotenial powers civil and military, I went among the Mormons.

Bessie, this is a little state secret. Mr. Polk knew it. General Kearny knew it. One Col. Allen detailed by Kearny to march off a Battalion knew it. But probably no one else. And they are all dead, and can tell no tales. And I shall tell none; for I tell it to you, only because it is a secret, and can show you that I already look upon you as my wife.”²⁴²

While the missing pages make certainty in this matter impossible, it seems that the “state” secret which Kane was referring to was the US government’s role in his mission to the Mormons and the real reasons behind the raising of the Mormon Battalion. Polk, Kearny, and Captain Allen, according to Kane, all knew that it was a means of preventing the Mormons from

²⁴¹ James K. Polk to Thomas L. Kane, June 11, 1846, Thomas L. Kane Papers.

²⁴² Thomas Kane to Elizabeth Wood, May 19, 1852, Thomas L. Kane and Elizabeth W. Kane Collection. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University.

become enemies of the state. Of course, Kane was writing here to his future wife whose fears he was trying to placate regarding his connections to Mormonism. He also hoped to impress her with his “plenipotential” calling given him by the government. And it seems highly improbable that William Marcy, the Secretary of War, did not also know of the scheme, as Kane himself told Young later that Marcy was involved. Kane probably was merely trying to make his fiancée feel special, that she was the only one who he dared trust with this secret. In any case, this letter to Bessie, his letter to Elisha, and the later meeting with Young in Utah all demonstrate that Kane was in fact on specific orders from President Polk and the War Department.²⁴³ Kane was not advising Little to threaten British intervention, rather Kane was on a federal mission to prevent such intervention from occurring. Kane’s interactions with Polk are key to seeing the Mormons as Polk saw them: as a foreign entity that demanded federal attention.

Polk’s Fears of British Intervention in the Mexican War

Polk could not turn a blind eye to the designs of Britain on California and its possible interference in the area or in the war itself. Secretary of State James Buchanan would not let him. Buchanan repeatedly harangued Polk about his unvarnished rhetoric that he feared might provoke a British intervention. Earlier in May, on the same day Congress had approved of Polk’s war message, Buchanan had chided Polk that the United States needed to modify its war message sent out to American foreign diplomats to include a statement of disavowal of designs on Mexican territory and especially California. The cautious Secretary of State worried that the British, upon learning of the war declaration, would themselves intervene in sparsely populated

²⁴³ Kane also admitted to Elisha that he was seeking self-aggrandizement by offering his services to the president.

California from their Pacific bases. Buchanan even envisioned a possible Anglo-French joint intervention on the side of the Mexicans.²⁴⁴

Polk was initially dismissive of Buchanan's warnings on the surface. Polk recorded in his diary with characteristic bravado that he would go to war with Britain and France, as well as Mexico, before he would make the territorial promise Buchanan suggested. He wrote, "I told him that neither as citizen nor as President would I permit or tolerate any inter-meddling of any European Power on this continent."²⁴⁵ However, despite such defensive pronouncements, Polk demonstrated in practice a desire to avoid anything that might prevent him from achieving his designs on California, including warfare with Great Britain. Despite the fact that Polk had been adamant about obtaining all of Oregon, he had acquiesced when it appeared he could only achieve the 49th parallel and the Columbia River without resorting to warfare. One historian has written, "From the time of his first overture to Great Britain in July 1845 until the settlement of the Oregon question nearly a year later, President Polk steadfastly demonstrated his desire to compromise [with Britain]."²⁴⁶ And, of his obsession over California, historian Thomas Hietala states emphatically that, "The acquisition of California became to Polk what the annexation of Texas had been to Tyler."²⁴⁷

It was not only the warning of Buchanan and Kane that inspired Polk to respond to Little's letter swiftly and decisively. Polk himself was doggedly mistrustful of British intentions, especially in California. In October 1845 he had remarked to Senator Thomas Hart Benton in a discussion about California that "Great Britain had her eye on that country and intended to

²⁴⁴ Frederick Moore Binder, *James Buchanan and the American Empire* (Selinsgrove, Penn., Susquehanna University Press, 1994), 106.

²⁴⁵ James K. Polk Papers, Diary, May 13, 1846, 13.

²⁴⁶ Thomas M. Leonard, *James K. Polk: A Clear and Unquestionable Destiny* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001), 121.

²⁴⁷ Thomas Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 84.

possess it if she could.” Polk had affirmed that neither the British nor any other foreign power would be allowed to accomplish such designs in California.²⁴⁸ Americans had long feared that the Crown had schemed to acquire Mexican territory in California, for the same reasons Polk himself sought it out. Not only had the Hudson’s Bay Company been active in the region, only months earlier the United States had learned about a proposed plan for Mexico to resolve its foreign debt with Great Britain by the means of several private plans to settle British subjects on millions of acres of land tracts in California. Fearing an exacerbation of the Oregon difficulty, the British government had not endorsed the land swap schemes, but as historian David M. Pletcher explained, “Rumors of these futile proposals were quite enough to stimulate anxiety in the United States about British designs on California.”²⁴⁹

Though British Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen had in fact contemplated British intervention in California in 1845, and First Lord of the Admiralty and Earl of Ellenborough, Edward Law, had vigorously argued that the British should secure bases in California, such intervention was never imminent. Aberdeen had sagaciously recognized that any British or Mexican claim to the area would ultimately come under insurmountable pressure by American settlers. On the Mexican side, as the war with the United States approached, the Mexican government became more frantic to secure British aid in defense of California against American designs. The British Minister to Mexico consistently refused to offer any such cooperation. Aberdeen was committed to resolving the Oregon dispute without warfare and any tempting prospects in California had to remain secondary to the primary goal of settling the Oregon problem and keeping the country out of an economically unattractive war with the United

²⁴⁸ James K. Polk Papers, Diary, October 24, 1845.

²⁴⁹ David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 420-421.

States.²⁵⁰ However, in the early months of the Mexican War, Mexican politicians still hoped that the Oregon dispute would yet flare up into warfare and lead to an Anglo-Mexican alliance. The failure of such an alliance was a point of disappointment for the Mexicans, accentuated when the Americans and British signed a treaty resolving the Oregon dispute shortly after the United States had invaded Northern Mexico across the Rio Grande.²⁵¹

Nevertheless, despite the fact there was, in actuality, only a slight prospect of British or French intervention, in rumor-filled Washington, the possibility loomed much larger on the horizon. The *Philadelphia Evening News* was certain with its inside information that the recent outbreak of hostilities with Mexico was wholly because the British were acting “behind the scenes” to provoke the aggressive Mexican actions.²⁵² Polk’s obsession with California caused him to manifest a correlating, though smaller, obsession with British interests there. He had only months before the war recorded in his diary that “the people of the United States would not willingly permit California to pass into the possession of any new colony planted by Great Britain or any foreign monarchy.”²⁵³ And, Polk was well aware that the French and British would do all in their power to prevent American acquisition of Mexican territory, as evidenced by his concerns over the Slidell mission to purchase those lands.²⁵⁴ As Thomas Hietala explains,

²⁵⁰ Pletcher, 423-426.

²⁵¹ Timothy J. Henderson, *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 163. Concerning possible British intervention in California, Stanford professor Ephraim D. Adams, as early as 1909, set down the argument that there was never any real intention of the British government to annex California. Rather there existed a mixed bag of British foreign agents themselves trying to persuade the government at home that such an intervention was necessary. Adams concluded that the “theory of an active British governmental design upon California is then wholly without foundation.” See Ephraim D. Adams, “English Interest in the Annexation of California” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Jul., 1909), 763.

²⁵² *The Philadelphia Evening News*, reprinted in *The Hagerstown Torch Light*, May 21, 1846.

²⁵³ James K. Polk Papers, Diary, September 16, 1845, 34.

²⁵⁴ James K. Polk Papers, Diary, October 24 1845

“Polk’s exaggerated fear of Britain... influenced his approach to California.”²⁵⁵ His reaction to the Mormons over the next few days demonstrated this fear in practice.

Polk’s Response to the Perceived Mormon Threat

It was with Buchanan’s worries ringing in his ears, his candid meeting with Thomas Kane, and his own predilections to distrust British intentions that President Polk read Jesse Little’s June 1 letter.²⁵⁶ Despite the protestations of loyalty in Little’s letter, the mere mention of foreign powers spurred Polk to action. Even if Amos Kendall had actually pitched the idea of a Mormon army to Polk, as he had claimed when talking to Little, Polk had not even taken enough notice of it to mention it in his records. He had for days talked of almost nothing else than the California campaign and the best way to obtain that territory, yet had never mentioned the Mormon force at all nor had he recorded being introduced to Little only a few days earlier.²⁵⁷ Suddenly, with the arrival of Little’s letter, Polk reacted with a furor that transposes all of his previous disinterest toward the migrating Mormons. Amidst all of the frenzy of activity as the White House readied for a war that would span thousands of miles²⁵⁸, Polk made his response to Little immediately, and not simply with a brief and dismissive letter.

On June 2, the day after Little’s letter was sent, Polk asked Amos Kendall to go to Little and arrange a face to face meeting on the next day. Yet even before the meeting with Little, in Polk’s June 2 cabinet meeting he had determined to include the Mormons in his war plans.

²⁵⁵ Hietala, 84.

²⁵⁶ Thomas Leonard has summed up Polk’s view of the British in this way: “Throughout the expansionist period, Polk constantly anticipated British hostility and interference. He was convinced that the British sought not only to block U.S. expansion in Oregon and California but might also use force to achieve their objectives.” Leonard, 194.

²⁵⁷ MHC. Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, 15.

²⁵⁸ Thomas Kane commented that Polk was “so pressed” by the affairs of the war that he had very little time to do anything. Thomas L. Kane to Elish[a] Kane, May 29 1846, Thomas L. Kane Papers.

Little's letter appears to have been the catalyst to set all of these things in motion. Upon receiving the letter, Polk almost immediately addressed his cabinet about the Mormons and called for a meeting with Little on the very same day. Though Polk had made no mention of the Mormon migrants in the May 30 cabinet meeting that outlined his California campaign, only days later, he modified the orders for Kearny's invasion force specifically to include the Mormons. Kearny was now "authorized to receive into service as volunteers, a few hundred of the Mormons who are now on their way to California." Yet Polk was quite specific about his purpose for inducting Mormons in the US Army and explained the reason for his newly found concern in the Mormons. He was thinking of the nation's security interests and the prosecution of the war, but not because, as so many Mormons erroneously believed (and many continue to believe to the present), the US government *needed* the manpower the Mormons could provide. No doubt the Mormon enlistments would help bolster Kearny's invasion force, as they constituted a large portion of Americans already considerably west of other American settlements. But Polk explained to his cabinet that he wanted to enlist the Mormons because he saw them as potential enemies, not because of military expediency. The Mormon troops were to be raised specifically "with a view to conciliate them."²⁵⁹

Polk, as evidenced by his cabinet meetings, was almost desperate to ensure that the United States took control of California during the war. He concluded that, given Little's letter and his interview with Kane, the Mormons were a real threat to the US that might prevent him from achieving that goal. The arrival of thousands of Mormons in California, hostile toward the United States government for their failure to protect them in Missouri first, and then Illinois, was a risk that Polk was not willing to take. Whether the Mormons planned to create their own nation in the Mexican territory, fight against the US to gain vengeance for the spilled blood of

²⁵⁹ James K. Polk Papers, Diary, June 2, 1846, 121.

Joseph Smith, or invite a pretext for British intervention, the decisions of the migrating Mormons had ceased to be a zero loss scenario for Polk as they had been in January, and now there were multitudes of new possibilities, and almost none of them favored the American nation.

Therefore, Polk schemed to nip potential Mormon treachery in the bud by trying to entice the Mormons into direct service of the US during the war. He would rely on his personal charisma and Thomas Kane's good offices to convince the Mormons of his professed good intentions, but he would also take concrete steps that would both weaken the Mormon contingent as well as place the Mormons squarely on the side of the United States in the present war with Mexico. Polk left no doubt that his decision to enlist the Mormons rested directly on his fears of foreign intervention and the possibility of Mormons becoming enemy soldiers in the field. His action was not taken to provide a source of ready troops as many historians have erroneously claimed. Certainly the Mormon troops did prove helpful militarily in the end, but tactical advantage in the war was not his purpose in raising the troops. Polk's interactions with the Mormons and their emissaries reflected much larger strategic considerations which centered on the possible difficulties arising from Mormon power. His was clear that his purpose with the Mormons was to "attach them to our country" and most importantly "prevent them from taking part against us."²⁶⁰

In making the decision to raise the Mormon volunteers, President Polk was taking the first overt action by the federal government to treat the Mormon people as enemies of the state. National policy, indeed American foreign policy with regard to these territories that were not yet under American control, was to view the Mormons as a potential threat, and that policy was set firmly by President Polk himself. As such, special precautions, even outright deceptions, were

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

not only prudent but necessary in the mind of the president. He would deal duplicitously with Little, both keeping information from him and falsely representing other untruths as facts.

Polk and Little Negotiate Terms of Mormon Involvement in the War

On June 3, according to his request, Polk met with Jesse Little and his pseudo sponsor, Amos Kendall. Little's primary goal was to act upon his instructions to secure the United States' sanction and help, if possible, for the Mormons' move to the West. While the meeting was amicable it was in fact between two desperate men. Polk was desperate to secure California before the war, which he thought would be short, came to a close. He was determined to prevent any force, Mormon or otherwise, from impeding this goal. Little, an apostolic injunction spurring him onward, was desperate to gain at the very least the blessing of the United States government as the shunned Mormons left the country, entered nominal US possessions in Indian Territory, and finally settled in Mexico. Little, like many Mormons before him and many in the following decades, was also desperate to impress upon the chief executive the point that the Mormons were in fact loyal, patriotic citizens of the republic. Little affirmed absolute Mormon loyalty, even though he was aware of the excoriating rhetoric several Mormon leaders used in relation to the United States.

Little began the meeting by asking Polk of the US government policy toward the Mormons and their planned migration. Given the swirling rumors in Illinois, Iowa, and Washington D.C. that some type of federal intervention was possible and/or imminent, Little must have been relieved to hear the President respond with much the same rhetoric he had expressed to Senator Semple in January. Polk recorded that he had guaranteed the Mormons that

they were to “be treated as all other American citizens were, without regard to the sect to which they belonged or the religious creed which they professed.” He went on to tell Little that he “had no prejudices towards them which could induce a different course of treatment.”²⁶¹ Little recorded the exchange in an even more positive light, saying that the president “believed us to be good citizens; and was willing to do us all the good that was in his power consistently.” More importantly for Little, Polk disabused him of the notion that the federal government would prevent the Mormons from leaving the country. Little recorded that Polk had said “we [Mormons] should be protected.”²⁶²

Part of Little’s report of the meeting is especially important in understanding what motivated Polk to his present action. Polk told the Mormon emissary that he had read Little’s June 1 letter “with interest” and was “glad of an opportunity of having an interview.” Polk certainly could have spoken with Little earlier, or set up a special meeting, when he had originally been introduced to Jesse Little in the White House on the evening of May 22. Yet a week had passed without Polk so much as mentioning either the Mormons or Little, their envoy. Kane’s meeting with Polk on May 28 is the first record of Polk having a discussion about the Mormons since his January dismissals to Senator Semple of any federal interest. Little’s record of the conversation lends confirmation to the assertion that Polk’s decision to meet with the Mormon leader came only after he had received Little’s June 1 letter that suggested foreign interference might be the result of federal inaction concerning the Mormons.²⁶³

Little, desperate to cling to what he perceived to be an extended olive branch from the federal government, quickly asserted to the president that the Mormons “were Americans in all

²⁶¹ James K Polk Papers, Diary, June 3, 1846, 123-124.

²⁶² MHC. Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, 22.

²⁶³ MHC. Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, 22.

their feeling, & friends of the U.S.” In reply to this proclamation of loyalty and patriotism, Polk explained to Little that the U.S. was at war with Mexico and he asked the Church leader “if 500 or more of the Mormons now on their way to California would be willing on their arrival in that country to volunteer and enter the U.S. army in that war.”²⁶⁴ In Little’s rendering of the meeting the President had specifically assured Little that “he had confidence in our people as true American citizens, if he had not, he would not make such proposals.”²⁶⁵ In making this assertion to Jesse Little, Polk was actually presenting two halves of the same falsehood. First, he did *not* have confidence in the loyalty of the Mormons. Second, the only reason he was making “such proposals” was that he viewed the Mormons as potentially disloyal and as an element in the present war that could be exploited by foreign powers to the detriment of American military aims. Polk presented Little reasoning that was exactly the opposite of what he actually believed and intended, and it is a testament to Polk’s political skill and experience, or a commentary on Little’s lack thereof, that he was able to so easily persuade the Mormon emissary that his intentions were benevolent. Much of this no doubt had to do with the fact that Jesse Little wanted to be persuaded. Hearing kind words from the President of the United States was anathema to previous Mormon experience. Mormons in general, and Little in particular, had testified repeatedly of the fealty of Mormons as American citizens and Polk’s willingness to accept these assertions must have been totally disarming.

Polk specifically expressed that he did not want the Mormon volunteers enlisted until after they had settled in California. He had no way of knowing how long the war would last, and certainly did not know how quickly California and upper territories of Mexico would fall under American control. He hoped that Kearny would reach them before winter, but this was by no

²⁶⁴ James K Polk Papers, Diary, No. 4, June 3 1846, 124.

²⁶⁵ MHC. Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, 22.

means probable. Still, if the conquest and occupation of California could be accomplished without the Mormons being officially mustered into the army, it would prevent Kearny from having to take special pains to ensure Mormon loyalty. If United States troops were already on the ground when the Mormons arrived, chances at foreign interloping would be greatly reduced. Little's response to the call for troops was resounding in the affirmative, that Mormons would gladly join the war effort. In fact, Little offered personally to head to the Mormons camp in Iowa Territory and make the government's request for troops directly to the largest body of Latter-day Saints.

Perhaps Polk was a bit taken aback by the willingness of Little to raise a company of Mormon troops. In any case, he did not go further with the conversation at that point but instead arranged to meet with the men again the next day, explaining that he needed to talk to the Secretary of the Navy about the plan to raise a Mormon battalion.²⁶⁶ Little's protestations of patriotism might have surprised Polk, but they did not change his mind. Despite the fact that the conversation lasted for three hours, he still viewed the Mormons as a threat to national interests, especially as they entered a war zone. He explained in his diary that he did not think it "prudent" to explain that the US government was mounting an expedition under Kearny to take New Mexico and California. His claims not to see the Mormons with any prejudice notwithstanding, Polk wrote in his diary that if the Mormons were in fact inducted into the Army that they would "constitute not more than ¼ of Col Kearny's command." This ceiling on the number of Mormon troops further demonstrated the fears he still held of the Mormons and their intentions. Far from the common historical view that Polk wanted the Mormons as a military necessity, he was seeking to limit their enlistment ratio to the number of troops that were viewed as real

²⁶⁶ MHC. Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, 22.

Americans. While cabinet meetings only a few days earlier had revolved around Polk's worries that forces could not be raised fast enough to take California before winter, the offer of Little and the Mormons to bolster this force had to be restricted in Polk's mind for obvious reasons. If the Mormons were indeed treacherous, Kearny would need the other three-quarters of his command to suppress the unruly Mormons if necessary.²⁶⁷

Polk, perhaps thinking that future posterity would question why he enlisted the support of the universally hated sect, was very clear in his diary that the only purpose of raising the Mormon troops was to pacify them and "prevent them from assuming a hostile attitude towards the U.S. after their arrival in California." Polk further betrayed his thoughts, and his duplicity, in the pages of his diary, explaining, "It was with the view to prevent this singular sect from becoming hostile to the U.S. that I held the conference with Mr. Little, and with the same view I am to see him again tomorrow."²⁶⁸ Polk had obviously not been dissuaded from regarding the Mormons as enemies rather than allies.

Polk's decision to view the Mormons as potential enemies was not swayed in the least by his meeting with Jesse Little. But Polk's acting job was worthy of any great politician. When Little returned the next day for the scheduled appointment, Polk was scrambling to arrange a cabinet meeting to address the new British response to the Oregon dispute and he asked Little if he would please come the following day. He added in a friendly manner that he "hoped [Little] would not get tired of waiting."²⁶⁹

Little and Kendall returned on June 5 as Polk had requested. Polk explained, in a diplomatic, though ultimately deceitful, manner, that after consulting with the Secretary of War,

²⁶⁷ Papers of James K. Polk, Diary, June 3, 1846, 124-125.

²⁶⁸ Papers of James K. Polk, Diary, June 3, 1846, 124-125.

²⁶⁹ MHC, Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, 23.

they had concluded that the US Army was not in a position to accept the Mormon volunteers before they reached California. Once they arrived, however, “they would to the number of 500 be mustered into the service of the U.S. as volunteers for 12 months,” assuming of course that the war was still being waged. Little protested somewhat to the president. He again put forth his plan that the Mormons be mustered into service immediately and again volunteered to ride ahead to the Mormon camp to prepare those troops for the army’s call to arms.²⁷⁰ In Little’s view, which he probably did not express to the president, the sooner the Mormons were called into service, the sooner the pay for the Mormon soldiers would commence and such pay would help defray the cost of moving the Mormons into Mexican territory. Polk politely declined Little’s offer to enlist the Mormons immediately and Little eventually left to consider Polk’s proposal; he sent a letter of acceptance later that evening.²⁷¹

While Little retired to mull Polk’s offer, Amos Kendall remained behind. With the Mormon out of the room, the president explained himself to Kendall in order to justify his position with regard to the Mormons. Polk revealed to Kendall what he had purposely hidden from Little, that Kearny was preparing an expedition of his own that would take Santa Fe and then march on California via the southern route. Again framing the Mormon issue in terms of national security, he told Kendall he “did not think it safe” to tell Little of the planned California expedition, ostensibly because if the Mormons did decide to throw in with the Mexicans or the British and fight the United States, they would be able to apprise either foe of Kearny’s secret

²⁷⁰ Papers of James K. Polk, Diary, June 5, 1846, 131-132. It is not certain whether Polk actually discussed the Mormon offer to raise troops where they were in Iowa with William Marcy, Secretary of War, after his initial meeting with Little. However, evidence suggests that such a discussion either did not take place or Marcy did not understand the president, because Marcy’s order to raise the Mormon Battalion was sent off on the same day as Little’s first interview with Polk. If Marcy thought the Mormon force could not be raised because of logistical obstacles prior to reaching California, as Polk claimed, why then did he sign the order that called the Mormons into the Army while they were yet in Iowa, exactly contrary to such assertions made by the President?

²⁷¹ MHC. Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, 23.

plans to march west from Santa Fe.²⁷² The Mormons were not essential to Polk's war plans; they were a liability to be carefully handled, not an asset. Polk's record of this meeting further demonstrates that Kendall had not been forthright in claiming to have pitched a Mormon plan to the president earlier. Polk was relating to Kendall his invasion plans for the first time, and in a secret manner. Polk's account hardly corroborated Kendall's claim of the ongoing discussions about the Mormon involvement in a planned invasion of California that Kendall had asserted to Little while trying to defraud him.

Most reports indicated that the Mormons were planning to immigrate to northern California and Polk did not know how long it would take Kearny to reach southern California after seizing Santa Fe. He explained to Kendall that he did not want the Mormons to arrive in California ahead of the Kearny expedition, especially if they were already mustered into the service of the US Army. In light of the fact that US and Mexican forces in California were so sparse at the outbreak of the Mexican War and that Polk desperately wanted to occupy the territory before the hostilities ended, Polk's insistence that the Mormons not be the first US troops into the territory is particularly striking. He told Kendall that the entire purpose of raising the Mormon troops was not out of military necessity but "to conciliate them and prevent their becoming the enemies of the U.S."

He went on to tell Kendall that there were other considerations beyond even the Mormons' potential treason. Americans already settled in California, specifically in the area of Sutter's Fort, had heard of the large Mormon migration and were "alarmed" that the Mormons might settle in their area. And, Polk added, "this alarm would be increased if the first organized troops of the U.S. that entered the country were Mormons." It is uncertain what reports from California citizens Polk was receiving, but the idea that the Mormons would see their new

²⁷² James K Polk Papers, Diary, June 5 1846, 131-132.

settlements in California as a God-given paradise was an idea that a nearby Maryland newspaper had explained only a few days earlier, saying that “the ‘Mormons have found another leaf of their Bible, that gives them California as the promised land.’”²⁷³

In any case, Polk saw Kearny’s raising of a Mormon force once both groups had arrived in California as a way of both satisfying the fears of the local residents yet preventing the Mormons from seeking British backing for their new settlement. Polk believed he had prevented the Mormons from siding with the enemy or becoming enemies in their own right. He further explained that he would restrict the number of Mormons under Kearny’s command to no more than one fourth of his entire force for the obvious reason of making certain the untrustworthy Mormons could be subdued, if necessary, once armed and supplied by the United States government. For his part, Kendall’s feigned support for Little and the Mormon cause melted before the logic of the president’s argument and Polk records that Kendall left in agreement with Polk over his deception about the California expedition and the enrollment of the Mormon force in the army. Kendall, of course, never told Little what the president had said in the private conversation.²⁷⁴ For his part, Kendall never told Polk that he and A.G. Benson had deliberately damaged Mormon/US relations in an attempt to blackmail the Mormons out of millions.

Little left his interviews with the president convinced that the federal government not only harbored no ill feeling toward the Mormons, but that the Mormons must in fact be necessary to the United States plans for conquest in the West, a view that found ready resonance given the nature of Joseph Smith’s expansionist ideals shortly before his murder. Polk’s personal feelings and his use of the war as a deceitful tool to keep the Mormons from “becoming

²⁷³ *The Hagerstown Torch Light*, May 21, 1846.

²⁷⁴ James K Polk Papers, Diary, June 5, 1846, 132.

enemies” though they were American citizens were not known until years later after his diary became available to the public.

Little in fact wrote a letter in 1891, two years before his death, in which he lamented the fact that Mormon popular culture considered the calling of the Mormon Battalion to be a nefarious scheme of the federal government. Given the federal pressure that had been brought to bear on the Mormon community in Utah in the 1880’s over polygamy, it was easy for the Mormon populace, feeling that they were being oppressed by a tyrannical federal government, to believe that the calling of the Battalion was in fact a diabolical act on the part of the government. Little wrote that the belief that the army had deliberately ordered the Mormon battalion out to “cripple and hinder our people in their migration to the Desert of Salt and the upper California” was simply misplaced. Little knew that he had in fact urged the speedy raising of the Battalion. Polk had preferred not to raise the Mormon troops prior to their travail-laden journey over the Rocky Mountains. Thus, Little felt that the belief that the government had ordered the Mormons into service in just another attempt to hinder the Mormons’ progress was an unfair accusation against the United States government. However, while Mormon sentiment was misguided in its feeling that they were deceived by the US government, Little was not yet aware of the duplicity of Polk’s conversations with him, which would come to light in later decades.²⁷⁵

Amos Kendall made a desperate attempt to salvage his position as Mormonism’s benefactor in the face of Polk’s explanation to Jesse Little that he harbored no ill feelings toward the Mormons. If Little believed Polk, then all of the information Kendall had funneled to both Brannan and Little was obviously false. His only hope was to convince Little that it was his influence that had changed the mind of the executive. Accordingly, the next day, June 6, Amos

²⁷⁵ Jesse Carter Little to Orson F. Whitney, Nov 25, 1891, Jesse Carter Little, Letters 1890-1891, MS 14690, LDS Church Archives.

Kendall told Little that he had “written to the President” for Little, intimating that such communications had made all of the difference in the Mormon/US negotiations. Kendall must have been incredibly frustrated with Polk. The president’s dishonesty toward Little was trumping Kendall’s own fraudulence. One man had been representing that the United States government despised the Mormons and that military action against them was imminent, the other was insisting the government was a friend of the Mormons; neither was true, but there is no wonder to the fact that Little accepted the president’s claims over Kendall’s following the interviews. In any case, Kendall was about to be displaced permanently by Thomas Kane, who actually did have good intentions toward the Mormons, despite his primary goal of preventing British/Mormon collusion. He telegraphed Jesse Little that evening that he would be arriving from Philadelphia the next day.²⁷⁶

Little’s Continued Negotiations

Whereas Kendall had been secretive, condescending, and ominous, Kane appeared to be an enthusiastic supporter of the Mormon cause, such that Little remarked with wonder, “From some cause he feels very much interested in behalf of our people!” Upon his arrival the two attempted to visit the heads of several governmental departments. They had a pleasant dinner and after sharing a bottle of wine and spending a few hours discussing the persecution of the Mormons, Kane went to see Amos Kendall and Secretary of State James Buchanan. Upon

²⁷⁶ MHC, Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, 23.

reading Little's June 1 letter to President Polk, Kane not only heartily endorsed it, he asked for a copy.²⁷⁷

The next day, June 8, Kane not only wrote another introductory letter to Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft for Little, he personally visited with President Polk and Secretary of War William Macy about the Mormons. Having already received his commission from Polk, these meetings likely conveyed more information about the Mormons that Kane had learned from Little in the past few days. The possible contents of this meeting only came to light more than a decade later, but are illustrative of Polk's fear that British interests were meddling in Mormon/US relations. In an 1858 discussion, Thomas Kane told Brigham Young that Major Robert B. Mitchell, who had threatened military violence in Iowa against the Mormons for conspiring with the Indians, had also reported to President Polk "that the Mormons were receiving large sums of Money from the British Government and they were Conniving with the Indians against the government."²⁷⁸

For decades, frontier settlers and politicians had accused British agents on the frontier of arming Native American groups and inciting them to attack United States interests. Now Polk was presented with a report that placed the Mormons in the same position which governmental leaders commonly attributed to Native American groups, as malleable pawns of nefarious British designs. That Mormons were likewise weak-minded was clearly evident by their devotion to a fanatical sect. Though the report was enough for Polk and Marcy to discuss the issue with Kane, he also explained that it was "not generally believed." In fact, according to Kane, there was some sentiment in Kane's meetings with the governmental leaders to proffer support and aid to the Mormons because they were "a poor persecuted people and ought to be helped instead of

²⁷⁷ Ibid. Little did not know that part of Kane's motivation was his presidential instructions to travel to the Mormon camp and mitigate British influence.

²⁷⁸ Woodruff, *Journal*, February 27, 1858, Vol 5, 172.

being persecuted.” That aid was to come in the form of granting the Mormons a part of the Kansas Territory in which to settle. This plan was rejected because Secretary of War William Marcy not only strenuously denounced it, he declared he would resign if such a move was made to aid the Mormons. Kane, apparently from subsequent interviews with Marcy or others who knew, told Young that Marcy had been upset that General Kearny had acted so graciously toward the Mormons and even claimed that Marcy might have had something to do with Colonel James Allen’s death because he had been “friendly” to the Mormon battalion he was to command.²⁷⁹ Neither Marcy’s resignation, nor a land grant to the Mormons was forthcoming. Polk had asked Kane, who had already covertly agreed to go west to the Mormon encampment as a government agent, to learn “the truth concerning” the Mormons and “make a report of it” back to the president. Still antsy, Polk wanted to be certain that no British/Mormon ties existed.²⁸⁰

Little too met once more with President Polk. Polk again was the picture of amicability, not betraying the least concern about the Mormons’ loyalty. Instead, he told Little that he had “good feelings” toward the Mormons and “considered [them] good people.” It was with this presidential endorsement that Little left Washington D.C. to rejoin his fellow Saints in the wildernesses of Iowa. Little had one more interview with a high ranking official. Kane introduced Little to Vice President George Dallas. Whether Polk instructed Dallas to play the part is unknown, but in any case the Vice President was very affable toward Little and even urged Little to see him again before leaving the city.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Ibid. Allen, who had been on very cordial terms with the Mormon leaders, had died of a mysterious illness August 22, 1846, after being bed-ridden for more than a week. This came only a couple of weeks after the Mormon Battalion had marched off to Fort Leavenworth and occurred while they were en route to Fort Bent on the Arkansas River, the farthest flung of American outposts lining the border with Mexico. See the letter informing Young of Allen’s death, Surgeon George B. Sanderson to Brigham Young, August 22, 1846. Tyler, 153.

²⁸⁰ Woodruff, *Journal*, February 27, 1858, Vol 5, 172.

²⁸¹ MHC, Report of Jesse Carter Little to President Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, July 6, 1846, 24-25.

The historical irony of the Little/Polk meetings is that the message still somehow went out from the War Department authorizing the raising of the Mormon volunteers while they were yet camped in Iowa, despite Polk's desire that the Mormons not be enlisted prior to their arrival in California. Secretary of War, William L. Marcy, sent a letter to General Stephen Watts Kearny, the leader of the proposed California campaign, on June 3, 1846, two days before the final meeting with Little and Kendall in which Polk determined that the Mormons could not be trusted in the service prior to their arrival in the West. Marcy directed Kearny to attempt to raise a Mormon force to supplement his army. Marcy spoke of the Mormons as though they were foreigners or Native Americans, not genuine citizens of the United States. Kearny was to "use all proper means to have a good understanding with them." Unlike the president, however, Marcy's letter spoke of the Mormons as if they were in fact a military necessity, while all of Polk's communication was dismissive of this aspect of Mormon service. Perhaps Marcy, upon whom the logistics of mounting a rapid expedition to California fell, realized that taking 500 Mormons into Kearny's force would in fact facilitate the US Army objectives to obtain the Mexican possessions.²⁸² Or, if Kane's later account of Marcy's animosity toward the Mormons is to be believed, perhaps Marcy wanted to take no chances in letting the Mormons out of the Army's sight. What is clear, however, is that President Polk did not see the Mormons as a military necessity, only their foreignness as a military threat.

Of course, the extent of the relationship was destined to be short-lived as Secretary Marcy explained to Kearny that the Army's relationship to the Mormons was specifically "to the end that the United States may have their cooperation in taking possession of, and holding, that country." Referring to them derisively as "these Mormons" a foreign observer would hardly

²⁸² Secretary of War William Marcy to Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny, June 3, 1846, *House Executive Document* 60, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 153-155.

know that “these Mormons” were in fact American citizens. Marcy was quick to caution Kearny that the Mormons were only to make up a third of his force ostensibly so he could have at least a 2/3 majority to keep the fanatical Mormons under control should their soldiers get out of line, a transmuted incarnation of the one-fourth restriction that Polk had mentioned in his diary. Following his instructions about the Mormons, Marcy explained that there were some “American citizens” living in Mexican territory that would also be willing to join the force, an indication that he did not consider the Mormons to be Americans.²⁸³

Mormon Reaction to the Call for Volunteers

It was with these orders that Captain Allen rode into the Mormon encampment in Iowa to raise the Mormon Battalion on June 26. Allen sought to raise four or five companies of Mormon volunteers to join the forces of Stephen Kearny which was preparing to march on Mexican positions in the Southwest. His enlistment message called upon “those of the Mormons who are desirous of serving their country” to step forward and enlist. The reaction of the Mormons in Mount Pisgah, Iowa, where his message was first delivered, was one of uncertainty and bitterness. Allen asked destitute and driven Mormons to serve “their” country, a message greeted with cynicism among the Mormons who believed that same country had recently expunged them from its territory. Allen’s appeal made it clear that the United States still considered Mormons citizens of the nation, regardless of their present condition or future place of settlement.

Wilford Woodruff had just experienced the mob-like atmosphere that still pervaded in Nauvoo on his way home from a mission in England to join the migrating wagon train. While

²⁸³ Ibid.

still in England, Woodruff had bitterly denounced the United States in his journal, upon learning that the Mormons were going to be forced out from Nauvoo and that “the State of Illinois And the whole United States have filled up there Cup of Iniquity And well may the Saints go out of her midst As did Lot out of Sodom for her Judgment and destruction is equally sure.” Woodruff marveled that the Mormons were to “be drove out of it [Nauvoo] By the American Nation.”

Like many Mormons, Woodruff regarded the inaction of the federal government to be a calculated effort to destroy Mormonism. Hence the evil nation and government was deservedly condemned as was the ancient city to which he compared them. Still, Woodruff believed that the basis of the United States government was sound; it was the corrupt leaders who were causing “American liberty with her proud eagle [to] found a sepulchre there to remain untill resurrected by some power who will...Administer those laws in equity & Justice that the present Administrators have not moral Courage enough to maintain against the power of Mobocracy.”²⁸⁴

Woodruff and other Mormons could not help but regard the government interest in the group now with icy suspicion, especially since they had not received contrary intelligence reports yet from Jesse Little. He recorded some of the feelings of his fellow Mormons at the Army’s odd request for soldiers from the Mormon group. Woodruff said the camp was “flung into some excitement”, much of it because the Mormons were on such tenuous terms with the United States government that the appearance of an army officer in camp was first heralded as the vanguard of the oft-rumored US military intervention Governor Ford had promised. Even when this proved not to be the case, Woodruff’s journal betrays the level of disgust he held for the federal government. He doubted the sincerity of Allen’s intentions and that Allen was acting under orders of President Polk to invite the Mormons to raise a battalion of volunteers “to Assist the

²⁸⁴ Wilford Woodruff, *Journal*, Typescript, Edited by Scott G. Kenney, Volume 3 (Midvale, Utah : Signature Books, 1968), January 18, 1845, 617.

USA in the Mexican War.” He believed first that the President had not made such an authorization, and second that Allen and his group were merely spies scouting out the Mormon forces in the area under false pretenses. Rumors of federal military intervention to stop the Mormons’ exodus and their supposed collusion with the Indians fueled such cynical thinking by the Mormon apostle.²⁸⁵

Nevertheless, Woodruff sent Allen on to Council Bluffs, Iowa, to meet with Brigham Young directly about the request to raise volunteers. Records indicate that there must have been at least some discussion over whether to supply the requested troops between Brigham Young and apostles Willard Richards and Heber C. Kimball. In the end, Young determined to “raise the men wanted” and the Mormon Battalion was soon thereafter born.²⁸⁶

That there was consternation among the Mormon leadership and great hesitancy to respond to the government request is understandable for two separate reasons. First, the animosity the Mormons as a group felt for the government was inescapable. Their daily sojourn west painfully reminded them of the scorn they felt was visited upon them by the federal government; the Mormon leadership felt indignant that the government would come calling for help when it had been deaf to Mormon pleas and petitions for protection for more than a decade. Second, and on a much more practical level, the 500 troops requested represented a large percentage of the able-bodied men who were then plodding their way west to the Rocky Mountains. The loss of so many men could only mean a more difficult journey for the fatherless families left to make the arduous trek on their own. Only days before Allen’s request for soldiers, Brigham Young had made a call for an advance party to speed its way ahead of the

²⁸⁵ Woodruff, *Journal*, June 26, 1846, 55.

²⁸⁶ MHC, June 30, 1846, Vol. 15, 219.

main group, marking out trails and fords and preparing the new land by planting crops for the main body to come later.²⁸⁷

The hardship created by the removal of the Mormon Battalion members for service was one that endured in Mormon memory far longer than the one-year enlistment papers signed by the volunteer soldiers. Many Mormons looked upon the government's request for troops as at best a great irony. The government called upon the Mormons now when it needed them, but no such reciprocity had been enjoyed when the Mormons needed federal intervention. Some looked at it as an underhanded attempt to hurt the Mormons by pressing men into service at the very time they were needed most. Erastus Snow, who would become an apostle just a few years later, expressed perhaps the most extreme view of the call for troops, though certainly he was not alone in his thinking. Several months after the call to arms, Snow attempted to explain why the progress of the Mormon migration was slower than anticipated. After citing the weather and subsequent diseases and difficulty in building roads and bridges, Snow turned to the "suttle plan for our distruction devised by the government of the United States." While Captain Allen had styled his call for troops a "request", Snow referred to it as a "demand." Snow believed that the government had deliberately made the request on the grounds that they knew the Mormons, so recently castigated and scorned by that same government, would refuse to serve. The government would then "consider it sufficient pretext for treating us as enemies of the government and cutting off our retreat to the Indian Country." On the other hand, the governmental conspirators "well knew", in Snow's mind, that if the Mormons did respond favorably to the enlistment call, "it must leave hundreds of teams without teamsters and families without protectors." But it was not just a desire to slow the movement of the Saints that American plotters sought. With the men removed from the camp the United States government

²⁸⁷ MHC, June 28, 1846, Vol. 15, 217.

“fondly hoped that we [the Mormons] should be an easy prey to Savages, Starvation, disease and Death.”²⁸⁸

Daniel Tyler, a veteran of the Mormon Battalion who wrote a book about his service in the war, expressed the general feeling of contempt among the Mormons when the call to arms came. Though he does not say that he felt there was hostile intent behind the federal government’s motivation, he understood the hardship and derision such a call engendered. At the same time, Tyler felt that Polk asked for Mormon volunteers because he knew both that they were already headed West where the army was planning its campaign and more to the point because he knew the “hardihood and habits of discipline of the Mormons.”²⁸⁹

Brigham Young’s Decision to Provide the Troops

Brigham Young had no idea of the discussions that had been held between Little and President Polk in the East. Only ten days later, when Little himself arrived, was the matter given its full (at least from Little’s obfuscated point of view) disclosure. Yet, even without the favorable report that would be forthcoming from Jesse Little, Brigham Young determined that it was in the best interest of the Mormons to respond to the military’s request for a Mormon battalion composed of 500 men, as well as dozens of women who would go along as paid laundresses.²⁹⁰

Young called an initial recruitment meeting on July 1. Captain James Allen spoke first followed by Young. Allen explained that “through the benevolence of James K. Polk” that the Mormon battalion was to be called into service. Brigham Young, realizing that many of the men

²⁸⁸ Erastus Snow, Journal, September 1, 1846, Vol. 3, 79-82, MS 1329, LDS Church Archives.

²⁸⁹ Daniel Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War, 1846-47*, 80.

²⁹⁰ Stephen W. Kearny to James Allen, June 19, 1846, MHC, Vol 16, 2.

in the congregation would be very hesitant to volunteer for a government they perceived as having abandoned their founder, Joseph Smith, to be slaughtered and the entire people to be driven from the nation, was quick to allay such thoughts. Young asked the congregation to do something that for many years the Mormon leaders had refused to do: “make a distinction between this action of the general government and our former oppressions in Missouri and Illinois.”²⁹¹ This distinction between the state governments and the federal government was one that was not readily made in Mormon rhetoric. In fact, the expulsion period in Nauvoo had led to denunciations of the United States along with the mob forces in Illinois and Missouri. Young explained to the group that “he wanted to clear their minds of all prejudice and not blame the general government for the acts that had been perpetrated by mobbers.” He reasoned with the crowd that the result of the war would be American domination of the area of Mexico where they were headed. Mormon service in the war was needed, and he told the people that “if we embrace this offer we will have the U.S. to back us and have an opportunity of showing our loyalty and fight for the country that we expect to have for our homes.” Young saw the calling of Mormon troops as a way to solidify a beneficial relationship with the United States government which was destined to control the Great Basin and consequently the new Mormon settlements.²⁹²

Yet Young also knew that there was a practical aspect to many men hesitating to join the military. The Mormons were hundreds of miles outside of the established civilization, in Indian Territory, and were struggling to prepare for the most arduous part of their trek to the West. Many of the men asked to volunteer were heads of families, with wives and small children; how could they leave them on the prairie to fend for themselves? Young reasoned, “the question might be asked, Is it prudent for us to enlist to defend our country?...Suppose we were admitted

²⁹¹ MHC, July 1, 1846, Vol 16, 4.

²⁹² John Taylor, Journals, July 1, 1846.

to the Union as a State and the government did not call on us, we would feel ourselves neglected.” He went on to say that the Mormons should be the first to set their feet in California and that Captain Allen had assured them that the government would, because of their service, allow the Mormons to camp in Indian Territory until they were ready to make the long journey West. As Young explained, this “was the first offer we have ever had from the government to benefit us.”²⁹³ The Mormons had for years asked for the federal government to notice them, and now, with the call to arms present, they should not allow their bitterness to turn away the government when it finally did recognize them. Young promised to take care of the families of those who left to serve.

En route to another Mormon encampment to raise more military volunteers in Iowa, at Mount Pisgah, Young met Jesse Little who was hurrying west to tell Young of his interviews with President Polk. Little must have been surprised that the Army was seeking volunteers already, as Polk had been fairly adamant that the Mormons would not be called into service prior to their arrival in California.²⁹⁴ However, Little’s reassurance that the President was a true friend of the Mormons became a part of Young’s stump recruitment speech.²⁹⁵

A letter was dispatched to another temporary Mormon settlement in Garden Grove, Iowa Territory urging the Saints there not only to send all of the men between the ages 18 to 45 who were willing to enlist, but to also quickly send all the other men that they possibly could in order to take the place of the departing soldiers in the main camp. The Mormons in Garden Grove were just becoming settled and waiting to harvest their crops. Nevertheless they were told to quickly sell the land and the improvements they had made once the crops were harvested, or

²⁹³ MHC, July 1, 1846, Vol 16, 4.

²⁹⁴ MHC, July 6, 1846, Vol 16, 8.

²⁹⁵ MHC, July 7, 1846, Vol 16, 26. In fact it was after this speech that Daniel Tyler, who recorded the daily exploits of the Mormon Battalion, determined to enlist along with 63 other men.

even the crops too while still in the ground if they could get the right price. Realizing that this would be startling to the residents, Young used a little tongue in cheek humor to soften the blow, quipping, “Some of the Missourians ought to be glad to give a handsome sum for Garden grove, to get rid of their neighbors.”²⁹⁶

On a more serious note, Young explained why the Mormons in Garden Grove should now respond to these new demands that came as a result of the United States government requesting a battalion of Mormon volunteers. Young wrote, “This is no hoax. Elder Little, President of the New England churches, is here also direct from Washington, who has been to see the President on the subject of emigrating the Saints to the western coast...the U.S. want our friendship, the President wants to do us good, and secure our confidence.”²⁹⁷ Polk’s interviews with Little were serving his purposes of placating the Mormons as the Church leaders accepted Little’s assessment that the president was a true friend to the Mormons and repeatedly used these sentiments to assuage Mormon skepticism.

Young also explained to the Garden Grove settlers that the war between Mexico and the United States would determine which nation would possess California, and the Mormons needed to be the first settlers in whatever area they came to occupy. Young had become convinced that the Church’s problems in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois all stemmed from the fact that the Mormons had been newcomers in states that were already settled. The “old citizens” of these areas had used the changing demographics accompanying Mormon settlement “as a pretext to mob the saints.” In the vast expanse of Mexican California, the Mormons would be the “old citizens.”²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Brigham Young to Samuel Bent, Council, and the Saints at Garden Grove, July 7, 1846, MHC, Vol 16, 27-30. The non capitalization of “grove” is in the original.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 27.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 28.

Young endorsed another letter sent to the leaders of the Church who were yet still in Nauvoo, desperately trying to sell Mormon lands and houses, including the temple, and organize emigration trains of the remaining people. This letter explained that the Church was going to furnish the volunteers requested, despite the difficulty the loss of such men would entail.²⁹⁹

The arrival of Colonel Kane in the Mormon encampments only strengthened the view of Polk's benevolence that Little had reported. He helped assure the Mormons that the president's offer was a genuine and good-hearted one. Wilford Woodruff, who had been convinced on Captain Allen's first encounter with the Mormons that it was some scheme on the part of the government, appeared to be convinced by Kane and Little that "the President was vary favorable to our people And had taken this course for our good." In fact Woodruff went on to write, "From the information we received from him we were convinced that God had began to move upon the heart of the President And others in this Nation to begin to act for our interest And the general good of Zion."³⁰⁰

Back with the main encampment of Mormons on the western edge of the territory on July 13, Young made a final push for the remaining volunteers needed to fill out the ranks of the battalion. Young shamed some of those who were hesitant to enlist, saying "some have said, they did not see the propriety of going, and that the Twelve did not realize their peculiar circumstances." Young responded to these thoughts hyperbolically saying, "After we are done talking we will call out the companies, and if there are not young men enough, we will take the old men and if there are not enough, we will take the women." He added in a more matter of fact way, "If we want the privilege of going where we can worship God according to the dictates of our own consciences, we must raise the battalion." Young went on to explain that since the state

²⁹⁹ Brigham Young to Elders Babbitt, Haywood, & Fullmer, July 7, 1846, MHC, Vol 16, 30-34.

³⁰⁰ Wilford Woodruff, *Journal*, July 11, 1846, Vol. 3, 58. Spelling in original.

religion of Mexico was Roman Catholicism, the United States needed to gain possession of California for the Mormons to be able to practice their religion legally. And, Young reiterated his incorrect belief that President Polk had “now stretched out his hand to help us and I thank God and him too.”³⁰¹

On July 18, Young held a meeting with commissioned and non-commissioned officers of the newly-formed battalion and charged them with living their religion, being chaste, gentle, and refraining from swearing. Young told the Mormons to “have no contentious conversations with the Missourians” that would make up a large part of Kearny’s force, and that prohibition even extended to the Mexicans they would be fighting and every other class of people the battalion encountered. Young also admonished the commanders with this military injunction: “Should the battalion engage with the enemy and be successful, treat prisoners with the greatest civility, and never take life, if it can be avoided.” However, he “assured the brethren that they would have no fighting to do”, an odd assurance to be given to a military force primed to march into enemy territory. Even more profound he promised that if the men were faithful, “every man will return alive.” He again praised President Polk for his kindness toward the Mormons, and stated that the Mormons would “go into the Great Basin” where they would be safe from mobs and could build their temples. They were not interested in the coastal portion of California or the areas of Sutter’s settlement, despite what worried Californians had told Polk.³⁰² Young saw the Mormon Battalion as an essential tool to strengthen relations between the Mormons and the United States, as well as provide much-needed income.

³⁰¹ MHC, July 13, 1846, Vol. 16, 46. As it happened, the Mormons would eventually establish colonies in northern Mexico because the Mexican government, under the pro-American Porfirio Diaz, was not willing to enforce prohibitions against Mormon polygamy, while the United States government made the matter an increasingly hostile point of contention by the 1880’s.

³⁰² MHC, July 18, Vol. 16, 86-88.

The Mormon Battalion began marching out on July 21, 1846, for their epic 2000 mile journey to California. Brigham Young prepared for his own march with the advance party of Mormons to the Great Basin. Young's reaction to the call to arms and especially his Garden Grove letter and his July 13 enlistment speech, demonstrated how wrong James K. Polk had been in adjudging the Mormons as traitorous enemies. Young had accepted Polk's call to arms with little hesitation, even before he was apprised of Little's interviews with Polk. In essence, Young went from fearing an armed intervention to proffering soldiers for that same army. Young even argued for the enlistment on the grounds that the Mormons would eventually be admitted to the Union in their new settlement in the West. And, his July 13 recruitment meeting placed Brigham Young where Joseph Smith had been before his death: squarely on the side of American expansionism. Speaking about California, Young had said that the country ought to "ultimately come under the government of the United States." When it did, the Mormons would want to be the "old settlers" in the newly acquired lands. Far from the imagery of Sodom and Gomorrah that that characterized previous statements about the United States, Young now linked the fortunes of the Mormons with those of the United States.³⁰³ This was despite the fact that the calling of the battalion had, in Erastus Snow's words "crippled" the Mormon migration and made them "unable to prosecute the journey further" that year, thus delaying their arrival in the Great Basin and arriving at their permanent settlement.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ MHC, July 13, 1846, Vol. 16, 46.

³⁰⁴ Erastus Snow, Journal, September 1, 1846, Vol. 3, 82, MS 1329, Church Archives. Wilford Woodruff shared Snow's pessimism about the difficulty the calling of the battalion created for the migrating Mormons, but instead saw it as a matter of patriotic pride. He wrote in his journal, "When this 500 men were Called for they stepped forth instantly at the Call of the President notwithstanding the Ill treatment & suffering we had endured in the Persecutions of the United States. Yes we stepped forward as A People while in the midst of a long journey And left families teams waggons & cattle standing by the way side not expecting to meet with them again for one or two years. Yes wives & Children were left in this way to the mercy of God And the brethren And went away with Cheerful hearts Believing that they were doing the will of God. And while casting my eyes upon them I considered I was viewing the first Battalion of the Army of Israel engaged in the United States service for one year And going to

Understanding the Causes Behind the Raising of the Mormon Battalion

The initial belief held by many Mormons of nefarious federal intent was not wholly misplaced, but it was misinformed. President Polk was in fact duplicitous in his raising of the Mormon Battalion, but not for the reasons the Mormons cited. In their reaction to the calling of the Battalion, the Mormons were operating under two false assumptions. First, they wrongly believed that they were considered necessary to the war effort by the president. Thus, it was easy to feel bitter that the country would ask for aid which it had refused to offer. Some, like Daniel Tyler, believed that their character qualities and willingness to endure hardship were prized by the army and the government. Second, Mormons also operated under a false assumption that the call for the troops originated wholly at the behest of the government. It was easy then to think that the government asked for volunteers while the Mormons were crossing the “wilderness” either out of some twisted spite or out of penury and need. The second assumption was informed by the first, and vice versa. These beliefs endure to some degree in Mormon culture in the United States even to the present.³⁰⁵ And, as the recent works on the Mexican War attest, the belief that the Mormons were enlisted because the government needed the manpower has been accepted by the larger historical community as well. However, this examination reveals the need for manpower to be the least important consideration motivating the calling of the Mormon Battalion.

lay the foundation of A far greater work even preparing the way for the building of Zion.” Woodruff, *Journal*, July 16, 1846, Vol 3, 60. Spelling as in original.

³⁰⁵ For examples of Mormon cultural belief that the Battalion’s call originated from the federal need for troops see Arianne B. Cope, “Marching with the Battalion,” *New Era*, Jul 2009 and Lance B. Wickman, “From Iowa to Immortality: A Tribute to the Mormon Battalion,” *Ensign*, Jul 2007.

The idea common among historians and Mormons alike that Polk's primary impetus in raising the Mormon Battalion was to swell the ranks to more quickly conquer California is erroneous. The irony of the Mormon misconception surrounding the calling of the Battalion is that Polk had made his decision to raise Mormon troops in direct consultation with the highest ranking Mormon in Washington. Rather than a sordid plot hatched by Polk and his cabinet and fueled by religious bigotry to destroy the Mormons, or strand them on the plains, the reality was that the Mormon representative in Washington was more eager to raise the force than was Polk. Orders from the military simply travelled to the Mormons faster than notice from Jesse Carter Little.

Polk's conversations on the topic of enlisting Mormons into the army and Marcy's order to Kearny about the Mormons also demonstrate several things. First, Polk came to fear the effects Mormons could have on his pursuit of California. This fear was specifically spurred by the idea that the Mormons might seek British backing for the creation of their own sovereign state or become a British protectorate. The Mormons might also side with the Mexicans in a bid to attain retribution for the wrongs they felt the United States had inflicted on them. Jesse Little's June 1 letter to Polk, following as it did on the heels of Thomas Kane's concerned interview with the president, appears to have been the catalyst that caused Polk to take direct action. The raising of the Mormon Battalion demonstrates the depth of Polk's Anglophobia and how concerned with foreign intervention President Polk was in the early days of the Mexican War. In a very real sense, the Mormons themselves, even without British or Mexican backing, represented a "foreign" intervention, one that could delay or thwart Polk's California ambitions. One can justly, albeit cynically, view Polk's treatment of the Mormons as a sagacious and pragmatic piece of leadership, one that demonstrated Polk both feared foreign intervention in the

Mexican War and took reasonable steps to prevent such from occurring. One might also make the argument that his enlistment of the Mormons under such false pretenses indeed had the desired effect, as the Mormons rallied to the American cause and saw themselves as co-conquerors with the nation they had so recently left.

In, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, David Pletcher's final criticism of Polk's handling of the Mexican crisis was that Polk had failed to achieve what he readily could have through "conventional diplomacy." Polk could have maintained diplomatic pressure on Mexico while accepting an impasse as a result long enough for "the emigrants of 1845 and 1846 to settle in central California." The resulting declaration of independence by these American settlers would have allowed the United States to claim California without resorting to war and Mexico, as in the case with Texas, would have had little ability to protest such an act. But in Pletcher's plausible scenario, he accepts what Polk was ultimately unwilling to abide: that the Mormon immigrants already bound for California were in fact loyal American citizens. Granted, Polk's realization that the Mormons might entice foreign intervention or set up their own state came only after war had already been declared. The Mormon migration did not seem to affect his decisions leading to the war with Mexico at all.

However, it is essential for historians to view California in the light that Polk saw it, as holding vast potential for future growth and trade, but as yet sparsely populated and easily overpowered. That the gold rush following the war brought tens of thousands of American citizens to the territory is an eventuality that is accepted as a foregone conclusion by many viewing this period with the benefit of hindsight. However, in June of 1846, though American settlement in the territory had increased to a trickle in preceding years, no one, and certainly not

Polk, saw that the territory would be filled so quickly with so many American emigrants. Thus the Mormons appeared to Polk to be a formidable, potentially destabilizing group.³⁰⁶

The darker side of Polk's pragmatism and response to the Mormon migration is also quite clear. Polk had, under false pretenses and promises of friendship, called hundreds of "unnecessary" men into the military during wartime. The Mormon Battalion would eventually march over 2000 miles and though it would capture the town of Tucson, and help stabilize the disquieted situation in American occupied San Diego upon reaching the California coast, they encountered no military resistance. Though no Mormons died in battle, Polk could not have foreseen this result when he made the determination to call the force together. Nearly two dozen Mormons died from various diseases and ailments resulting from their march. Had circumstances been different, dozens or even hundreds of the men could have been killed or wounded, and each casualty would have come as a result of Polk's duplicity.

Polk used the Mormons as pawns in his diplomatic chess game. He was willing to place hundreds of men in potentially life-threatening situations, because he refused to accept the Mormons' claim of loyalty. His view of the Mormons as potential threats seemed a practical response given the disparaging newspaper reports, his interview with Thomas Kane, and his fear of the British Empire. His obsession with obtaining California so clouded his judgment, or so reflected it, that the lives of these Mormons became expendable. In fairness, the Mormons readily volunteered, seeing their service as both a vindication of their loyalty and welcoming the pay that followed the Battalion's enlistment. And, unless they all took Brigham Young's promise as an absolute, all of the volunteers knew that they were possibly placing their lives on the line.

³⁰⁶ Pletcher, 610.

But the deception made by Polk and the War Department, places a gray shade on the entire affair. The Mormons were not being called up because they were loyal citizens; in fact, they were being called up precisely because Polk feared they were not loyal citizens. He encouraged Little to believe that he respected, cared for, and wished to defend the Mormon people, when in fact, he saw them as a threat. He feared that the Mormons might endanger his precious California enterprise and possibly enlist the aid of the British Empire, the consummate foe of the United States for control of the Western Hemisphere. Kane's interview presented the reality of this possibility and Little's letter to Polk spurred the chief executive to take the action that he did. While it could be argued that given Polk's goals and fears his response was quite practical, the fact remains that the price of Polk's pragmatism could easily have been Mormon Americans' lives which Polk himself insisted had no military value at all.

The waters surrounding this incident were further muddied by other non-governmental actors such as Alfred Benson and Amos Kendall. Representing themselves as quasi-governmental officials, with the power to affect policy, the duo were able to convince Mormon officials like Samuel Brannan and Jesse Little that the United States government was bent on the destruction of the Church. They found the Mormon leaders easily convinced of such a plot, as it was echoed in daily newspapers, had been voiced by the governor of Illinois, and corresponded perfectly with the Mormon Church's overdeveloped sense of persecution, created through the past decade of mob violence. While Brigham Young rejected the "treaty" Benson and Kendall negotiated with the presumptuous Brannan, it was not because Young did not believe the federal government capable or willing to militarily intervene in the attempted Mormon migration out of the country. Rather, he was unwilling to submit to an unjust document penned by "demagogues." Benson and Kendall, through their own avaricious and deceitful scheme, had

driven the Mormons to mistrust the United States government to a greater degree and indirectly caused the response from Polk which led to the calling of the Battalion. Part of Little's frustration when he wrote to the president on June 1, was a direct result of false reports that had been funneled to him by Amos Kendall. Amos Kendall was both responsible for the heightened and desperate state of the Mormon leaders in the East and indirectly the response from Polk, who, when confronted with Little's letter and the idea of a Mormon intervention in the Mexican War, made the determination to enlist Mormons into the war effort under false pretenses. It was a decision that cannot be removed from the international realities that Polk felt pressing on him.

The episode demonstrates the alienation of Mormons from other American citizens in the minds of leaders of the federal government. Prior to the Mexican War, Polk had viewed the Mormons troubles as a domestic concern not worthy of his notice. With the coming of the conflict, he adjusted his policy to treat the Mormons as polity that needed to be cajoled in order to be controlled to preserve the expansionist interests of the United States. Just as the Mormons had begun to see themselves as isolated from the nation they once loved, the leaders of the nation had begun to see the Mormons a foreign group, one that needed to be kept at arm's length, held in suspicion, and negotiated with as was a foreign nation or at the very least a Native American tribe. Unlike other Americans who could protest their loyalty and enlist in the military to demonstrate it, Mormons had no recourse for actually proving their loyalty. There is no similar order from Polk or the War Department to limit the number of any other particular religious group preparing to serve in the military, nor is there any evidence that President Polk debated bringing troops into the fold that hailed from religions that were avowedly opposed to the war, such as Unitarians, Disciples of Christ, or Congregationalists in order to "conciliate" them.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁷ Clayton Ellsworth broke down the opposition to and support of the Mexican War across sectarian lines in American Christianity. He does not examine the Mormon position on the war, but does outline the outspoken

Though the anti-war rhetoric of these groups often outstripped anything Mormon leaders had said, Polk did not see them as a threat. They were not crossing as a body into disputed territory. There was little threat of a British intervention in Massachusetts or a Mexican landing in New Jersey. And, while Congregationalism was considered American to the very core, Mormonism seemed to be a new type of religious radicalism and had been vilified in the popular press for years. The treatment of Mormons in the matter of the Mexican War was more as if Mormons constituted their own political/ethnic group rather than a religious one. Polk treated the Mormons as a foreign entity, even as the Mormons thought of themselves as Americans and believed the service of the Mormon Battalion validated their citizenship.

The view of the Mormons as traitorous citizens, ones that needed to be handled apart from other Americans, was not lost on members of Polk's cabinet. Secretary of State James Buchanan, whom 10 years later would himself be president, certainly remembered Polk's view of the Mormons as Buchanan readied thousands of men to march to Utah to suppress a supposed insurrection in 1857. He could, reflecting on his experiences, view the Mormons with a legacy of traitorous intentions. Buchanan's Mormon War would help divert the nation from his presidency that was failing to cope with Bleeding Kansas or the slavery issue in general, failing to come to a final determination on the status of the territories, and failing to respond to the economic recession that accompanied his presidency.

By enlisting a battalion of troops the Mormons actually participated in advancing the very American empire that would soon be loathe to find this "singular sect" astride the communications routes from East to West. However, for a brief period, the Mormons believed that their troubles with the government had ended. And, for a short time, the Mormon people,

criticism of several denominations. Clayton Sumner Ellsworth, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Jan., 1940), 301-326.

who had always considered themselves the best of citizens, actually felt that their love for the United States was required. The irony was that the raising of the Mormon Battalion in fact represented the greatest level of mistrust of the Mormon people, rather than a new era of acceptance and amity. Thus Mormons would be confused when in the months and years that followed the federal government appeared to again treat them with contempt and fear.

The Mexican War did not settle the divisive issues in the country; rather, the vast swath of territory acquired by the United States would exacerbate the increasingly frayed ties that were holding the nation together. Similarly, the calling of the Mormon Battalion did not bring an end to difficulties between the Mormon Church and the United States. It represented a beginning of a relationship that would soon become quite difficult. That the association was one born of fear and dishonesty goes a long way to explaining US/Mormon relations in the years that followed. The Mormon settlement in what was to become Utah Territory would play a key role in the national argument over slavery's expansion into the territories. But the outcome of that settlement and the federal relations with the Mormons was not a foregone conclusion.

Chapter 5: “A Brighter Day and a More Righteous Administration”: US/Mormon Relations in the Wake of the Mormon Battalion

The recruitment of the Mormon Battalion brought about a limited détente in Mormon/US relations. Mormon anti-government rhetoric was somewhat muted. Of course, Polk’s interest in Mormon affairs was a sudden development. His view of the Mormons as a foreign entity had not solidified until early June 1846. By August, his Mormon Battalion scheme seemed to be unfolding well. Mormons, on the other hand, believed their sour relations with the federal government were nearly a decade old. Polk’s apparent overtures of goodwill were anathema to all previous dealings with the United States. Mormons tentatively re-embraced America as their patron, but still cautiously maintained their efforts in Great Britain as well. As the Mormon Battalion marched further away from Iowa and into Mexican territory, Mormon leaders prepared for the following spring’s continued exodus. The Battalion’s departure made life more difficult for many of the families remaining behind and the Church arranged to care for them. Mormons expressed mixed support for the war. While the departure of men in the battalion occasioned some widespread grumblings, the most concerned were obviously the wives of the departed soldiers. While the Battalion men had all signed their pay over to the Church to be used in common to aid the immigration of the Mormons, many of these women, facing the harsh realities of another cold winter on the prairie, clamored to receive their husbands’ pay directly.

Another principal concern was whether President James K. Polk would allow the Mormons to remain temporarily encamped on lands designated for Native Americans. To solidify their newfound “friendship” with the American president Brigham Young wrote Polk

just a few weeks after the battalion had departed.³⁰⁸ Young had previously begged Polk for federal aid as the Mormons were being driven from Illinois by mob violence in May 1845. Polk had not even responded. Polk's indifference sealed the Mormons' fate and convinced many Mormon leaders that the United States was an enemy of their people. Young's tenor in this letter to Polk differed from both his importuning of 1845 or the private vehemence expressed to his fellow apostles as they journeyed across Iowa.

Though Young reminded Polk of the sufferings of the Mormon people at the hands of the United States, he avoided a list of government slights and misdeeds. He reminded the president that the Mormons were citizens driven from their own country. Perhaps most important to Polk, as he read Young's letter, was the specificity with which Young explained where the Mormons planned to settle. Young removed the ambiguity surrounding the Mormons' final destination and assured the president that the Mormons would settle "in a location west of the Rocky Mountains, and within the basin of the Great Salt Lake or the Bear river valley."³⁰⁹

Young's letter reveals the uncertain nature of the US/Mormon relations even after the raising of the Mormon Battalion. Young sought to build upon the overtures Polk seemed to offer the Mormons in his decision to use Mormon troops in the War. He felt it was important to reassure Polk that the Mormon company was going to settle in the desolate area surrounding the Great Salt Lake. Young appears to have anticipated Polk's fears that the Mormons might settle in areas that were desired by other emigrants to the area and thus precipitate a conflict and destabilize the region. Young explained that the Mormons were willfully choosing isolation. This position followed the logic that had been offered by many, including Young, that the

³⁰⁸ Wilford Woodruff explained in his journal that the purpose of the letter was to both send the President "expressions of gratitude for his kindness" and speak against former Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs who was reportedly endeavoring to become governor of either California or Oregon. Wilford Woodruff, *Journal*, August 7, 1846, 65.

³⁰⁹ Brigham Young to James K. Polk, August 9, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 137. Capitalization as in original.

Mormon people would only be free from difficulties if they settled in a remote area removed from existing Gentile settlers. He wrote that the Great Basin was a place “where good living would require hard labor, and consequently will be coveted by no other people, while it is surrounded by so unpopulous yet fertile country.”³¹⁰ The fact that the Great Basin would not be attractive to future settlers was as important in Young’s view as the lack of white settlements in the area when the Mormons first arrived.³¹¹

Young’s letter also demonstrated the effectiveness of Polk’s diplomacy with the Mormons. He explained that Jesse Little had arrived and “assured us of the personal friendship of the President.” Thomas Kane’s elucidation of Polk’s good intentions had furthered convinced Young and other leaders. Young waxed poetic about Polk’s friendship, expressing that “your Excellency’s kind feelings have kindled up a spark in our hearts which had been well nigh extinguished.” Rather than the love of liberty, it was the ember of “love of a country or rulers, from whom previously we had received but little save neglect or persecution.”³¹² Young’s letter demonstrated to Polk that his calling of the Battalion combined with Kane’s secret mission had prevented the Mormons from joining the nation’s enemies. In fact, Mormons were now praising his leadership and proclaiming that they had “not been disappointed in [their] anticipations of a brighter day and a more righteous administration.”³¹³

Aside from solidifying their perceived alliance with Polk, Young’s letter had two main purposes: legitimizing the right of Mormons to settle on Indian lands in Iowa while they prepared for their exodus and asserting Mormon intentions to immediately seek a territorial

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Historian Ronald K. Esplin has argued with convincing evidence that “it is doubtful that Brigham Young ever considered the pacific Coast as the location for the new headquarters.” Isolation was key to the decision of where to settle. See Ronald K. Esplin, “‘A Place Prepared’: Joseph, Brigham and the Quest for Promised Refuge in the West”, *Journal of Mormon History*, No. 9 (1982), 99.

³¹² Brigham Young to James K. Polk, August 9, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 138.

³¹³ Brigham Young to James K. Polk, August 9, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 140.

government upon reaching Upper California. There would be no time for British tampering with the Mormons if Young's affirmations proved true. He assured Polk that "as soon as we are settled in the Great Basin we design to Petition the United States for a territorial government bounded on the north by the British and the south by the Mexican dominions, and the East and West by the summits of the Rocky and Cascade Mountains."³¹⁴

This was the first outline of a massive territory, encompassing most of the land that would eventually be ceded by Mexico. If Polk still thought the Mormons disloyal and untrustworthy, the size of the proposed Mormon territory could cause more alarm. Still, the description of the territorial boundaries seemed to preclude the prized coastal portion of California where several hundred American settlers already lived. The boundaries suggested by Young encompassed nearly all of the territory under the direct control of Native American groups rather than white settlers. However, Polk's trepidation of the Mormons appeared to be greatly reduced during the remainder of 1846. He no longer mentioned the Mormons in his diary which instead was consumed with the other matters of the war and the eventual peace settlement. And, rather than the face-to-face meetings Little enjoyed during the early crisis, Polk communicated to the Mormons through his surrogates, which was the more natural course of executive power.

For some of the apostles, the new relations with the United States did not change their view of the divine condemnation which the nation was under for its crimes against Mormonism. Orson Hyde still excoriated the United States in an August letter for "whipping and murdering the innocent and unprotected!! They have oppressed the poor – they have robbed the widow and

³¹⁴ Ibid, 140. Young also denounced Lilburn Boggs, the former governor of Missouri, as Kane had delivered a rumor that Boggs might be made governor of Oregon or California.

the fatherless by driving them from their homes or compelling them to take one fourth their value, and that in rags and trash too.”³¹⁵

Mormon Efforts to Enlist English Support

Colonel Kane still played an integral part as a liaison between the government and the isolated Mormon encampment on the Missouri. Writing letters to his eminent father, Kane sought to influence the cabinet officers in Washington. The Mormons felt they had reached an understanding with the United States government, even if they were still uneasy about the prospects of such amity continuing.

Young’s uneasiness with the current Mormon/US relations manifested itself within days of the departure of the Mormon Battalion. He did not want to rely solely on the continuing beneficence of the United States government. Before Thomas Kane left the Mormon encampment, Young explained to him the intention of not only establishing a territorial government in Mexican territory, but also of establishing another Mormon enclave, particularly for the British converts to the faith on remote Vancouver Island. Kane was aware that the settlement with Great Britain would likely leave the island in British hands, and Mormon intentions to colonize the island with British backing was just the type of “tampering” Kane was secretly trying to prevent. He made efforts to dissuade the Mormon leaders from attempting a Vancouver colony. He cautioned Young that late diplomatic news from the American ambassador in England, Louis McLane, held that Lord Aberdeen intended to organize the colonization of Vancouver Island himself.³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Orson Hyde to Joseph L. Heywood, August 16, 1846, Joseph L. Heywood Collection, MS 9480, folder 4.

³¹⁶ MHC, August 7, 1846, Vol. 16, 137.

However, Young knew that he had his own operatives in England working that angle of settlement. Even while the Mormons were protesting their total loyalty to the United States government, several apostles were attempting to gain British sanction to found a Mormon colony on Vancouver Island. The large island off of the coast of British Oregon had long been discussed as a possible point of settlement for the Mormons after they determined to leave the United States. Congressman Stephen Douglas had suggested the site in 1845. And though Young had assured Polk that his group was determined to settle in the wastelands of California, he contemplated a simultaneous colonization in British territory even after he had determined that the main body would inhabit the Great Basin. While Young clearly hoped to spread Mormon influence over a greater geographical area, other factors might also have played into his position on Vancouver Island. Tensions between the US and Great Britain were so pronounced that Young may also have sought the settlement as a way to diffuse the American anti-English sentiment that too easily became anti-Mormon. If fewer English Mormons joined the main body in California, then arguments about the Mormons' "foreignness", or ties to foreign countries, would have less fodder. In any case, the Mormons had learned through tough experience to keep their options open in case violence followed them even to the deserts of the Great Basin.

In fact, just as Polk displayed dualism in his dealings with the Mormons, the Mormons were willing to deal simultaneously with both the United States and Great Britain to gain an advantage. Seeking to take advantage of economic instability in Britain, Mormons there wrote the Queen and Parliament with an emigration plan. After citing the dire circumstances of many of the citizens of Great Britain, they proposed government subsidized immigration of British Mormons to the western coast of North America.

The Mormon immigration plan had a two-pronged justification. First, it argued for the economic benefits of removing from the nation some of its destitute poor, who happened to be recent Mormon converts. The second justification sought the same leverage from foreign affairs as did Little in his June 1 letter to President Polk. The Mormons reminded the British government of the standoff between the United States and Britain over Vancouver and Oregon. The Mormons raised fears of continued American interference in British-claimed territory despite the fact that it was “fully settled and determined that Vancouver’s Island, with a large portion of the Oregon territory, on the Great Pacific Coast belongs to [her] Majesty’s Empire.”³¹⁷

In fact the document showed a great deal of clarity and understanding of Britain’s relationship with the United States and of current US policy. The petitioners explained that they were aware, as they were sure the Queen herself was, that the “government of the United States is doing much to favour the settlement of its territories on its Western Coast, and even to settle territory now in dispute between it and the Republic of Mexico.” The United States, they warned, was not only expanding its territory, but solidifying its gains by quickly populating the new areas. Experience had shown that merely staking a claim to a territory was not enough to withstand the hordes of American settlers waiting in the wings, something that the British were all too aware of when they rejected the Mexican proposal to assume land grants in California as payments of Mexican debt. As such, the Mormon petitioners urged the Queen to look to “British interests in the region, and adopt timely and precautionary measures to maintain a balance of power.” Showing an economic understanding that was as deep as their understanding of the territorial dispute between the two nations, the Mormon petitioners explained that securing Vancouver and the western coasts of North America was crucial to securing the future trade with

³¹⁷ “Memorial to the Queen for the Relief, by Emigration, of a Portion of Her Poor Subjects”, *Millennial Star*, No. 8, November 20, 1846, 142.

China.³¹⁸ The Mormons in Britain attempted to raise governmental fears of American expansionism at the very time that Mormons in America were taking part in the American expansion.

Not only were the petitioners asking for passage to western North America, they hoped the Crown would also provide them gratis land grants, claiming the American government offered similar incentives. The list of signatures to the petition was an impressive 168 feet long. Like many petitions to Parliament, however, little attention was paid to the Mormon scheme. British authorities, facing a growing economic crisis, probably saw the Mormon proposal as one that was quite impractical. If the British government did facilitate Mormon movement to Vancouver, it would then be faced with the same difficulties in dealing with the independent-minded Mormons as were the Americans. Most importantly, the British government had already come to terms with the Americans over Oregon Territory, and with the United States waging a war against Mexico, Britain had little fear of American tampering in the area, at least in the short term.

The immigration proposal did not go completely unnoticed by parliamentarians. John Bowring, a prominent reformer in the House of Commons, took the time to respond to the idea. His answer was pragmatic and frank. He did “not know any resources from which the government would be disposed to vote public money for the emigration to North Western America.” Part of the problem was that the Mormon petitions had vastly underestimated the costs involved in such a state-sanctioned migration. Bowring reminded them that it would not be sufficient for Britain to “pay the amount of transport alone, for pauper immigrants. There must be provision made for their existence, and that is an expensive matter.” He did not disagree with the arguments the Mormons made that the interests of Britain would be served by such

³¹⁸ Ibid.

immigration, just that the government could not possibly support it as an expenditure. He closed by assuring the Mormons that “voluntary and self-supported emigration I should be glad to see encouraged towards Oregon and Vancouver’s Island, and I would expect such emigrants as had pecuniary resources at their disposal would meet with encouragement from the government.”³¹⁹

Despite the fact the scheme had very little chance of success, Mormon leaders continued to hope that Parliament would endorse the plan, especially as the famine worsened in 1847. Franklin Richards wrote home to his cousin Thomas Bullock, explaining the terrible situation of the starving. Speaking of the suffering of people, he told Bullock, “I will not attempt to describe they are past description.” He explained that the two groups not leaving were the “Landlords, & entirely destitute” because those who had some means were trying to emigrate away from the growing human calamity. While he felt deep empathy for the Irish, Richards could not help but point out the hypocrisy of the United States government and its farcical attitude in the realm of foreign relations. He noted the shallowness of supposed philanthropy of the United States in sending some aid to the Irish “while the United States tacitly witness the Saints driven out to the wilderness for their Heavenly Father to feed with Quails...” While dozens of Mormons, American citizens, had died from hunger, fatigue, exposure, and disease that accompanied their forced removal from the nation, no supposed lovers of the downtrodden had sent aid to them. But “the Eastern States Can raise a few hundred thousand dollars & Congress two ships for the relief of the Irish.” Richards’ bitterness about the United States sending aid to help foreigners while refusing to aid its Mormon citizens reveals the way in which Mormon leaders, and by extension the average Mormons who heard their sermons, began to see themselves. The calling of the Mormon Battalion had not erased the bitterness which was still directed at the national government. The Mormons were not just being treated as foreigners, who had no claim to the

³¹⁹ John Bowring to Thomas D. Brown, February 13, 1847. Printed in the *Millennial Star*, No. 5, March 1, 1847, 75.

protections of the enshrined Constitution, they were, in Richards' mind, being treated even worse. Such lines of thought alienated the Mormons in their own minds, making them feel like foreigners to the United States.³²⁰

Yet the Mormons were frustrated with the British government as well for its failure to act on the proposed immigration plan. Richards wrote, "The Queen has not yet granted the Petition of the Saints and Parliament (as well as Congress) has got the way of spending time talking much and saying or doing but little indeed[.]" Mixing pragmatism with his faith in the power of the Almighty, Richards surmised of the various world governments, including the United States, "I do not apprehend that the nations of the Earth will do much to build up Zion except what the Lord causes them to do instantly or through motives of self interest..."³²¹

The attempt and subsequent failure to enlist English support for the emigration of the British Mormons also demonstrated the international aspect of Mormonism. Though the apostles leading the Mormons in England were in fact Americans, their nationalism was not such that it sought to uphold US interests. The episode in fact lends some credence to the arguments made by critics who were skeptical of Mormon patriotism. Though this attempt to elicit British support did not immediately come to light, it was cited as evidence of Mormon treason to the United States government by a disaffected Mormon in early 1852.³²² The Mormons were in fact willing to pledge their allegiance to a foreign nation, settle far flung British territories, and in particular argue that such settlement should be done to counterbalance growing American strength in western North America. Just as Polk's policy toward the Mormons had been

³²⁰ Franklin D. Richards to Thomas Bullock, April 11, 1847, Thomas Bullock Papers, MS d 2794, Folder 1, LDS Church Archives. Emphasis as in original.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² "Mormonism Exposed, by an Ex- Mormon", *The New York Times*, February 14, 1852.

formulated to serve the interests of the United States the nation, Mormon policy toward the United States had been calculated to serve the interests of the Mormons and their church.

From the Mormon perspective, such willingness to have British converts to the faith pledge support to the British government was not incompatible with Mormon religious doctrine. Joseph Smith had written a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Democrat* in 1841 which outlined the history of the Mormon Church and highlighted its key points of doctrine. Smith had maintained that one of those key points of doctrine was that Mormons believed “in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring and sustaining the law.” Mormonism’s critics would call this article of faith in to question time and again, especially with Smith’s order of the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor* newspaper in 1844. However, though Mormonism had been founded in America, it was a multi-national religion. The Mormon leaders were well aware of the anti-British sentiments that both the American government and American people in general tightly held. One historian has even characterized the feelings between the two countries as they battled for control of the Western Hemisphere as sometimes amounting to “hatred.”³²³ The colonization of Vancouver Island for the purpose of both expanding Mormonism’s foothold in North America and diffusing further accusations of “foreignness” would have served a double-purpose for the Mormon Church.

Because the British chose not to endorse the Mormons’ immigration petition and there was no press coverage of the attempt in the United States, the episode did not add to Mormon/US tensions. Yet the Mormon attempts to enlist the British government’s support did demonstrate the basic mistrust the Mormons had of the intentions of the American politicians and leaders. This enmity, while abated to some degree by the 1846 actions of the Polk administration, still

³²³ Kathleen Burk, *Old World New World: Great Britain and America from the Beginning* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008), 268.

existed. Mormon misgivings of the federal government were still real enough that an alliance with a foreign power was still a possibility. The Mormons proved desperate to find state support, as Little had intimated to Polk in the first letter he had sent him.

Early Tensions over Mormon Settlements

One reason Mormon/US relations began to sour quickly after the Battalion agreement was the continued vacillation on the part of the federal government over whether the Mormons indeed had the right to temporarily settle on Indian lands in Iowa and across the Missouri River in what would become Nebraska territory. Captain Allen had assured the Mormons that they were welcome to stay on Indian land. It was under this pretext Brigham Young had sent the Mormon Battalion off to fight, but the recalcitrant attitude of the federal Indian agents to Mormon settlement there became increasingly problematic.

The first signs of renewed federal friction worried Thomas Kane, still on his mission to prevent foreign intrigue among the Mormons. Severely ill, Kane was confined to the Mormon camp in western Iowa and unable to make a direct report to Washington. Nevertheless, he endeavored to champion the Mormon cause through the offices of his father. Having been asked by his son if he would discuss the matter with the President, Judge John Kintzing Kane dutifully acted on Thomas' request, while encouraging Thomas' present course of action for trying to aid "the sufferers for conscience' sake."³²⁴ In a subsequent letter, the elder Kane explained that he had met with President Polk and "talked over the whole subject. He [Polk] assured me definitely that the Mormons should not be disturbed."³²⁵ But John Kane had forwarded, along with his

³²⁴ John Kintzing Kane to Thomas L. Kane, August 18, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 230.

³²⁵ John Kintzing Kane to Thomas L. Kane, September 4, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 231.

reassuring letter that explained the disposition of Polk relative to the Mormons, another which was a copy of the orders sent from the War Department's Office of Indian Affairs to the federal Indian agent in charge of the lands where the Mormons were camped. It was not so congenial.

The orders explained that both the President and the Secretary of War had discussed the matter of the Mormon settlement on Indian lands. More accurately, these were actually *former* Indian lands as the Pottwattamie had only recently sold their land rights to the federal government in the area where the Mormons were camped. Far from the reassuring "they should not be disturbed" rhetoric that Polk volunteered to Judge Kane, this letter instead warily eyed the Mormons' interactions with the Native American tribes in the area. Though the Mormons had secured agreements from the local tribes for the right to settle, the War Department viewed such agreements with distrust, hardly surprising given the way Polk himself actually viewed the Mormons and the reasons he gave the War Department for raising Mormon troops in the first place. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, former Democratic congressman William Medill, told the local Indian agent, Thomas H. Harvey, that the actual "intentions" of the Mormons were "not entirely satisfactorily set forth." Medill explained that the federal government did not intend to interfere with the Mormons, if, with a very mistrustful caveat, "their continuance is really to be temporary." Under no circumstances were the Mormons to be allowed to consider Iowa their new home.³²⁶

Medill enumerated the problems an extended Mormon stay would present. Chief among them was that, as Medill coldly explained, the Mormons' friendly relations with the Native Americans "would interfere with the removal of the Indians." Any delay in removing the Indians from Iowa Territory would meet with the strongest remonstrance by the non-Mormon

³²⁶ William Medill to Thomas H. Harvey, September 2, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 232.

citizens in Iowa. Settlers were anxious to appropriate the newly acquired lands, some of which the Mormons were now encamped upon.³²⁷

As in Illinois, partisan politics were a key factor in Mormon/US interactions in Iowa. Relations between Iowa Territory and the federal government were not to be jeopardized on account of the Mormons. Iowans had been contemplating statehood since 1839, but bitter partisan political divides had prevented statehood resolutions from being ratified. Whigs had actively worked against statehood throughout the early 1840's because they were a distinct minority in the territory. As long as Iowa remained a territory rather than a state, the Whigs could offset the Democratic majority in the popularly elected territorial legislature with the presidentially appointed judicial and executive branches. A Whig president could appoint a Whig governor, who, along with Whig judges, could blunt the legislative powers of the territorial assembly. Statehood, however, would remove this parliamentary trick from the Whig arsenal, and they would be forced to stomach the anti-bank legislation that was already being agitated by Democrats in Iowa. The Whigs hoped that through delay they could strengthen their organization in the territory. And, because US senators were elected by the state legislatures, they hoped to prevent yet another state from entering the Union that would simply send two more Democrats to that body with which they would have to contend on national issues.³²⁸

Of course, their delaying tactics counted on Henry Clay winning the 1844 election. When he surprisingly lost, only attempts to redraw the potential state's boundaries had delayed the statehood application. Following Clay's defeat a Democrat was chosen for the governorship in the subsequent bestowal of political spoils and he insured that statehood could no longer be delayed. The Whigs were not about to give up Iowa without a fight however and Whig

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 32.

congressman from Connecticut, Truman Smith, dispatched both men and funds to Iowa to try to ensure that Whigs carried the state. Smith, whom historian Michael Holt has called the “closest equivalent for a national party chairman” for his time, planned to use speakers and expensive print media to sway Iowan voters.³²⁹ Having lost the statehood contest, the Whigs eventually came to view the Mormons as a large potential voting bloc if they could be swayed from their Democratic tradition. Rivalries between Democrats and Whigs dominated US relations with Mormons in Iowa.

Given the fact that state political strife was one of the primary causes of the Mormons’ ouster from Illinois, the Mormons represented an unstable and unknown quantity in Iowa. In Illinois they had switched party allegiances in almost every election. And, hatred for the Mormons was such that no doubt national Democrats feared that Polk’s apparent amiability with the sect might be used by conspiring Whigs to tarnish the image of the Democrats in Iowa. This was an accusation that could be made with all the more verve and believability given the Mormons’ conciliatory relations with the Native Americans in the western portion of what was to be the new state. If Polk had hoped to keep the calling of the Mormon Battalion a quieter affair to avoid possible political backlash, these expectations were dashed when the *National Intelligencer*, perhaps the most widely read newspaper in Washington D.C. and by this time a solidly Whig daily, published a report of the calling of the Mormons to arms in late July.³³⁰ Political considerations were part of the reasoning behind the insistence of the federal government that the Mormons needed to leave Iowa Territory quickly.

Though it was never the Mormons’ intention to settle there permanently, this letter from the federal Commissioner of Indian Affairs, conveying the sentiments as it did from both

³²⁹ Holt, 237.

³³⁰ “Late from the Mormon Camp”, *National Intelligencer*, July 22, 1846.

President Polk and Secretary of War William Marcy, demonstrated that the Mormon decision to offer service in the Mexican War had not dissipated federal apprehension of the sect. The Mormons' willingness to send troops into the Mexican War had not in and of itself proven Mormon loyalty to the nation. If the formerly Indian land was to be opened to US citizens as settlers, then could not the Mormons be those selfsame settlers? The answer, at least in the minds of Polk and his surrogates, was demonstrably in the negative. Under no circumstances were the Mormons to be allowed a permanent settlement in Iowa territory. And, in fact, the longer they stayed the greater problems they would cause, especially in relation to the local Native American tribes. Thus, Commissioner Medill stressed about the Mormons in closing his letter to Thomas Harvey the need to "impress upon them the necessity of leaving at the earliest moment" that circumstances would allow them.³³¹

Polk, Medill, and Marcy had such apprehensions of the Mormons' congenial relations with the Native Americans increase when the Mormons sent another letter in early September to President Polk concerning Mormon/Indian relations via the then-departing Thomas Kane. In late August, the Mormons had entered into direct negotiations with the local Omaha and Oto tribes, on whose territory the Mormons wished to winter on the west side of the Missouri River.

Mormon/Indian Relations

On August 28, the Mormons met with a large body of Omaha Indians and their elderly chief, Big Elk. Young and the Mormons explained that the shortage of manpower, occasioned by the removal of the Mormon Battalion necessitated a temporary halt to the westward advance of the people. They cordially asked the Omahas if they could enter into friendly relations with

³³¹ William Medill to Thomas H. Harvey, September 2, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 233.

them and be allowed to raise crops, cut timber, and temporarily settle on their land.³³² In return, the Mormons offered, according to Wilford Woodruff, to “do some work for them[,] make them a field & fix there guns.”³³³ Mormon promises of friendship were coupled with offers of mechanical assistance and instructions on farming practices.

The Omaha chief explained to the Mormons that his people were in a very tough situation. The land they were living on was also claimed by the Otos, and the local tribes were vigorously competing with the Omaha for control of the area. Big Elk expressed to the Mormons his fear of the “great father at Washington” if he allowed the Mormons to stay on his land. He blamed the federal government for much of the Omahas’ problems because the Indian agents ordered them to make no military retaliations against the other tribes that were encroaching on Omaha land. He was willing to accommodate the Mormons and allow them to live on their land, provided they did not consequently kill all of the local game or cut down all of the trees. Big Elk hoped the Mormons would also open store in order to trade “cheap goods” between the two groups. Still, Big Elk’s words were laced with pessimism and fatalism. He told the Mormons in short order he was sure they too would have to sell their land and move elsewhere, but until then he promised, “While you are among us as brethren, we will be brethren to you.”³³⁴

Following the meeting, Brigham Young dispatched the letter outlining the arrangement to President Polk. It explained that the Omahas had agreed to a temporary Mormon settlement. In return, the Omahas asked that the Mormons might help them in a variety of ways. They asked if the Mormons would help them with their corn harvest, “assist them in building houses, making fields, and doing some blacksmithing.” They also asked the Mormons if they would “teach some

³³² MHC, August 28, 1846, Vol. 16, 204.

³³³ Woodruff, *Journal*, Vol. 3, 72, sic.

³³⁴ MHC, August 28, 1846, Vol. 16, 205.

of their young men” these skills so the Omaha could continue them in the future. No mention was made that the blacksmithing skills offered by the Mormons primarily centered on making and fixing firearms for the Omahas.³³⁵

The letter to Polk further explained that trading with the Indians and maintaining friendly relations would help them both in acquiring skins to replenish their clothing and in hiring Indian laborers to help them herd their livestock. This need, Young reminded Polk, existed because of the diminished manpower in camp due to the departure of 500 men in the Mormon Battalion. In any case, the Mormons stood ready and willing to provide “all that information in mechanism and farming” to the Indians and asked for Polk’s approval of the course they had already undertaken.³³⁶

In offering such “civilizing” services and instruction to the Native Americans in the area, Young appeared to not have a grasp on what American policy really was concerning Indian groups. While the rhetoric emanating from Washington might have encouraged Native American adoption of the “civilized” practices of farming and homesteading, in reality federal policy was much more concerned with appropriating Indian lands. And, paradoxically, improvements made upon Indian lands such as fenced fields and organized homesteads made the Indian attachment to the land much greater and therefore decreased their willingness to sell these lands to the federal government. The government’s abject hypocrisy in this regard had only recently been made tragically manifest in the removal of the “Five Civilized Tribes” from Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and the surrounding areas in order to open the way up for white settlement. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 had empowered the Jackson administration to relocate Indian tribes to new tribal “homelands” with the tragic results that

³³⁵ Brigham Young to James K. Polk, September 7, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 239.

³³⁶ Brigham Young to James K. Polk, September 7, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 240.

accompanied the Cherokee Trail of Tears. The fact that the Cherokee had attempted a level of assimilation into the surrounding white culture by adopting white farming practices, slavery, Christianity in a large measure, similar legal systems, and a written language and constitution, “only heightened [Georgia’s] resolve to remove them.”³³⁷ Conversely, it only strengthened the determination of the Cherokee not to leave the ancestral lands that they had now improved in some cases with plantation style, slave-labor agriculture.

The very Potawatomie tribal group that the Mormons had negotiated with initially in order to gain permission to reside in Iowa Territory had themselves acquiesced to a removal from Iowa to lands in Kansas on the consideration of a payout by the federal government in July of 1846. Thomas Harvey had himself been one of the United States’ representatives at the negotiation and signing of this treaty. He understood in practical terms that land improvements made in cooperation with the Mormons only fostered greater Omaha attachment to the land. This would cause greater difficulty when their time for removal came.

Further Tensions and Thomas Kane’s Efforts to Support Mormon Interests

It is not surprising then that Young’s letter to Polk was not greeted with an enthusiastic response. In fact, it received no direct response. And the subsequent communication with the federal Indian agents would continue to test the affirmation that Polk had previously made that he was both a friend to the Mormons and would “exercise all of his power” to help them. In fact, only days after Young’s letter was dispatched to Polk, another harassing and disheartening letter was received, this time it came from the only recently-departed Thomas Kane.

³³⁷ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 323.

In September 1846, Kane left the Mormon encampment and began the return journey to his family in the East. Kane had enjoyed almost unlimited access to the Mormon leaders during the months he camped with the Latter-day Saint sojourners. Prominent Mormon apostles would call Kane both a great man and friend for the remainder of his life. For Kane's part, he even solicited and received a special blessing from John Smith, the patriarch of the Mormon Church and uncle of the murdered Joseph Smith.³³⁸

Kane's purposes for his stay in the Mormon camp and his affinity for the Mormon cause are the subject of some debate. While Mormons, both then and now, venerate him for his selfless devotion to their people's cause,³³⁹ his full intentions have been difficult to discern. As shown in the preceding chapter, Thomas Kane had gone to the camp with secret orders from Polk to mitigate Mormon hostility. Yet Kane's months in the Mormon camp reflect a growing admiration for the sect. Matthew J. Grow has argued in his excellent biographical treatment of Kane that his affinity for the Mormons was a mixture of both his personal aversion to evangelical Christian orthodoxy and his friendship with prominent Mormon leaders and their kindnesses

³³⁸ MHC, September 7, 1846, Vol. 16, 237. A patriarchal blessing is a unique doctrine specific to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The blessing is for the purpose of giving the lineage of the recipient in terms of which tribe of Israel he or she is a descendant. All Mormons believe themselves to be members of a particular tribe of the House of Israel, either through direct descent or through adoption upon their conversion to the sect. The blessing is usually only reserved for members of the faith who are considered to be faithful by Church leaders. Thus, Kane's reception of a patriarchal blessing as a "Gentile" is a singular event and evidences just how fondly Mormon leadership felt toward Kane. Thomas Kane was told he was "of the blood of Ephraim." In addition, the patriarchal blessings often give other pronouncements of promises from God which the recipient might obtain through righteous living. In addition to being promised he would be venerated by generations of Mormons, Kane was told he would be married and have children in the future.

³³⁹ Evidence of the Mormon Church's devotion to Kane is evident in several areas. Gordon B. Hinckley, longtime Apostle and then President of the Mormon Church from 1995 until his death in 2008, called Kane "the great friend of our people in the days of their distress." Another Mormon Apostle and President, former US Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson styled Kane as "a true friend of the Saints in their dire need." In fact, the Mormon Church in 1970 purchased an old Presbyterian chapel which Kane had built at the behest of his aunt in the settlement he founded in Kane, Pennsylvania, roughly 130 miles away from Pittsburgh. Kane settled this area of rural Pennsylvania following his service in the Union Army during the Civil War. Kane was buried in the chapel after his death in 1883. The chapel was renamed Thomas L. Kane Memorial Chapel after the LDS Church purchased it and a large statue of Thomas L. Kane was placed outside. A similar large statue of Kane can be found inside the Utah State Capitol building. See Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Blessings of Family Prayer," *Ensign*, Feb 1991, Ezra Taft Benson, "Civic Standards for the Faithful Saints," *Ensign*, Jul 1972, and the Mormon Historic Sites Registry at <http://www.mormonhistoricsitesregistry.org/USA/pennsylvania/kane/chapel/history.htm>

toward him, especially during his illness. Grow concludes that a “myriad of factors – growing sympathy for the Mormon cause, belief in the Saints’ sincerity, admiration for their community and certain elements of their religion, genuine friendship with Young and other key leaders, gratitude for his treatment during sickness, his own unorthodoxy – cemented Kane’s decision to become the Mormons’ permanent advocate to the nation.”³⁴⁰

Of course, Kane also saw his affiliation with the Mormons as a possible route to fulfill his own personal and professional ambitions. Already his willingness to treat with them had earned him audiences with the president and the most important members of the cabinet and his continued relationship with the Mormons would thrust his name into the national spotlight much more readily than his other ambitions would have done, given his relatively unimportant station. He had advised Elisha after his Polk interview that the pair “must not be meek and lowly if we seek to inherit this earth.”³⁴¹ Kane recognized the Mormons as a group that would indeed require federal negotiations in the future, and he had become the nation’s Mormon specialist.

On his return journey from the Mormon camp, Kane was lobbied by the local sub Indian agent Robert B. Mitchell to pass along a series of instructions to the Mormons, which he had received from Thomas Harvey, his superior. Mitchell treated Kane at this point very much as an ambassador to the Mormons from the United States. Official government communiqués were directed to him with instructions to relate the information to the Mormons and he had been asked

³⁴⁰ Matthew J. Grow, *Liberty to the Downtrodden: Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009), 69. Grow also takes time to examine the claims of his widowed wife, Elizabeth, who, during the period of greatest animosity toward the Mormon religion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries attempted to distance her husband from the Mormons and their religion. At one point Elizabeth railed that her husband was far too intelligent a man to have been deceived into believing Mormon theology. She maintained that “gratitude and pity were his sole incentives.” Grow, 68.

³⁴¹ Thomas L. Kane to Elish[a] Kane, May 29, 1846, Thomas L. Kane Papers, underlining in original.

by the government to keep tabs on the possibly seditious sect by none other than President Polk himself.³⁴²

Because of his continuing poor health and the fact that he felt that Mitchell's indirect way of communicating federal orders to the Mormons indicated a level of contempt and lack of respect, Kane had instructed Mitchell that he should correspond with the Mormons directly rather than through him as an intermediary. But nonetheless, Kane passed along Mitchell's commands. The Mormons were not to "commit any waste of timber" on the lands they were now encamped. And the order of Medill and the War Department was reiterated with emphasis that the Mormon "passage through the land should occupy no longer time than is altogether necessary."³⁴³

Kane was visibly annoyed at what he considered to be needless badgering from the federal officials dealing with the Mormons. Though still ailing from his lingering sickness, he advised the Mormons simply to not pay attention to any such injunctions regarding timber or the timeframe of their departure. True, the orders from Mitchell were coming from Washington, but Kane insisted that he would put all such nonsense to rest when he personally made his case to the president once he reached the nation's capital. He guaranteed them that in just a few weeks they would not receive any more harassing orders or letters from the federal government and its officers.³⁴⁴ Kane's annoyance at the temperament of the federal officials, and his brash instructions to the Mormons to ignore such haranguing messages prove Kane was defensive of his position as mediator and his view that relations with the Mormons were far more important than wasted timber.

³⁴² Woodruff, *Journal*, February 27, 1858, Vol. 5, 172.

³⁴³ Thomas Kane to Brigham Young, September 10, 1846, MHC, September 12, 1846, Vol. 16, 249.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 250.

While the federal Indian agents were busy counting the number of trees felled by the Mormons and stressing upon them the importance of leaving the area quickly, the Mormons were negotiating with the local Indian groups on their own accord. A rash of killings and thefts of Mormon cattle and oxen had led both the Mormons and the Indians to wonder what the next step would be in the escalating tensions. Apparently having had long experience with the retaliation generally meted out by whites when they felt their property threatened, Big Elk, returned to the Mormon encampment October 24 with more than two dozen braves to negotiate with Brigham Young over their mutual grievances. He informed Brigham Young that he knew bad feelings existed between the two groups and the purpose of his visit was to obviate any further problems.

While the Mormons were unhappy about the theft and killings of their sheep and cattle, Big Elk explained that his people had grievances as well resulting from the Mormon settlement. Though the Mormons had lost dozens of livestock to his tribe, he still felt that the Mormons were not owed anything because of the use of timber, land, and the loss of game which had already resulted from the settlement. The loss of game must have been particularly upsetting to Big Elk, as it was the first precondition he had outlined in his agreement to allow Mormon settlement in the meeting held in August. Big Elk explained that the Omaha were a tribe that was coming apart generationally. The younger men were no longer listening to his counsel. No doubt Big Elk had even less control over the group given the staggering rate at which the Omahas were dying from disease. At least according to the Mormon record of the meeting, Big Elk related that half of his village had died in the past month from disease, so many in fact that the tribe had abandoned its plans for a late fall hunt in preparation for winter. In the resulting social disorder, Big Elk's ability to control the young braves was waning quickly. He blamed the "young men"

of his band for committing the depredations and commiserated that they simply would not listen to him and he “could not restrain them.” Big Elk apparently assumed that the Mormons would simply hunt down and shoot the offending Indians when they tried to take the cattle, explaining that the Mormons “were soldiers enough to defend” themselves and their property from thefts. Plus, he added, that “he knew white people were quick tempered” and therefore expected a swift military retribution. He had tried to explain to the younger braves that the Mormons were allies, but the younger Omaha “did not like white people” and believed Big Elk was lying about the goodness of Mormon intentions, a position that was hardly surprising given the record of whites vis-à-vis the Omaha. Yet the meeting ended amicably, with Brigham Young assuring Big Elk that the Mormons “were their friends” and “had no bad feeling to them.” He promised gifts of tobacco, gunpowder, and lead and explained that the Mormons would try to build a stockade to keep the cattle under greater control.³⁴⁵ Young knew that the federal Indian agents were already harassing the Mormons over the Indian lands, and he needed to maintain peace at all costs. As one historian has explained, “Young’s single objective was to live in peace among the Indians.”³⁴⁶

Even as Mormon frustration mounted with local federal authorities, various assurances came from those in higher echelons of government who were continuing to promise their friendship and support. Joseph L. Heywood, one of the men selected as a trustee for the church to sell the remaining Mormon holdings in Nauvoo, including the temple, had encountered Illinois Senator James Semple on a steamship bound for St. Louis where Heywood was hoping to raise money to help the destitute Mormons who had been scattered from their homes. In a long conversation with Heywood, Semple presented himself as a friend to the Mormons and offered

³⁴⁵ MHC, October 24, 1846, Vol. 16, 413-414.

³⁴⁶ Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri: Winter Quarters, 1846-1852* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 91.

“to use his influence” to aid the Mormons in their struggles. It is difficult to believe that Semple, who only months earlier had held the interview with Polk regarding the danger the Mormons presented the country, was now willing to side with the despised sect. More probable is that Semple, like Polk, was more than willing to duplicitously claim Mormon affinity when he had none. Yet Heywood, unaware of Semple’s January meeting with the President, joyfully related the conversation to Young in a letter the latter received in late October.³⁴⁷

On the heels of Heywood’s letter came another which also struck a reassuring chord. Jesse Little had returned back to the eastern states and had once again met with President Polk and also with William Medill as well. Little reported that Polk received him warmly and “had more confidence in our people than when I left him.” Medill too had assured Little that the problems with the Indian agents were simply misunderstandings and “everything will be right.”³⁴⁸

Little had also met with Thomas Kane’s father, Judge John Kintzing Kane, who heartily expressed his thanks for the kind treatment the Mormons had shown his son while he was suffering from severe illness among them. The elder Kane pledged to assist the Mormons in any way he could to help persuade the minds of the great men in Washington. He also commented that the continuing violence in and around Nauvoo perpetrated by the enemies of the Mormons was having the effect of softening the feelings toward the Mormons by politicians in Washington.³⁴⁹

Escalating Confrontations Over Mormon Settlements

³⁴⁷ Joseph L. Heywood to Brigham Young, October 2, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 429.

³⁴⁸ Jesse Little to Brigham Young, October 6, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 429.

³⁴⁹ Jesse Little to Brigham Young, October 6, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 429.

Only a week after Young received these encouraging letters, on November 1 another contentious meeting took place in the Mormon camp with Thomas Harvey, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at Saint Louis. Harvey, along with his sub Indian agent, Robert Mitchell, claimed that the instructions they had received from Washington expressly stated that the Mormons were to be gone from the Indian lands by the spring. Harvey articulated great displeasure that many of the Mormons had moved to the west side of the Missouri River and were now encamped upon the Omaha lands. Harvey reiterated the complaint made by Mitchell through Kane in September that the Mormons were burning timber from the Omaha lands and had no right to do so. While these accusations might have been borne without incident in and of themselves, Harvey followed with a damning question that sparked a spirited response by Young. Harvey had asked the Mormons to explain their “reasons for stopping here.” Young explained that the only reason the Mormons had stopped was the government had called for a large portion of their “most efficient men” to fight in the Mexican War and that Captain Allen had assured the Mormons that in providing the troops they would be allowed to stay where they were due to the resulting lack of manpower. Harvey reportedly responded to this by threatening that the federal government might “remove [the Mormons] this winter.”³⁵⁰ Such a threat, with the staggering implications of loss of life that would accompany it, provoked so curt a response from Young that any pretense to cordiality in the increasingly contentious meeting was dropped. Young flatly stated to the federal agents that the Mormons would “not move from either side of the river.”³⁵¹ Young further made his point that “the government could not and had not power to remove [the Mormons]” that winter. He impressed upon the federal agents that the Mormons “would not

³⁵⁰ Winter Quarters Municipal High Council Records, November 1, 1846, Church Archives, LR 6359 21.

³⁵¹ MHC, November 1, 1846, Vol. 16, 439

be...drove or pushed.”³⁵² Young confidently related his own intelligence that called Harvey’s blustery bluff, that Captain Allen had told him that “the Government had not the power to remove [the Mormons] this winter.”³⁵³ The goodwill on US/Mormon relations seemed to be evaporating rapidly.

In the aftermath of the contentious meeting, Young had a letter dispatched, written by Apostle Willard Richards but under the signature of the president of the High Council, asking for copies of the orders to which both Harvey and Mitchell were referring. Young obviously wanted to know if the agents had received different instructions than the ones he had seen copies of in September through the Kane communications. The letter also explained that much of timber the Mormons were using had in fact been floated down from upriver and the agents were wrong to assume all had come from Indian land. In any case, the Mormons had been using the timber to make “valuable improvements” to the land. The implication that apparently was leveled by Harvey in the November 1 meeting (or at least perceived by Brigham Young) of Mormon disloyalty was answered with briskness and condescension. The letter closed, “Major Harvey may be assured, that if we had not been disposed to act in concert with our native country we should not have enlisted five hundred of our effective men in her service, the only thing which confined us at this point.”³⁵⁴

This time it was Harvey who felt his honor had been challenged. And, receiving the communication and providing copies of the requested orders, he made a concerted effort to prove that his treatment of the Mormons had nothing to do with their particular religion or customs. Rather, Harvey explained, “no white persons are permitted to settle on the lands of the Indians without authority of the Government. Your party being Mormons does not constitute the

³⁵² Winter Quarters Municipal High Council Records, November 1, 1846, Church Archives, LR 6359 21

³⁵³ MHC, November 1, 1846, Vol. 16, 439.

³⁵⁴ Alpheus Cutler to Thomas Harvey, November 3, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 442-443.

objection.” He was merely trying to perform his duties as ordered. Waxing philosophically pious, as had Polk when he initially dealt with the Mormon situation in Illinois, Harvey insisted that in the course of his duty he made decisions irrespective of “sects or parties, and [was] sure that the Government at Washington acts upon the same principle.”³⁵⁵

Both the substantive and ideological content of Harvey’s letter were received poorly in the Mormon camp. Harvey’s underlined statement that the Mormons had not received permission to settle on Indian land was especially frustrating and in the dictated response, the Mormons again reiterated that their Iowa layover was due to their response to the request to raise volunteers for the United States Army. Further, having now seen that the orders Harvey referred to were the same ones already in the Mormons’ possession, the very instructions given to Harvey by Commissioner Medill were used as proof that Harvey was exceeding his authority in demanding that the Mormons leave immediately in the spring or cease cutting down trees to build temporary shelters. While Harvey emphasized the fact that the Mormon settlement was to be temporary and that Mormon intentions were to be questioned, the Mormons particularly invoked Medill’s phraseology that the Mormons were to be spared from being exposed to “much suffering...starvation and death” which would be the inevitable consequence of leaving Winter Quarters at this point in the year. The Mormons could not leave any time soon, especially without the return of the Battalion men, without such suffering as was outlined, the letter reasoned. Young’s response letter, sent again under the signature of the president of the High Council, contained much of Young’s biting sarcasm, as it assured Harvey that “we are more anxious to be off than any people are to have us.” Of the seemingly incessant federal complaints over the Mormon use of timber, the letter declared, “It is true we are building a mud and log city with regular lots and streets...for what? To keep our families from freezing to death this

³⁵⁵ Thomas Harvey to Alpheus Cutler, November 5, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 445.

winter.” Furthermore, the timber was being used to fence fields and build houses, mills, and various other improvements. The Mormons simply assumed, they explained, that such things could be useful to the Omaha after they departed. Or, the letter continued, betraying an understanding of federal intentions toward the Indians despite the professed goal of “protecting” them, the improvements would make the land more valuable to the United States government “should they purchase the land soon, as we anticipate they will.”³⁵⁶

Leaving the particulars with which Harvey was accusing them, the Mormon response letter returned to the discussion of why the Mormons were on Indian land or living on former Indian land in Iowa at all. “Many of our people,” the letter explained, “left their homes in dead winter for the mountains.” The difficult circumstances and travels had compelled the Mormons to “leave some of [their] poor” in Iowa and the calling of the Mormon Battalion had ceased the progress of the most forward elements of the Mormon migration. With Incredulousness the Mormon communiqué asked, “It is well known to you, Sir, and to the U.S. that we have been driven from their borders, and yet have enlisted in her defence, and what can be a greater proof of friendship than for a people to lay down their lives for their country [?]”³⁵⁷ Mormons expressed amazement again and again that the Mormon Battalion had not demonstrated Mormon loyalty to the country.

The Mormons affirmed once again that the “one intention of the camp of Israel...is and has been, to locate west of the Rocky Mountains as soon as it is possible for them to do it, and any man who may have reported to the contrary” was either a fool or a scoundrel. Softening the blow a bit and allowing for the fact that errors were obviously possible given the distance the

³⁵⁶ Alpheus Cutler to Thomas Harvey, November 6, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 447-448.

³⁵⁷ Alpheus Cutler to Thomas Harvey, November 6, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 448.

Mormon camp was from the seat of government, the letter concluded that such a “misunderstanding” could be the result of multiple correspondences.³⁵⁸

The tension created by the meeting and these exchanges never fully dissipated. Harvey felt that Mormons were challenging his authority and thereby the authority of the United States. The Mormons, feeling they had received assurances of their course of action from President Polk, William Medill, and the War Department, believed that Harvey was merely exercising excessive authority due to his dislike of the Latter-day Saints. Of course, Harvey was in a difficult position. His superiors were professing a loyalty and affinity to the Mormons which he knew they did not possess. Harvey was a seasoned and experienced government agent and he knew how to read the orders that questioned the Mormons motives. He knew that the question was more of a statement of belief from Washington that the Mormons’ intentions may not be altogether good in the view of the United States government. And, keenly aware of the political difficulties in Iowa and of removing Indians to open up land to future settlement, Harvey must have felt that his superiors in Washington did not fully comprehend the facts as they stood on the banks of the Missouri more than a thousand miles away.

In truth, though Harvey protested that his actions relating to the Mormons had nothing to do with their religion, his later correspondence betrays that he too, like Senator Semple, Governor Thomas Ford, and President Polk, was affirming no bias while in fact such negative feelings existed. Little more than a year after the heated exchanges took place, Harvey sounded a xenophobic warning to Medill. By this time, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had been ratified by the United States Senate, ending the Mexican War and ceding the Great Basin, the destination of the Mormon émigrés, to the control of the United States. In April 1848 Harvey cautioned Medill, “I would take this occasion to remark that a large portion of the Mormons that

³⁵⁸ Alpheus Cutler to Thomas Harvey, November 6, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 449.

are immigrating into the Indian Country are Englishmen put from their own Country; and probably two thirds of them are unnaturalized persons.” Not only were many of the Mormon migrants hated Englishmen, they were second rate Englishmen who, as Harvey saw it, had been kicked out of their own country. Nearly a year after the first Mormon wagon trains had made their way to the Salt Lake Valley, Harvey still remained skeptical that these new immigrants in fact intended to settle there, though this was affirmed consistently by the Mormons. Furthering his warning he explained, “I strongly fear from their reckless immoral character, and a disposition to acknowledge no government but their Church so called.” If nothing were done about the Mormons, Harvey was sure they would “produce much embarrassment to our government and especially Indian relations.”³⁵⁹

However the Mormons presented a greater threat than merely their immorality or their disloyal allegiance to foreign powers. Not only were they a danger to upset delicate relations with the various Native American groups, Harvey saw the Mormons as martial threats to the United States and its sovereign power in North America. As such, the presence of the Mormons demanded that the United States back up its rights and claims through force of arms. There was simply no other way of ensuring control of the sect for they were too powerful to be controlled “without a strong military force.”³⁶⁰ Mormon allegiance to American republicanism and subservience to governmental institutions were highly questioned by federal officials such as Harvey.

Efforts Made by the Kanes to Resolve the Dispute

³⁵⁹ Thomas H. Harvey to William Medill, April 19, 1848, MS 96, Volume 9, William Clark Papers, Kansas State Historical Society.

³⁶⁰ Thomas H. Harvey to William Medill, April 19, 1848, MS 96, Volume 9, William Clark Papers, Kansas State Historical Society.

The tensions between the local government agents and the Mormon leadership seemed to squander whatever goodwill existed as a result of Polk's earlier artifice. Though the Mormons did not know the contents of the letters Harvey sent back to his superiors, they could certainly discern his enmity toward them. The latest confrontation was such that even several comforting letters from both Thomas Kane and his eminent father did not assuage the disposition that was once again manifested inside of the highest councils of the Mormon hierarchy that the United States federal government was, as it seemed to have always been, an enemy to the Mormon Church.

The younger Kane sent a lengthy letter Brigham Young and included the letter Thomas had just received from his well-connected father concerning the Mormons. Judge John Kane had, at the behest of his importuning son, written to President Polk in late August, 1846, and the president had forwarded the letter to William Medill in the Indian Affairs office with an instruction to reply. On September 3, 1846, after having dispatched the letter a day earlier to Harvey which had been the heart of the contention between Harvey and the Mormons, Medill explained the president's position to the judge, "on the subject of giving permission to a party of Mormons, who are emigrating to the west of the Rocky Mountains, to remain for while and winter...near Council Bluffs where they now are." Polk had, "after a full consideration of the subject in all its hearings...deemed it best to give permission." But only "upon the conditions" outlined in the letter sent to Harvey. After personally vouching for Major Harvey and his skills, Medill closed by including a copy of the same letter he had sent to Harvey the day previously.³⁶¹

This letter to John Kane presents several interesting questions about the intent and motives of Medill and by extension Polk. While it was obviously written to placate the inquiries of the Kanes, Medill did not elaborate on his orders to Harvey at all. One cannot read the Kane

³⁶¹ William Medill to John K. Kane, September 3, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 460.

letter along with the Harvey letter to have a better idea of the intent of Harvey's instructions. However, Medill's very reluctance to elaborate on Polk's instructions could be read to be a deliberate concealment of the true tenor of the orders he sent to Harvey. He did confirm, at least to John Kane, that there were not discussions about removing the Mormons that winter, but perhaps the caveat about certain "conditions" being met had given Harvey the license he felt he needed to make such a threat to the Mormons. Given Polk's actual beliefs that the Mormons were potential threats and enemies of the United States and liable to become agents of a foreign power, it is not surprising that his instructions to Medill would be couched the way that they were, in ambiguous enough terms that the Mormons could see benevolence in them based upon his personal assurances alone.

But Thomas Kane and his father seemed to believe that the Medill correspondence and Thomas' personal interactions with both Harvey and his sub agent Robert Mitchell (whom Thomas Kane claimed to Brigham Young was "pledged to me [Kane] personally") suggested an end to any troubles with the government. Both Kanes manifested a propensity to take at face value, the proffered sentiments of politicians in the higher echelons of government, particularly if they came in the form of a private interview or conversation. Thomas Kane knew that the whole point of his mission was to prevent the alienation of the Mormons. Why would Polk place all of his accomplishments at risk over petty disagreements over Indian Territory? As such, Thomas Kane confidently wrote Brigham Young that the latter need not worry about any future rash orders or pesterings coming from Harvey or Mitchell. In fact, Kane acted surprised that the Medill orders to Harvey included some question of the Mormons' ultimate intentions. To this,

Kane could only surmise that Captain Allen's report, outlining Mormon intentions, had never reached the president in the first place.³⁶²

The receipt of the Kanes' letters must have inspired various emotions in Brigham Young. First and foremost, the fact that they arrived only days after the Mormons' biggest confrontation with Harvey, whom Thomas Kane believed would no longer trouble the Mormons, must have brought Young close to laughter. On a more serious note, a realization that the Kanes were not wielding the influence that either of these Gentiles thought they were or that Mormons hoped they would, must have caused a grave reassessment of the Mormon position vis-à-vis the federal government. The Kanes seemed to be getting the same flowery and reassuring promises that the Mormons themselves were getting. But these promises were proving to be, in reality, quite vague and unsettling.

Mormon Alienation as a Result of Clashes with Federal Authorities in Iowa

Young knew, through his own envoys, that Polk had been kept well apprised that the Mormons intended no permanent settlement in Iowa. Whether the communication from Allen had actually arrived in Washington explaining the purpose of Mormon immigration and the sect's layover in Iowa, was really immaterial. Jesse Little had many months ago explained Mormon migratory intentions to the president. Young himself had written directly to Polk and explained the Mormon intention to settle in the Great Basin. There could be no confusion as to the Mormons' intentions, unless a disbelieving government chose to perceive the Mormons as potential threats rather than martial allies in the Mexican War. Further, Young could have easily wondered why it was, if the government truly saw the Mormons as equal citizens, it would not

³⁶² Thomas L. Kane to Brigham Young, September 22, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 461.

allow them to settle in Iowa in the same fashion as the hundreds of homesteaders headed there each year.

Of course, Young would not have wondered this at all; he was sure the Mormons were being treated as though they were lesser citizens, and the Harvey episode, the Medill letter, and the seeming ambivalence of President Polk to the disquieted situation they were facing on the frontier were simply additional evidences of what the Mormons deemed a disloyalty on the part of the nation's politicians to the ideals of the Constitution. Both federal officers and Mormon leaders at this time, and essentially for decades following the migration, accused one another of precisely the same crime: disloyalty. For the Mormons, the accusation was often couched in terms of disloyalty to the nation's founding documents, such as the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence and the ideals of freedom that were being trampled by unscrupulous politicians. For the federal officials, the Mormons were disloyal to the country and its government, as well as its institutions and culture especially after the polygamy debate took center stage in subsequent years.

Part of the perceived belligerence of the Mormons and of Young himself stemmed from the fact that for the most part, the Mormons refused simply to acquiesce in the face of persecution and accept a role relegated to them that differentiated them from other citizens of the United States. Thus, Harvey could claim he was treating the Mormons as he would any other citizens with respect to Indian Territory, but the Mormons knew full well that the very mention of their faith in relation to his orders suggested otherwise. This also led the Mormons to erroneously perceive slights or persecutions when in fact such did not exist. Their relations with federal, state, and local authorities would lead them to a hypersensitivity of perceived persecutions. While in some cases the result was benign, the end result of this culture of fear and

persecution cultivated by US/Mormon relations would eventually be the horrendous bloodletting at Mountain Meadows.³⁶³

Young determined to present the matter fully to his closest advisors upon receiving the bittersweet Kane letters. Calling a general council of his advisors on November 12, 1846, he bade the men to “be free and speak their minds” about their present prospects and current difficulties. What each man said is not certain, but Brigham Young spoke authoritatively in his prophetic tone, telling the men that he “did foreknow that we should go in safety over the mountains, notwithstanding all the opposition and obstacles government officials & others might interpose.”³⁶⁴ Receiving an affirmative response from his fellow Church leaders, Young confidently related to Charles C. Rich, the leader of the Mormon encampment many miles Iowa in Mt. Pisgah, Iowa, that they had received “a visit” from Major Harvey from the Indian Affairs office. Young related that Harvey “seemed pretty disposed to move us to the East side of the river, but acknowledged that we were too strong for him.” Such insubordination to a duly constituted US authority was something to be proud of rather than secreted, and Young boasted, “We apprehend no difficulty from any thing he can say, having our confidence in a higher power.” As the tenor of the letter was designed to reassure Rich in the difficult circumstances under which he labored away from the main body, Young did not mention that the Mormons were forced to rely solely on the “higher power” because their highly placed friends, the Kanes, seemed to be out of touch with the situation.³⁶⁵ Growing feelings of isolation and neglect were also fostered by the mortality rate in the Mormon encampment.

³⁶³ For the most complete and thorough study of the Mountain Meadows Massacre see Ronald Walker, Richard Turley and Glen Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³⁶⁴ MHC, November 12, 1846, Vol. 16, 462.

³⁶⁵ Brigham Young to Charles C. Rich, November 15, 1846, Charles C. Rich Collection, MS 889, Box 2, Folder 2, LDS Church Archives. Spacing in original.

Mormon Enmity Inspired by Great Suffering in Winter Quarters

Young's belligerence toward Harvey, and his almost mocking tone he took to describe the federal government's inability to move the Mormons despite its threats, should be taken with at least a few grains of salt. If Young treated Harvey and the other federal officials in a flippant way, as though the number of trees felled or where the camp was located was a trivial matter, perhaps it was because of the mortality that had already expressed itself inside the Mormon camp and the deaths that had previously occurred on the march to western Iowa. Most families were eking out an existence, living in tents or temporary, crude shelters that offered little respite from the effects of the elements. For instance, Elizabeth Terry Heward, who related in her diary that her husband John had "dug a cave [in the] bank of Mosquito Creek and covered it with willows and grass for us to live in. It was cold and damp."³⁶⁶ Hundreds of Mormons would eventually die at this remote outpost on the prairie, many from diseases incident to their travel and their exposure to the weather.

For some families, death knocked so often on the door that such hardship is difficult to comprehend. For instance, Stillmon Pond had four of his children die just on the journey to Winter Quarters. While there, four more of his children died, as well as his wife. While fevers and chills took the lives of some, others had much more painful and excruciating deaths from malnutrition which led to scurvy. In the frontier environment, living as they were in tents and crude cabins, the mortality rate for children was very high, and not just among the average Mormon family. Several Mormon leaders experienced great tragedy as their family members, especially young children, suffered and died. Truman Angell, who would eventually be the chief architect of the Salt Lake City Temple, had two daughters and a son die in the Iowa/Winter

³⁶⁶ Elizabeth Terry Heward Autobiography and Journal, July 8, 1846, MS 9666, LDS Church Archives.

Quarters move.³⁶⁷ Erastus Snow, who would two years later become an apostle in the Church, endured the death of his youngest son, Charles Henry Snow, in September.³⁶⁸

The experience of apostle Wilford Woodruff and his wife Phoebe is so poignant that it bears mentioning. In mid October, Woodruff had gone to the forest to chop down trees to help build houses for the camp, the very trees that Harvey was complaining about. Woodruff had been severely injured by a falling tree, which had bounced off of the ground and smashed him up against another tree. With several ribs broken, his sternum smashed, as well as a badly mauled hip, arm, and leg, Woodruff was forced to ride the agonizing two and half miles on his own horse back to camp before he could get aid. He exclaimed in his journal that every step shot pain through him “like an arrow.”³⁶⁹ Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, and Brigham Young gave Woodruff a blessing of healing, common in the Mormon Church, and promised Woodruff “in the name of the Lord he should live.”³⁷⁰

Woodruff was bedridden for nearly three weeks. But only one day after he finally was able to be dressed for the first time, his young 14 month old son, Joseph, became ill. Not only had Phoebe Woodruff spent the past three weeks caring for her badly damaged husband, she had also been feverishly trying to nurse back to health Jane Benbow, an English convert to Mormonism who had been instrumental in providing funds to publish hundreds of hymnals and copies of the Book of Mormon. Wilford recorded that Phoebe used “every exertion” in an attempt to revitalize her health. Now her young toddler was also dangerously ill with a cold that had “settled upon his lungs.” The following excerpts from Wilford’s journal convey the daily torture of watching their young child die:

³⁶⁷ Conrey Bryson, *Winter Quarters* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1986), 72.

³⁶⁸ Erastus Snow, *Journal*, Volume 3, MS 1329, LDS Church Archives, 83.

³⁶⁹ Woodruff, *Journal*, Vol. 3, 94.

³⁷⁰ MHC, October 15, 1846, Vol. 16, 384.

Nov. 5th Joseph is failing. Is dangerously sick

Nov. 6th Joseph is not any better.

Nov. 7th I am daily gaining in strength. But Joseph is failing. I called upon the Elders to administer to him.

Nov. 8th Mrs. Woodruff has to spend her whole time day and night with Joseph as he is in a dangerous situation.

Nov. 9th Joseph is still failing.

Nov. 10th Joseph had the appearance of Dying in the afternoon and evening but revived at about 12 oclock.

Nov. 11th I spent several hours with Joseph. Supposed each moment to be his last but [he] again revived at midnight.

Nov 12th We found our little boy was failing and Could not possibly hold out longer. Every exhortation had been made to make him comfortable And if possible restore him to health but it seemed that He must go. He continued to fail through the day and night. Sister Abbot took the main Charge of him during the night as Mrs. Woodruff[‘s] Strength was mostly exhausted. He had suffered much from convulsions during his sickness but He breathed his last and fell asleep this morning 15 minutes before 6 oclock. And we took his remains to the grave at 4 oclock this afternoon. We truly felt that we were called to make a great sacrifice in the loss of our son Joseph.³⁷¹

Woodruff’s journal was nearly silent for five days before he began again to write extensively again, and it is not surprising that his mood, examining the death and hardship the Mormons were experiencing around him as well as feeling his own loss, was a somber one. Commenting on the struggles around him he wrote, “I have never seen the Latter Day Saints in any situation where they seemed to be passing through greater tribulations or wearing out faster than at the present time.” But the Woodruffs’ difficulties were still not over. Phoebe, who had endured the recent hardships while nearly seven months pregnant, gave birth to a six weeks premature son on December 8, 1846. Recognizing the probable fate of the new young child, Wilford wrote, “The boy was alive smart and active yet we cannot suppose him to live but a short time. We call his name Ezra.”³⁷²

By the next day, his fears were confirmed and Ezra too seemed to be dying. By December 10, the Woodruffs had lost their second young child in less than a month’s time and

³⁷¹ Woodruff, *Journal*, Vol. 3, 94-95. The Manuscript History of the Church also records the death of young Joseph Woodruff, MHC, November 12, 1846, Vol. 16, 462.

³⁷² Woodruff, *Journal*, Vol. 3, 97.

they held a burial service on December 11. The experience left Phoebe in a very low and unhealthy condition, both physically and emotionally exhausted.³⁷³

With such traumas playing out almost daily inside the Mormon camp, one can readily discern why Brigham Young had little patience for Harvey when it seemed the latter was merely nit picking the Mormons' actions to satiate his own personal vehemence for the sect. This lack of patience of course extended to President Polk and the United States government in general. Young never doubted that Polk only needed to say the word and all federal interference would stop. In fact, a prominent Democratic newspaper in the Missouri, also related, though in exaggerated terms, the sufferings of the Mormons, and also concluded that only federal intervention in the form of aid could help avert a human catastrophe and "save many from death." The paper reported that Polk had dispatched a federal official to the area and assumed that the appointee's purpose was "probably with a view of granting them some relief."³⁷⁴ That word, of course, was never given. Polk never intended to give the Mormons any more support than was absolutely necessary to prevent the Mormons from interfering with his territorial ambitions. What concern was it of his if the now-depleted Mormons were suffering in the "wilderness" of the nation? Mitchell and Harvey were merely reading Commissioner Medill's orders as Polk intended them to be read: with a view of apprehension toward the disloyal Mormons then camped on the outskirts of settled United States territory. Willard Richards wrote a lengthy response letter back to Thomas Kane's latest correspondence in which both Harvey and Mitchell were excoriated as men who were conspiring against the Mormons because of their

³⁷³ Woodruff, *Journal*, Vol. 3, 97.

³⁷⁴ "The Starving Mormons", *Harrisburg Argus*, September 30, 1846, quoting from the *St. Louis Republican*.

faith, disabusing, though in kind terms, Kane of his belief that Mitchell was “pledged to him” and that Harvey was no longer going to cause any trouble.³⁷⁵

Growing Political and Social Opposition in the East

In late November, Orson Spencer, a former Baptist minister who had converted to Mormonism and was soon to serve as President of the British Mission, visited Thomas Kane at his home in Philadelphia. By this time, the sickly Kane had finally made his return voyage to his Pennsylvania home. He had on several occasions believed he was going to die and had urged his father to take up the Mormons’ cause if death silenced his efforts. His return to the East had been an eye-opening experience as the sheer magnitude of anti-Mormonism shocked his senses. Spencer related of Kane that he had “expressed his utter astonishment at the irrational and sensitive conduct of distinguished men both politically and religiously in opposition to our welfare. Even many that hung solely on his favor politically had presumed to condemn and revile almost beyond his endurance.”³⁷⁶

In fact, Spencer related that a large contingent from the Presbyterian Church, Kane’s chosen denomination, had made a special visit to the Colonel in order to ascertain why he was so strenuously and vociferously fighting for the Mormon cause. Kane had not just been active trying to persuade the political leaders in Washington to view the Mormons in the light he saw them, he had been publishing “feelers” in several major newspapers, in an attempt to gauge what was really the public opinion toward the Mormons and to see if any others would step up and join his cause in defending them. No less a great religious leader than Dr. Robert J

³⁷⁵ Willard Richards to Thomas L Kane, November 15, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 470-474.

³⁷⁶ Orson Spencer to Brigham Young, November 26, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 535-536. Spelling as in original.

Breckenridge, a recognized ecclesiastical leader of the Old School Presbyterians, made a personal visit to Kane's home, along with "two thirds of the Trustees of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church."³⁷⁷

Breckenridge had been instrumental in previous years in helping build churches and spread Presbyterianism to the more rural parts of Maryland.³⁷⁸ He had been appointed president of the recently-founded Jefferson College in Pennsylvania, a small Presbyterian school which would eventually merge with another to become Washington & Jefferson College. A native Kentuckian, Breckenridge often defended the practice of slavery as not constituting a sin, but was a zealous unionist and when the secession came virulently attacked those presbyters that wished to support the rebellion. His nephew, John C. Breckenridge would challenge Lincoln for the presidency in the bitter election of 1860 and then become an ardent secessionist. Robert Breckenridge showed no mercy for the rebellious clergymen following the war and was one of the main voices calling for a loyalty oath as a requirement for membership in the Kentucky Synod of the Presbyterian Church, not wanting the Church to simply "take all these rebels back again." His refusal to move on this point caused a schism in the Kentucky Synod in 1866.³⁷⁹

Meeting with Kane in November 1846, Breckenridge demanded, "What in the name of God are you doing! Do you mean to uphold the Mormon religion?" Kane had stood his ground against his religious leaders, but this encounter must have further convinced him that the

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 536.

³⁷⁸ Thomas Scharf, *A History of Baltimore City and County from the Earliest Period to the Present Day: Including Biographical Sketches of Their Representative Men* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), 548.

³⁷⁹ *The New York Times*, "The Presbyterian Assemblies: The Appeal of Dr. Breckenridge-The Reunion Committees", May 29, 1866. Biographical information of Robert Breckenridge can be found in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's and Eugene D. Genovese's *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge, New York : Cambridge University Press, 2005), 778-779.

Mormons were losing in the court of public opinion and not just with the political leaders in Washington.³⁸⁰

Kane had written to Polk upon his return to the East and communicated his desire to have a “short conversation with you [Polk] on subjects connected with my journey West of the Missouri.”³⁸¹ In an effort to alleviate the ongoing conflicts with the local Indian agents, Kane had had at some point, whether in this meeting or later, suggested to Washington the creation of another local sub Indian agency to deal with the local Indians that would be staffed by Mormons, and headed by Young, thereby eliminating both the harassing oversight of Mitchell and Harvey and removing from the Mormons from the necessity of having to ask government agents before they made any agreement with the Indians in the matters of trade and commerce. This suggestion was rejected out of hand. In addition, Kane had been confronted by several congressmen from the Northwestern states who had decried the Mormons and their continued presence. These congressmen raised the accusation once again that the Mormons did not really intend to move out of the country but instead to “loiter near the bluffs and not go over the mountains at all.” This “fearful apprehension” was a main source of difficulty in Kane’s defense of the Mormons. These congressmen were almost frantic in their insistence that the Mormons leave the nation immediately. Such was their outcry that even Kane had stressed to Spencer in the visit that the Mormons needed to not give even the slightest cause for these politicians to think such an accusation had merit.³⁸²

This letter added to the conclusions in the Mormon camp that were already being drawn about the actual level of amity that the federal government manifested toward the Mormons. Where Kane had once been the federal representative who was certain he could set things right if

³⁸⁰ Orson Spencer to Brigham Young, November 26, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 536.

³⁸¹ Thomas L. Kane to James K Polk, October 28, 1846, James K. Polk Papers.

³⁸² Orson Spencer to Brigham Young, November 26, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 537.

only he had a chance to explain the Mormon cause, he was now just a courageous lone voice in a wilderness of anti-Mormon sentiment that Spencer styled as the “politico-religious Sanhedrin of the nation.” Kane and Jesse Little had once been the bearers of glad tidings about the good offices of the Polk administration and its relationship toward the Mormons. Now they appeared more to be the pleaders for mercy from federal officials. Kane had ceased believing that simple explanation would sway the course of federal action as right-thinking men understood the Mormon position. Political realities had come to the fore and now Kane concluded, “the best method of operating upon the Cabinet is through the press and the conversion of public opinion.” Given the public animosity toward the Mormons, this effort by Kane was one that seemed to be without much hope of success. Certainly Brigham Young, who had long experience with the effects public opinion, could only see such a response from Kane as one that was doomed to failure. The hopes Kane, Little, and even Young himself had placed in the government changing its hostile attitude toward the sect had now been demonstrated as futile, and, the Polk administration’s pretenses to the contrary notwithstanding, it was clear that the United States government had taken and maintained a decidedly anti-Mormon position, despite the raising of Mormon troops to fight in the ongoing war with Mexico.³⁸³

Spencer’s letter closed with his thoughts concerning Kane and the nation as a whole. Lionizing the stalwart defender of the Mormons, Spencer explained that he felt God was speaking through Thomas Kane “to this wicked nation.” His feelings about the United States were fully expressed in his closing paragraphs to Brigham Young. He wrote, “I deeply realize how difficult it is to lead the church safely out of this murderous nation; my daily prayer and faith, however, is that God will enable you to do it.”³⁸⁴

³⁸³ Orson Spencer to Brigham Young, November 26, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 536.

³⁸⁴ Orson Spencer to Brigham Young, November 26, 1846, MHC, Vol. 16, 539.

And, “do it” Young did, whether it was God who enabled him to do so or merely his own charismatic, tireless, and uncompromising leadership. Over the winter he busily readied the advanced pioneer parties to cross the plains and settle in the Salt Lake Valley and chastised vocally the dissenting voices in the Mormon contingent. The initial teams were designed to be small, fast, and strong, with the goal of both bettering the road for the thousands who would follow and quickly getting in a crop in the new western soil before the growing season was cut short by the harsh winters. Most of the “Battalion Women”, wives of those who had gone off to fight under Polk’s false pretenses, remained behind Iowa in the hopes that their husbands would be released from service and return to help guide their families across the treacherous prairie.

Salt Lake City and the Resumption of Mormon Hostility to the United States

Young’s advance party of emigrants left Winter Quarters in early April. Making rapid progress amid fairly good weather and without many families to slow them down, the first Mormon pioneer companies began arriving in the Salt Lake Valley of the Great Basin in late July. The advance group wasted no time plowing fields, planting seeds, damming streams, and laying out the schematics of a future city. But the streams were not the only things busily being dam(n)ed. In a meeting held on July 28th, it was clear that Young no longer believed that Polk had ever had the Mormons’ best interests at heart, if, which is questionable, Young ever fully believed this in the first place.

After discussing the affairs of the future city, laying out lots for the proposed temple, the city blocks, residential areas, and even open spaces for recreation, Young began to preach to the assembled group about the trials the Saints had suffered while they were yet in the United States.

The leaders of the bloodthirsty mobs and the local officials who aided them would be “eternally damned.” But Young was clear that the injury to the Mormons was simply a series of local resentments that had boiled over into mob violence. He directly indicted the national leaders as well, and not just for their inaction as the Mormons were driven from the country. As Woodruff recorded of the speech, Young “also said all the governors & Presidents of the U.S.A Had rejected all our petitions from first to last. That when the Saints were driven from Illinois & perrish as it were on the Prairies then President Polk sends *for a draft of* 500 men to go into the Army.” Even though Little had endeavored to lobby for the raising of just such a battalion, the past several months of federal opposition and recalcitrance toward the Mormons appears to have permanently altered Young’s opinion of Polk and what his real intentions were in the raising of Mormon troops. While Young knew the men were not formally drafted into the military, he argued that the Mormons had little choice in whether or not to comply with the request from the government. He opined, “If the Brethren had not gone they would have made war upon us & the Gov of Mo would have been ordered not to have let us Cross the Missouri.” Young’s sentence upon Polk for his nefarious intentions with the Mormons was simple: “Polk would be damned for this act.” Polk would not be alone in his damnation, as Young continued that “many of the government men” would also be damned. In fact, Woodruff recorded a chilling account in which Young’s fiery indignation even led him to exclaim “if they ever sent any men to interfere with us here they shall have their throats cut & sent to Hell.”³⁸⁵

Young’s strong rhetoric, as seditious as it sounds, was meant for a very small audience. It was not published or distributed, nor was it intended to be a printed broadside against the government. Most of the men present at the meeting made little comment about it at all, and none gave the detail recorded in Wilford Woodruff’s journal. Those who commented on the

³⁸⁵ Woodruff, *Journal*, July 28, 1847, Vol. 3, 240-241.

meeting, such as Apostle George A. Smith, simply remarked that Young had given “some good teaching” without providing details.³⁸⁶ It is important to remember that in condemning James Polk and the United States for the expulsion of the Mormons and the failure to prevent the murder of Joseph Smith, Young was restating the beliefs that most Mormons had already held when the first federal officers had ridden into camp looking for Mormon volunteers. It had been difficult for most Mormons to accept the supposedly good offices of the federal government back in June of 1846. Even in Young’s inner circles, men like Woodruff, had initially recoiled, smelling some kind of trick up the federal government’s sleeve. Thus, perhaps Young felt the need to now explain why it was that he had undergone a period of *détente* with the federal authorities, and had even publically praised the Polk administration and had defended the call for troops. It had been Young who had personally led the recruiting drive for the United States Army. His explanation, according to Woodruff’s account, was that “the raising of the Battalion was [for] our temporal Salvation at the time.”³⁸⁷ For Young’s part, he simply reported that in his speech he had “reviewed the persecutions of the Saints.”³⁸⁸

However, Mormons not present for the diatribe would come to share many of the same feelings. When Elizabeth Terry Heward remembered the calling of the battalion, something she learned of only days before she moved into her muddy cave carved into the bank of Mosquito Creek, her bitterness was unrestrained:

On July 4th we met Bros. Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards, who were going back to Pisgah to get volunteers to go to California in the United States Army to fight the Spaniards. Yes, my heart aches to write it. After they had burned the houses and robbed the Saints of almost all they possessed, they drove them into the wilderness at the point of a bayonet amongst the wild savages on the western prairies and desert; yes, I repeat, after the wicked had done all this, instead of the President of the US raising up and avenging our

³⁸⁶ George A Smith Papers, July 28, 1847, Page 356, Box 1, Folder 2, MS 1322, Church Archives.

³⁸⁷ Woodruff, *Journal*, July 28, 1847, Vol. 3, 241.

³⁸⁸ MHC, July 28, 1847, Vol. 17, 103.

wrongs, he sent men after us calling for five hundred of our men to go into the US service and as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints never had transgressed any but commanded they yield to this call, also these five hundred men left wives and children without houses or provisions to perish with cold and at [the] mercy of the wild Indians, to go and secure [for] their vile persecutors, who had driven them from the lands of their nativity endeared by the graves of their fathers, who had suffered and bled by the side of General Washington when he fought and obtained freedom from the British oppression and formed a Constitution and pursuits of happiness with liberty to worship god according to the dictates of their own consciences, yet, the Saints have suffered all this because they have dared to believe that the Lord has spoken from the heavens again and revealed his will concerning men on the earth and also sent a Holy Angel with the gospel and the priesthood which he conferred upon Joseph Smith without which no one could be saved.³⁸⁹

Heward was not alone in her feelings. Most Mormons viewed the calling of the Mormon Battalion as a final, parting insult from the nation that had expectorated them.

One biographer of the life of Thomas L. Kane has argued that this period in Mormon history, the period following the murder of Joseph Smith and the expulsion of the Mormons from the country, and prior to the full disclosure of the Mormons' ultimately damning practice of polygamy, (roughly 1846-1852) a moment of contingency occurred "in which a possible compromise between Mormons and the nation seemed conceivable."³⁹⁰ Kane had been and would continue to operate upon this middle ground, hoping that he could lobby enough free-thinking men to the Mormon cause to offset the demagoguery that inevitably surrounded the sect. The Mormons were American citizens, but they were unsavory citizens who superstitiously clung to an avowedly idiotic and evil religion in the eyes of most Americans.

However, following the interactions of the late fall and early winter of 1846 between Mormon leaders and local federal agents as well as national figures such as President Polk, William Marcy, and William Medill, such an opportunity to "compromise" effectively

³⁸⁹ Elizabeth Terry Heward Autobiography and Journal, 16-17, MS 9666, LDS Church Archives.

³⁹⁰ Grow, 72.

evaporated very quickly. Rather, in the space of a few short months, the Mormons had gone from sending praises and declarations of fealty to President Polk “for his kindness” toward the Mormons to regarding both the United States and President Polk as enemies once again of the Church. When he summed up the year 1846 in his diary, Wilford Woodruff wrote that the Mormons had “been rejected by the gentiles on this land or continent even the land of Joseph. And the gentiles have shed the blood of the Prophets and patriarchs JOSEPH & HIRAM And others and have sought the lives of the Apostles and Saints and have driven us out of their midst and thereby have rejected the Kingdom of God with the keys, oracles, & revelations thereof which we have taken with us.”³⁹¹ Woodruff had reaffirmed his position that the United States had rejected the truth by its willingness to allow the Mormons to be driven out. The brief thaw in Mormon/US relations which accompanied by the enlistment of the Mormon Battalion had ended for him by January of 1847.

The Mormons were never static in their belief that the United States was the enemy of the Church. Indeed, they seemed, as the following chapters will demonstrate, almost desperate to gain approbation and acceptance of federal authorities whenever it seemed a hand was extended. And, no doubt, many in the echelons of the federal government hoped that, now removed from the country to a barren and seemingly forbidding country, the Mormons would no longer be the problem they once had been previously.

Over the space of the next several years, thousands of Mormons, many of them newly converted British immigrants, would follow in the footsteps of the first Mormon emigrant column and settle in the Great Basin. At the same time, this territory would diplomatically pass from nominal Mexican control, into the realm of the United States following the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in early 1848. Though Young hoped the remoteness of the area

³⁹¹ Wilford Woodruff, *Journal*, Vol. 3, 106.

would allow the Mormons a period of peace during which they could quietly build their envisioned idyllic community, the subsequent debate over the status of the newly acquired territories would thrust the Mormons and their newly-founded settlement directly into the national limelight once again. Polk's successor, Zachary Taylor, would have to make a decision similar to that of his predecessor upon same question: What was to be done with the Mormons? Yet while Polk dealt with the Mormon question in light of the possible assailment of foreign powers, Taylor attempted to deal with the Mormon problem in the face of a much more volatile and real threat, one that originated within the suddenly fracturing and divided republic and that seemed for a time to trump even the deep-seated anti-Mormon domestic and foreign policies that were legacies of the Polk administration.

Chapter 6: “Every Saint, Mongrel or Whole Blood...”: American Animosity Toward the Mormons and the Mormon Battle for Public Opinion

The settlement in Mexico placed the Mormons in an unstable international situation. They had moved the headquarters of their church from the edges of US territory into an area in which Mexico had de jure control, the US claimed military control, and the Mormons and Native Americans groups possessed de facto control. Their promised land lay at the shores of a salty inland sea, to them reminiscent of the Dead Sea in Canaan. Their “Moses” had led them out of the American Egypt, away from persecutions and calumny, and through the wilderness and to a place where the Mormons believed they would be safe from their tormentors. Many were relieved at having moved far enough away from the potential mob violence from non-Mormons whom they called Gentiles. Escaping the corrupt United States set many Mormon minds at ease. For example, Hosea Stout expressed relief at the end of “this long and tedious journey from the land of our enemies. & I feel free and happy that I have escaped from their midst.”³⁹²

While many Mormons had escaped “the land of their enemies”, thousands more lived within the United States, particularly in western Iowa. The Mormons had two centers of power for several years. In the Salt Lake Valley, in territory seized from Mexico but yet not formally ceded by treaty, Brigham Young worked to establish a new Zion in the power vacuum created by the war. Even after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo officially transferred the territory to the United States in 1848, the Mormons in the Great Basin would go years without formal US government organization. In the absence of outside organization and power, Young and the Mormon Church readily exerted their authority over Mormon and Gentile alike. As he had in the unorganized lands in Iowa, Young simply authorized local church leaders to handle both

³⁹² Hosea Stout, Journal, September 22, 1848, Vol. 4, 43. Hosea Stout Papers, MS 8332, LDS Church Archives.

temporal and spiritual matters. There were no US envoys, Indian Agents, or military forts in the Great Basin, only a few isolated and scattered trading posts along the route to Salt Lake. In this environment, the Mormons happily wielded and exercised power without any government intervention.

While the Great Basin Mormons had found a brief respite from national governments in their new home, the Mormons in Iowa found themselves again reminded of the fact that they were a class apart from their fellow citizens. Nominally, they were American citizens. But in actuality their fellow Americans no more regarded them as true Americans than did the United States regard Mexican claims to Alta California. The parting shot from the nation would be yet another demonstration to the Mormons that the laws of the United States would only be selectively applied when it came to defending their rights. Their anti-Mormon opponents were further confirmed in their belief that Mormons were foreigners, traitors, and blasphemers which belied any claim to American citizenship and rights.

Young only stayed a few short months in the Mormons' new mountain home before he made the traverse back across the plains to Winter Quarters and the Mormon settlements on the Missouri. By August 26, 1847 Young and several other leading Mormons had left Salt Lake. Along the way he learned that the migration to the Rocky Mountains was well underway, as nine separate pioneer companies, totally over 550 wagons, were already nearing the new Mormon colony after having covered much of the distance in the past two months. Over the course of their travels back, several happy reunions with the westward-heading pioneer companies occurred.

Young's leadership and organizational skills were more clearly displayed with the movement to the Rocky Mountains than they had been in Iowa. The Mormons had been able to

dodge death with much greater alacrity while moving on the trail than they had while in Winter Quarters. Only four people in all were listed as fatalities in the crossing of the plains to this point, a fact that no doubt attributed to the “joy & hilarity” in their midst when Young’s returning band encountered each of the several pioneer companies. The returning group made much better time than it had made on the incoming journey, with each man mounted and the wagons mostly empty. Though for a time, Young and his group were faced with an unexpected circumstance that put them all on foot.

After reaching the Sweetwater River, Young and his group met up with the final company of pioneers led by Jedediah M. Grant and Willard Snow on September 8, 1847. Though this group had avoided many human casualties, it was greatly struggling for want of stock animals and horses. A stampede had cost the group over forty head of cattle and a week’s worth of futile searching. Worse still, on the first night following their joy-filled reunion, an Indian raid had driven off another 49 horses and mules, crippling the capacity of the final emigrating company to carry the wagons over the mountains.³⁹³ Snow was already falling heavily at the South Pass, despite it being only early September. Young, faced with the reality that without enough horses and pack animals the Grant and Snow companies might make much slower progress and fall victim to an early snowstorm, improvised. He instructed his returning company to give all of their horses to the beleaguered westward-bound travelers. With an air of good humored sarcasm in the face of this complication, Young recorded, “After seeing the whole of J.M. Grants 100 on the road to the valley, at 9 a.m. I called on my council and all returning brethren, except the teamsters, to take a walk with me to Winter Quarters.” This invitation was

³⁹³ Erastus Snow, Journal, MS 1329, Box 1, Vol. 4, LDS Church Archives, 108.

accepted that the now mostly foot bound company set out to walk the nearly 900 miles back to the Mormon Camp on the Missouri.³⁹⁴

Brigham Young and Commodore Stockton

It was in this context that Young once again encountered authorities of the United States government. When the party reached Fort Laramie, Commodore Robert F. Stockton, invited Young to dine with him. Stockton was a seasoned naval veteran, having fought in the War of 1812 as but a young teenager. Afterward he saw service fighting pirates in Algeria as well as accepting a call, with the backing of the Department of the Navy, by the American Colonization Society, to find a more suitable place for the resettlement of American blacks under the supposedly auspicious plan of the ACS.³⁹⁵

Stockton had participated in the conquest of California, securing both San Diego and, with General Stephen Watts Kearny's help, Los Angeles. As such Stockton should have been returning to a hero's welcome in the East. However, after the end of effective Mexican/*Californio* resistance, he had become embroiled in a nasty power struggle between John C. Fremont, Kearny, and himself. The Mexican forces in California having surrendered to Fremont, Stockton appointed Fremont the military governor of the province. Kearny protested as Fremont had not been given orders to even participate in the conquest of California, let alone govern it afterward. Fremont's incursion into California at precisely the time of the outbreak of war had been propitious, but not sanctioned by the federal government. Kearny's orders allowed him to raise troops from the Americans living in California when he arrived. He believed these

³⁹⁴ MHC, September 10, 1847, Vol. 17, 114.

³⁹⁵ *A Sketch of the Life of Com. Robert F. Stockton* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856), 40-41.

orders gave him authority over both Fremont and Stockton. Perhaps Stockton thought, knowing Fremont's father-in-law to be the powerful Missouri Senator, Thomas Hart Benton, that backing Fremont in the dispute was the shrewdest move politically. However, if this was his gamble it backfired horribly. Kearny had received orders from Washington, confirming his superior status in regard to rank and his right to organize the captured territory, and Stockton was eventually humiliated as a result, while Fremont would be court-martialed for his brash insubordination.³⁹⁶ Following this debacle, Stockton began the overland journey back to the East with a small group of other men June 20, 1847.

Stockton had, within the past eighteen months, had several encounters with the Mormons. It was Stockton's Pacific Fleet which Amos Kendall had threatened would stop Samuel Brannan's Cape Horn-rounding *Brooklyn* were the Mormons to attempt to settle in California without agreeing to Kendall's and Benson's land grab scheme. While the *Brooklyn* had encountered Stockton's force during a stop in Hawaii, Stockton had merely provided intelligence to Brannan and his fellow travelers that a state of war existed between the United States and Mexico. The Mormon Battalion had also been a part of Stockton's command in San Diego once that group completed its grueling march through the Arizona desert.

Before Young's company had arrived at Fort Laramie, Jesse Little, who had left Salt Lake at the same time as Young but had gone ahead of the main group and was already the fort, learned of the loss of horses of the pioneers by recognizing two of the animals which the Indians had brought to the fort to trade. Identifying the horses as those belonging to his friends, Little obtained them and then tried to learn more about where they had come from. Further inquiry confirmed that Brigham Young's company no longer had the necessary animals. Fearing that

³⁹⁶ While Stockton's Fremont gambit in California may have failed, the result of the court martial of Fremont certainly validated any thoughts that Stockton may have had about Fremont's well-connected political ties. Though Fremont was found guilty, his father-in-law, Senator Thomas Hart Benton, had the conviction thrown out.

Young's return group "had been very badly crippled & perhaps unable to continue [their] journey", Little adroitly obtained some more horses and pack animals from other travelers at the fort and went out to find Young's group and bring them in. Unfortunately, Little took a different route than the one Young's company was traveling, and the two caravans had missed one another. At one point, Little's relief group encountered a large force of what they believed to be Sioux Indians and a standoff ensued. Commodore Stockton's returning group had arrived on the scene and, at least in the Mormons' view of events, the Indians had withdrawn as a result. The combined group had travelled back to Fort Laramie, where Young's company was now waiting for them.³⁹⁷

Not only had Stockton rendered this service, he invited Young and Heber C. Kimball to dine with him at the fort on September 26. What the topic of discussion was at the table is not known, but Stockton's aid to Little and his gracious gesture toward Young no doubt presented the Mormon leader with the stark contrast of United States officials when compared to those he had last dealt with on the banks of the Missouri River. Young would have learned, if he had not already from other returning battalion members, that the Salt Lake Valley where the Mormons had so recently settled, was now no longer considered a militarily contested territory, as the Mexican forces in Alta California, mostly *Californios*, had agreed to lay down their arms in January. Mexico had never exerted anything but nominal control over the Great Basin at any rate; thus the Mormons had not feared that that conflict would spill over into their desolate mountains. However, the news that the fighting in the settled, western portions of California had come to a close made the potential acquisition of the whole of California by the United States a most probable eventuality for which Young would have to now reckon. In fact, though neither Stockton nor Young could have known at the time, Winfield Scott had just completed his

³⁹⁷ Erastus Snow, Journal, MS 1329, Box 1, Vol. 4, LDS Church Archives, 111-113.

conquest of the Mexican capital and the drawn-out and complicated negotiations for a peace settlement were at least tentatively underway.

One can speculate as well that perhaps the dejected Stockton, returning home as he was in disgrace and blaming General Kearny for his troubles, might have enlightened the Mormon leader about the special orders Kearny had been given concerning the Mormon Battalion. The Mormons were not to make up even half of his force for security reasons and the fact that they had been enlisted at all had been clearly justified as a means to prevent Mormon rebellion, not to quell Mexican resistance. Well-versed in the suffering of the Mormon Battalion during their arduous march, such information would have no doubt soured Young even more toward the administration and the United States government in general.³⁹⁸

Another California adventurer met up with the Mormons only a few days later bearing news that also could have easily been unsettling to the Mormon leadership. Joseph Walker was a tough frontiersman who had more than a decade earlier explored the Great Basin and blazed a path to California through the Sierra Nevadas along the Humboldt River, and had recently served as a guide to that country for the famous John C. Fremont expedition. He encountered the Mormon company as it struggled back to Winter Quarters. Wilford Woodruff recorded that Walker had brought news that the Mexican War was still ongoing and that 500 federal troops were going to be stationed near the Mormon camp at Winter Quarters, with the ostensible purpose of building forts to protect the overland emigration route to Oregon and California. Woodruff, and no doubt Young also, viewed this rationale dubiously.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁸ Two historians have noted of the Mormon Battalion that it had encountered so many difficulties along the march to San Diego that by the time it arrived "...these starving men...were not likely to awe anyone, whether restive *californios* or insolent naval commanders." David H. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *The Mexican War* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006), 105.

³⁹⁹ Woodruff, *Journal*, October 7, 1847, Vol. 3, 281.

While historians can only speculate upon what information Stockton revealed to Young about the government's attitude toward the Mormons, it is clear that by the time Young returned to Winter Quarters, his opinion of federal officials and their relations to the Mormons had fallen even more. Matters were not helped by the continuing insistence of the federal Indian agents that the Mormons vacate the lands they were settled on in Indian Territory. Young had already made the determination to vacate Winter Quarters in the coming year and have the remaining Saints, those who unable to make the journey to Salt Lake, move back to the east side of the Missouri River. Yet even in this decision, which should have been welcomed by the pestering government agents, Young found frustration as one agent wrote him in early January of 1848 to prohibit him and his people from disassembling the cabins they had built on the west side of the river and moving them to the east side of the river onto the former Pottawattamie lands in Iowa.⁴⁰⁰

Whether Young's feelings toward the federal government were due to the information he had received from returning Battalion members of the government's neglect of their provisions, his Stockton interview, the relations between the Indian agents and Mormons in Iowa and Winter Quarters during his absence and upon his return, Walker's new information about federal troops being stationed in the heart of the Mormon camp, or the aggregate combination of several of the preceding facts, Young was confirmed in his belief of the animosity and mistrust of the federal officials toward the Mormons. Young stated with incredulity to a large gathering of other Church leaders in Winter Quarters that "the government officials were looking on us more eagerly than they had in...Missouri."⁴⁰¹ This was a bold conclusion given the fact that while in

⁴⁰⁰ MHC, January, 1848, Vol. 18, 3. This entry encompassed the first 15 days of January 1848 without notation as to when particular events occurred in that period.

⁴⁰¹ MHC, November 15, 1847, Vol. 17, 124.

Missouri the Mormons had eventually been driven by Missouri militia from the state as a result of the Extermination Order so infamous among the Mormons.

Thomas Kane and the Quest for the Territory of Deseret

Despite such feelings, Young was not contemplating a separatist stance for the Mormons. News was arriving daily of the events of the Mexican War. Young and other Mormons soon learned that Scott's Mexico City campaign had terminated in the successful, though bloody, occupation of that city. Still, the news accounts contained "no prospects of peace."⁴⁰² Despite this, there is really no indication that Young and the Mormons ever expected any other outcome than the eventual one, which brought all of California, including the Mormon settlement in the Great Basin, under the now outstretched wings of the American eagle. And while Young was passionate and insistent about the federal government's nefarious intent toward the Mormons, he was nothing if not a pragmatist on most issues. The Mormons did not seek separation from the United States, were not collaborating with a foreign power, and given the lack of support from Great Britain, at this point had no intention to do so. In fact, the primary question that dominated the Mormons' interaction with the United States involved whether the Mormons should opt for a territorial or state government in the newly settled area.

Thomas Kane, the stalwart ambassador of Mormonism in the East, had authored a letter in April of 1847, prior to the initial pioneer company's departure, in which he urged the Mormons to take care with the signatures on a territorial petition that they should be busily preparing. Providing them a text with which to form such a petition, the Mormons were to stress that the petitioners were "male citizens of the United States." Kane outlined the boundaries of

⁴⁰² Woodruff, *Journal*, October 30, 1847, Vol. 3, 288.

the proposed territory, a mammoth outlay that would have encompassed most of the land which was still a year away from being obtained with the termination of the war and the acquisition of the Mexican Cession. The proposed territory was to stretch from the Sierra Nevada mountain range on West to the boundaries of Santa Fe on the East. The area would reach to the Salmon River in the North and improbably extend as far south as “the Southern boundary of the United States.”⁴⁰³ Not only did Brigham Young approve the territorial dimensions, he urged Kane in February of 1848 after his return to Winter Quarters to use his political connections to press for a territorial organization along the lines of a petition that Kane himself would draft. Young hoped he would “agitate the subject in the halls of Congress.”⁴⁰⁴

While such an expansive territory appears almost ridiculous to modern observers, Kane thought that the inclusiveness of the territory, especially its southern boundary, would actually give the Mormons a better chance of a successful application. “On account of the peculiarity of our Mexican relations”, Kane reasoned, a Mormon territory ambiguously pushing the boundaries to wherever the US government saw fit to extend them following the war would quickly help the Americans organize and solidify the occupation of the largely desolate area.⁴⁰⁵ It is also entirely possible that Kane had his own motivations for carving out such a large territory for the Mormons to establish.

Though Kane’s biographer is relatively uncertain at what point he became an opponent of the expansion of slavery in the United States, within 18 months of penning this letter to Willard Richards he would be the keynote speaker at conference in Philadelphia of the newly-formed

⁴⁰³ Thomas L Kane to Willard Richards, April 25, 1847, Willard Richards Papers, MS 1490, Box 4, Folder 2, LDS Church Archives. A notation on the letter suggests it was received in August.

⁴⁰⁴ MHC, February 12, 1848, Vol. 18, 6-7. Young also requested that Kane one again ask for permission to stay on the Omaha territory and to forward a petition for the establishment of a post office located in the Mormon settlements in Iowa.

⁴⁰⁵ Thomas L Kane to Willard Richards, April 25, 1847, Willard Richards Papers, MS 1490, Box 4, Folder 2, LDS Church Archives.

Free Soil Party. Kane hoped to rally antislavery Democrats like himself to oppose the spread of slavery into the territories acquired from Mexico. Eventually he would form an alliance with none other than Pennsylvania congressman David Wilmot, whose famous introduction of the Wilmot Proviso in the early stages of the war had ignited vigorous and contentious debate. The two sought to organize the resistance in their home state. The Wilmot Proviso would have barred slavery from any territory acquired from Mexico in the war. The Proviso, which Wilmot attempted to add to an early appropriations bill for the Mexican War in August of 1846, had more than anything else sparked the sectional tensions between Southern Democrats and not only the members of the Whig Party that were already opposed to the war, but Northern Democrats who feared that the war was unleashing the “Slave Power Conspiracy” from the territorial limitations which had doomed slavery to a certain death in the United States.⁴⁰⁶ It eventually led to a reorganizing of party loyalties that would give birth to not only the Free Soil Party, but eventually the Republican Party. North-South sectionalism took several steps toward party codification with the arguments over the Proviso.⁴⁰⁷

Perhaps even at this early juncture, with the war still raging in Mexico, though California and New Mexico were at least tepidly secured, Kane sought to use the Mormons to further his antislavery aims. The Mormon emigrants to the Mexican territories were almost universally bereft of slaveholders, though there were a few prominent Mormons hailing from the southern states who would in fact bring their slaves with them to the Great Basin. Most Mormons were either from northern, non-slaveholding states in the US or, as their critics so often pointed out, recent immigrants of the fantastically abolitionist lower classes in Great Britain. It did not take a logical leap to assume that the new territory would be generally opposed to the expansion of

⁴⁰⁶ Grow, 96-98.

⁴⁰⁷ Wilentz, 600-601.

slavery and that resulting states would most probably appeal for admission without slavery protected in their various constitutions. At any rate, as loyal to the Mormons as Kane was, he certainly did not think that aiding them in their territorial petition would potentially expand American slavery, as slavery was an issue he would eventually even break with his own father over (with whom he was quite close) in a long and very public controversy over the latter's various enforcements of the Fugitive Slave Act.⁴⁰⁸ As will be demonstrated later, the idea of creating a mammoth territory or state to settle the slavery question was not just one that was entertained by Kane. Eventually the White House would suggest a plan that was even more radical with this same goal in mind. Of course, for those who regarded the Mormons as land-hungry, dangerous, imperialists vying with the United States for control of the territory, the borders which Kane proposed and the Mormons endorsed would simply add more fuel to the fires of anti-Mormonism in America, as the overreach the proposed state/territory comprised was clearly obvious.

Negative Views of Mormons in the Press

Along with his efforts to prepare a territorial petition for the new Mormon settlement, Kane had much more ambitiously undertaken a two part media campaign to both alter the oppressively negative image of Mormons held by most Americans and to raise money from the philanthropically-minded in behalf of the suffering poor among them. Kane's early efforts to enlist support in the Mormon cause had been so frustrated by the animosity toward the sect that he believed only a media blitz in the Eastern papers, and appeals to the reform-minded would soften the view of the Mormons in the nation.

⁴⁰⁸ Grow, 118-119.

The fact such animosity was palpable despite the service of the Mormon Battalion was highlighted by various newspaper accounts of the Mormon Battalion and the Mormons throughout 1847. Some rumors mocked the misguided nature and miscalculation of the Mormon leaders, such as one that claimed one of the westward bound Mormon pioneer companies had been so poorly prepared they had died by the dozens of starvation and exposure and had even resorted to the barbarity of cannibalism. Where such rumors came from one can only wonder, especially given the fact that the first wave of migration to the Great Basin was actually remarkably free from fatalities. Yet the paper reported that 53 out of a total 60 had perished and the seven survivors had only “been kept alive by eating the dead bodies.” Cannibalism seemed the logical next step for a group so wholly considered outside the realm of real civilization. Even more telling of public imagination of Mormons was the heading under which such rumors were reported: “A Few Foreign Items.” News of the Mormons’ migration was squeezed between reports of the King of Denmark buying bread for the poor and a famine in Madeira.⁴⁰⁹ Whatever the Mormons thought of themselves, most Americans decidedly considered them to be a foreign group, to be viewed with suspicion if not disgust and rancor.

St. Louis newspapers reported in May 1847 yet another rumor, the type of which had become quite routine at this point, especially in Missouri. The paper related that the Mormons in western Iowa had perpetrated a murder of several Oregon-bound immigrants in Indian Territory, robbing and killing all but two who escaped with their lives. The rumor was brought to St. Louis by a traveler who claimed to have heard the story from two of the survivors. Despite the dubious third hand account, such articles readily found place in the larger newspapers and were reprinted

⁴⁰⁹ “A Few Foreign Items”, *American Freeman*, June 23, 1847. The article cited unnamed St. Louis newspapers as the source of the report.

in smaller ones throughout the nation, this particular one under the damning title “Mormon Murders.”⁴¹⁰

More problematic than rumors of Mormon violence against Oregon-bound immigrants, were the ones that claimed the Mormons were a direct threat to the foreign policy interests of the nation itself. In fact, in July 1847, at the same time Brigham Young’s small advance party was busily laying out streets and a temple site upon their arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, a fantastic rumor swept papers throughout the nation regarding the allegedly traitorous Mormons. The anti-slavery *Journal of Commerce*, founded in New York by wealthy abolitionist brothers Lewis and Arthur Tappan, as well as Samuel Morse, reported through their Washington correspondent that President Polk’s fears concerning the Mormons a year earlier had come to fruition. The report was that “intelligence had been received that the Mormon regiment and Mormon settlers, in California, have risen and rebelled against the American government...taken possession of the country, and established an independent government of their own.” A Pennsylvania newspaper was among the many inclined to believe the report because it was known that prior to the Mexican War the Mormons had “designed to establish an empire in California, and taken some steps toward the enterprise.”⁴¹¹

Papers as far west as Milwaukee reported the rumor. The Mormons, it appeared, had indeed thrown “off their allegiance to the United States, and were intent upon setting up a republic for themselves in their new region.” One editor was inclined to believe the report because of Mormon history and distinctiveness. He explained:

⁴¹⁰ “Mormon Murders” *St. Louis Reveille*, May 27, 1847. Reprinted in the *Sandusky Clarion*, June 15, 1847. Most rural papers merely borrowed the majority of their stories from the larger newspapers based in the major cities. Thus, national news was very commonly framed, albeit in politically charged terms depending upon the affiliation of the paper, in the nation’s larger cities, as the smaller towns and rural papers possessed neither the means nor the staff to have field reporters. The larger papers, in effect, served the purposes that news services such as the Associated Press and Reuters serve at present.

⁴¹¹ *The Star and Banner*, July 30, 1847, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

I have no means whatever of judging of the probability of this rumor , but certainly, in view of the treatment experienced by the Mormons while in the United States they can bear no kindly remembrance to our people or government – and having arms in their hands, and finding themselves far off from the home authority – it does not seem at all improbable, that acting at once from ambition and from revenge, they may have seized the favorable moment when the American forces in California – few at best – were scattered on different points, to revolt from our stand and set up for themselves.⁴¹²

The editor's statement and the coverage of this rumor are particularly telling of the way Mormons were viewed by the public. Not only were Americans willing to readily accept that the Mormons, despite the fact they had a battalion of troops fighting for the nation in the ongoing Mexican War, were a traitorous group, there was a clear distinction made between the Mormons and "Americans." Thus, the rebellion occurred when the "American forces" were dissipated, excluding the Mormons from the national label. It was also very revealing that the editor of the *Sentinel and Gazette* did not dispute that the Mormons had received ill-treatment while still within the borders of the nation. The "revenge" he postulated that they might be seeking, was explained and justified to some degree. Americans consistently recognized Mormons as outside of realm of what constituted being an American, and thus Mormons were viewed as easily swayed by foreign powers, rebellious against the authority of the United States, and desperate to create their own "empire" in the midst of North America.

Rumors of Mormon atrocity had staying power. Weeks after the powerful Democratic Party mouthpiece, the *Washington Union*, had debunked the myth as having no validity, rural newspapers were still reporting the Mormon rebellion as fact.⁴¹³ Such terminologies that

⁴¹² *The Sentinel and Gazette*, August 6, 1847, Milwaukee, Wisconsin Territory.

⁴¹³ By August 11, 1847, papers as far away as the Wisconsin Territory were reporting the correction to the faulty news. In Norwalk, Ohio, however, two weeks later, the same rebellion story was still being reported. Of course, the *Huron Reflector* was a Whig paper and keeping the image up of incompetence in California and the war in general served a purpose for the Whigs, who only reluctantly supported "Mr. Polk's War" if they supported it at all; some, such as Abraham Lincoln, were quite vocally opposed to the administration. See "Mormonism", *Huron Reflector*, August 24, 1847, citing the *Zanesville Courier* and the *Weekly Wisconsin*, August 9 and August 11, 1847.

consistently referenced Mormons as separate from the other Americans were not simply limited to derogatory articles which reported unsubstantiated rumors of rebellion. Even articles that were heralding the rapid Americanization of the “backward” Mexican provinces were careful to note the distinction between American papers bringing “enlightenment” to California and the “Mormon paper” being published in Yerba Buena. However, at least in this case, the “Mormon paper”, though going unnamed while the other papers were specifically mentioned, was included under the article title of “American Newspapers in Mexico.”⁴¹⁴

The Mormons also proved to be ammunition in the burgeoning culture war between the slave states of the South and the free states of the North. Dr. Matthew Estes, of Columbus, Mississippi, published a widely circulated (and hailed in the South) defense of the practice of slavery in 1846. Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* published large sections of Estes’ *A Defence of Negro Slavery as it Exists in the United States* and dozens of Northern newspapers followed suit. Though it was billed by the *Tribune* as a “rational” argument in favor of slavery, the paper was also quick to conclude that if the “arguments shall fail to convince the North in one way, we trust it will be beneficial in another – it will show 12 millions of citizens in the North what the ruling classes of the South think of them.”⁴¹⁵ Estes’ arguments ranged from the historical to the economic to the religious. And on the latter point he broached the subject of Northern atheism and heresy. Estes countered the assertions of Northern abolitionists that it was not in keeping with Christian principles to possess slaves by arguing that, “Slavery is beneficial to the Negro in a *Religious* point of view.”⁴¹⁶ In Estes view the North was a breeding ground for “infidels”, a place in which not only the free blacks suffered from want of Christianity but that

⁴¹⁴ “American Newspapers in Mexico”, *Gettysburg Compiler*, May 24 1847.

⁴¹⁵ “A Defence of Slavery as It Exists in the United States”, *The New York Tribune*, as quoted by the *Janesville Gazette*, August 21, 1847.

⁴¹⁶ Matthew Estes, *A Defence of Negro Slavery as it Exists in the United States* (Montgomery, Alabama: Press of the “Alabama Journal”, 1846), 98.

even many whites were persuaded by “religious errors.”⁴¹⁷ Mormonism was chief among those listed by Estes. Lauding the near universal orthodoxy of southern Christianity, Estes argued that “in the North they have almost every species of nonsense, in the form of religion.

Mormonism...flourishes extensively, even in the very heart of the Northern Athens.” The North had allowed its Christianity to become polluted, in Estes’ view, by heathen sects of whom the Mormons were chief examples. Estes ridiculed the fact that a Mormon preacher had been able to go to Boston and achieve success. How could the people of the North claim any type of moral or spiritual superiority in the face of such barbarism?⁴¹⁸

Though they were almost universally white, the anti-Mormon sentiment was such that in some places it began to take on racial tones. The *Janesville Gazette* in the neighboring Wisconsin Territory was utterly unmoved by the pleading of the former members of the Church who wished to remain living in and around the Nauvoo settlement. Hundreds of Mormons had refused to follow Brigham Young on his Western odyssey, many refusing to accept him as the new de facto leader of the Church following the murder of Joseph Smith. As such, most of those still living in Hancock County, Illinois were either former Mormons who had been alienated from the Church for not recognizing the power of the Twelve Apostles and Brigham Young, or who were at the very least quite estranged from ecclesiastical body itself, preferring to keep their homes and farms rather than jettison all for the supposed comforts to be found in a desolate mountain region. Many of these people claimed to no longer be Mormons and therefore felt they should not be also forced to leave, having given up their allegiance to the sect. Yet the anti-Mormon mobs in Illinois were demanding that these former and estranged Mormons also leave the state, and the *Gazette* was heartily endorsing this position. Under the article heading titled

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, 109.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 149-150.

“All Mormons Must Leave”, the paper rejected the claim of these people that “they have left the church and can no longer be obnoxious...after winking at the iniquity of the brethren for years and perhaps participating in their crimes.” Such claimants for mercy were merely attempting to deceive the state’s other inhabitants. Mormonism was such an evil that it had to be totally eradicated from civilization and the writer explained:

After the great body of the church is gone we want to see no dens left behind where thieves and assassins may harbor, while they prey upon the lives and property of our citizens. We want to see a clean sweep made of Mormons and all their hangers on. Let every vestige and trace of the accursed system that has afflicted our county for years be eradicated; and not one living monument left to bring it again to remembrance. This and this alone will restore peace and prosperity to our county. Those who have flattered themselves that they can deceive the old settlers by now professing to leave the church, so as to obtain their consent to remain will find themselves mistaken. Had they left the church a year or more ago, when enough evidence of its corruptions was presented to satisfy every honest man, there could have been some confidence placed in their sincerity of resolve; but in death bed repentance we can have no faith.

The impassioned writer precluded all possibility of the term “former Mormon” from preventing such a sweeping and cleansing from taking place. The country needed to remove “every Saint, mongrel or whole blood, and every thing that looks like a saint, talks or acts like a saint.” At least in this writer’s mind Mormonism was to be treated as a racial characteristic, one that sullied one’s blood and could not merely be disclaimed by leaving and denouncing the religion.⁴¹⁹

Despite such animosity, the Mexican War did bring some favorable press to the Mormons, particularly, and ironically given the rumors of rebellion, attributed to the fighting qualities of the Mormon soldiers. One found a way to both praise the Mormon fighting qualities and reference the peculiarity of their religion at the same time: “Say what you will about those

⁴¹⁹ “All Mormons Must Leave”, *The Janesville Gazette*, January 24, 1848, sic.

men and their apocalyptic novelties, they make good soldiers. They seek light so earnestly, they don't care if it is let in by a bullet."⁴²⁰ Faced with a restive *Californio* population and a war that seemed to have no terminus, local military officials in California found themselves asking some of the Mormon soldiers to re-enlist to help maintain order. This was another great irony; the Mormons who had been enlisted at the behest of Polk through his deception and guile to prevent their possible treason to the United States in the Mexican territory of California were now being re-enlisted in view of their loyal service, by the local military commanders, at the appeal of Richard Barnes Mason, military governor of the conquered province. Colonel Stevenson, who wrote to Young to carry out his commander's request, acknowledged that the Mormons had been victims of "severe persecution" and that vicious rumors of the tenor of the Mormon people had swirled among California residents. However, the commendable conduct of the battalion had convinced California residents "both...native and foreign" of the need to retain them in service.⁴²¹

Kane's Efforts to Change Popular Opinion and Cultivate Political Support

Despite such moderately favorable accounts, the press coverage and public opinion of Mormons was, in the main, overwhelmingly negative and this was the perception with which Thomas Kane had to contend. Nevertheless, Kane had already succeeded in late 1846 in getting the *Pennsylvanian* and Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* to publish several unsigned letters

⁴²⁰ The *Philadelphia North American* as quoted by the *Janesville Gazette*, June 15, 1848.

⁴²¹ MHC, February 20, 1848, Vol. 18, 9.

vouching for the good qualities of the Mormons as a people and criticizing the “army of reforming moralists” that had “raped, pillaged, murdered, and expelled the Saints.”⁴²²

By the time Brigham Young had returned from Salt Lake to the Mormon camps in Iowa in the fall of 1847, Kane was not only actively placing articles in Eastern newspapers, but had sent a gift of gold pens for each of the twelve apostles, as a tribute to the kindness shown to him while he was ill and convalescing among them during the previous year. His publicity efforts were bearing some fruit especially as New York newspapers began to take a more favorable stance toward the “suffering saints.” Kane held meetings in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York with the aim of not only bringing attention to the injustices the Mormons had endured in the country, but of raising money for the thousands who were so destitute that they could not afford the means to make the transcontinental journey and join the nascent Mormon community in Salt Lake.

The Mormon cause in the late 1840’s was usually taken up by those who had decidedly anti-slavery views. While their reforming idealism pushed such men and women to aid the Mormons as another suffering group, the political implications of the Mormon presence in the West was readily seen as well. The Mormons might well be the key to preventing the expansion of slavery over the vast territory they were seeking establish. As such, the various meetings attracted some of the more powerful reformers and anti-slavery champions in the free states. Although Kane was a Democrat, Whigs tended to be more sympathetic to his cause. Formidable political enemies such as the long-time Philadelphia mayor and Whig leader, John Swift, attended the Philadelphia relief meeting and was even voted its president.⁴²³ The distinguished guest list of the various meetings included the fervent abolitionist Charles Sumner, whose caning

⁴²² Grow, 75.

⁴²³ “Meeting for the Relief of the Mormons”, LDS Church Archives.

less than a decade later at the hands of an enraged Southern congressman would further convince abolitionist forces in both the justness of their cause and the villainous martial oppression practiced by those who defended the slavery. Even the rich and powerful abolitionist leader Lewis Tappan attended the New York meeting, as did former Whig vice presidential candidate (Clay's running mate in 1844) Theodore Frelinghuysen. Josiah Quincy, mayor of Boston, and Charles Francis Adams, son of former president John Quincy Adams, attended the Boston meeting. Both men had only a few years earlier visited Joseph Smith in Nauvoo and spent some time conversing with him. At least part of the purpose behind that visit had been to sway the Mormon vote in Illinois to the Whig camp. Perhaps this personal connection, having met and conversed with many of the Mormons of Nauvoo, led these distinguished Massachusetts men to attend Kane's relief meeting. It is likely, however, that their view of the Mormons as potential political allies was also a driving force behind their attendance.

Though Whigs politicians dominated the meetings, the conferences were not bereft of heavy-hitters among Democrats. Powerful Democratic congressman, Benjamin F. Butler, was one of the attendees. Butler's later fame would come mainly during the early Civil War years when he refused to return "contraband" runaway slaves to their masters in Virginia who audaciously claimed the right of retrieval via the Fugitive Slave Act though their state was in open rebellion. His hard-nosed occupation of New Orleans when that city fell to Union forces garnered further notoriety for threatening to treat any women of the city who disrespected Union troops as though they were prostitutes trying to ply their trade. In relation to Mormons however, Erastus Snow made particular mention of his kindness and generosity toward them.⁴²⁴

⁴²⁴ Erastus Snow, Journal, 1848, MS 1329, Box 1, Volume 5, LDS Church Archives. (uncertain date, sometime before March 15.)

While President Polk considered the Mormons citizens of dubious loyalty at best, rumors swirled that the Mormons had rebelled against the government, and newspapers highlighted the distinctions between Mormons and other Americans, Kane's meetings sought to highlight the fact that these suffering people were in fact citizens of the United States. While the papers painted an image of Mormons as radical religious separatists, portraying the view held by the public at large, the meetings of these political dignitaries instead highlighted the innocent suffering that was taking place on American soil. Carefully choosing their words, the participants at the Philadelphia meeting affirmed that the Mormons had "been driven forth by force from their homes...with other citizens to the number of more than twenty thousand-that their houses, farms, and other possessions, have been confiscated to the use of armed men, by whom they were expelled-that the persons thus ejected and despoiled, have set out to seek a resting place on the western shores of this continent." The result of the outrages committed against them was that many Mormons, the elderly and the sick, the women as well as the children had "suffered much because of want of shelter clothing, and food, and from severe diseases brought upon them by their destitution."⁴²⁵

The Mormons had believed that the service of the Mormon Battalion in the war would settle questions about their loyalty and Kane's meetings stressed the point of their military service to that end as well. Because the government had granted the Mormons permission to temporarily settle in Iowa Territory and Indian Territory, the minutes of the meeting argued that the government had "recognized their character as citizens" and in return the Mormons had validated such trust by volunteering to fight for the United States in numbers that were greatly

⁴²⁵ Ibid, punctuation as in original.

disproportional to their small population.⁴²⁶ This assertion of loyalty dovetailed nicely with Kane's efforts to hammer home the point of American citizenship. His plea was not to simply aid the Mormons because they were suffering, but particularly because they were fellow Americans. The meetings concluded that, "grievous wrong has been sustained by this large body of American citizens; and that they are exposed to increased and calamitous suffering, if it be not averted by the active sympathies of their brother citizens within the United States."⁴²⁷

One wonders, given the high profile Whigs who were attending the meetings, if Kane might have done better to portray the Mormons as victims of their government and specifically Polk's administration, given the unpopularity of the war which most Whig politicians had come to denounce either as immoral at the worst or bungled badly by the White House at best. Whig politicians had staked out their opposition to the war as their primary campaign point throughout 1846 and 1847.⁴²⁸ Politicizing the meetings as a critique of the administration would have had the effect of gaining greater support among rank and file Whigs who might have followed the lead of the several distinguished party men who attended. Whig papers would have picked up the reports of the meetings more readily simply to add the treatment of the Mormons to the long list of harangues that were daily made against the Polk administration. Politicizing the meetings

⁴²⁶ The 500 Mormons who volunteered to serve in the military were from a total population of around 12,000. This figure represents over 4% of the total group. By contrast, states that heavily participated in the raising of troops did not reach so high an enlistment figure. For instance, Tennessee provided something closer to 3% of its total population. The number of the Mormons serving was even more disproportionately high given the fact that they were not leaving their families on well-established farms or in settled communities that could more readily provide support. The Mormon volunteers, rather, had left their destitute families past the edges of American control and civilization, and few had suitable clothing, shelter, or adequate food given the loss of property and haste that had accompanied their removal from Illinois. Hundreds would die of disease and malnutrition. This was a point that Kane circular of the meeting also partially touched upon.

⁴²⁷ "Meeting for the Relief of the Mormons", LDS Church Archives.

⁴²⁸ Holt, 245. Some historians have argued that greater apparent success in the Mexican War with Scott's capture of Mexico City weakened the anti-war stance of the Whigs and thus led to loss of political momentum. Holt, rather, argues that the tide turning against the Whigs in late 1847 was predicated much more upon the failure of Whig economic arguments to sway voters.

may also have provided a greater impetus toward donations, as loyal party members saw such largesse more in the light of a political contribution than altruistic charity.

Criticizing the administration, however, would have alienated Kane from the Polk administration, as well as the Democratic Party, in which he still hoped to wield enough influence to sway the potential appointees for a new US territory, primarily populated by Mormons, in the Great Basin. Criticizing the administration's treatment of the Mormons also would not as readily serve Kane's purpose of changing the popular view of Mormons as radical religious zealots who brought upon themselves their own suffering. Kane chose to portray Mormon suffering rather than the duplicity in relations between the community and the US government and the willful neglect of the Mormons and their rights while still in states. Because Kane also saw his special position in relation to the Mormons as a stepping stone to his own personal power, criticizing Polk would have cost him his executive backing.

Shrewdly, Kane believed that making the Mormons seem as though they were mainstream American citizens, suffering without just cause, would help Americans feel greater compassion for them, and shift the perception of Mormons from alienated sectarians to average Americans. Highlighting their patriotism and service in the war, while no doubt galling to some Whigs who considered support of the war in any degree to be unpatriotic and unprincipled, no doubt was better calculated to tap into the nationalism of Americans which was buoyed by recent victories on the field. Not only did the more neutral course better serve Kane's personal ambitions, he would soon admonish the Mormons to adopt the strictest of political neutralities in order to avoid the wrath that would be poured down upon them from either side once their party politics became clear. In many ways, this was a reflection of Kane's own views. He was a life-long Democrat, but his free-soil beliefs and his reforming impulses made his views only

palatable to some other like-minded Northern Democrats. His problems with the Southern wing of the Democratic Party led to his dalliance with the Free Soil Party and men like David Wilmot. Yet he was not an evangelical either, like many of the abolitionist/reform minded Whigs in the Northeast who attended his meetings. Though he would remain nominally loyal to the antebellum Democratic Party, by the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, Kane had become an abolitionist, despite the problems such beliefs created with his various family members.⁴²⁹

In any case, Kane had not set the agenda in a vacuum. Mormon representatives were a part of the meetings and Brigham Young did not question the tenor of the meetings at all. In fact, when Young received a copy of the circular produced from the meeting, he heartily endorsed the proceedings and Thomas Kane for his efforts, pronouncing that the pages demonstrated Kane's "great anxiety on behalf of a persecuted and suffering people."⁴³⁰ Erastus Snow attested that Kane's great personal efforts had helped them both raise funds and gain audience with "the Rich & the honorable & the high-minded." Some treated the Mormons with kindness and even made monetary donations. However, Jesse Little would complain that the number of people who contributed money to the cause of helping the destitute Mormons was much smaller than the number who pledged their sympathy without fiscal evidence to the fact. And Snow also commented that from many they "received little else beyond insult to our persons and contempt for our religion." Despite this, the Mormon/Kane efforts to raise money for the church members still in Iowa was far more successful than one might expect, raising close to \$10,000 nationally.⁴³¹

While Kane marked out a course that eschewed criticizing the administration, his friend Horace Greeley never allowed an opportunity to criticize the Polk administration to pass by

⁴²⁹ Grow, 226.

⁴³⁰ MHC, December 9, 1847, Vol. 17, 129.

⁴³¹ Grow, 79.

quietly. Often considered the most powerful editor in antebellum America, his widely read *New York Tribune* was a vocal advocate of Whig positions and Democratic politicians often found themselves on the receiving end of fiery salvos of oratory emanating from the *Tribune's* pages. With sweeping invective, one article called out for aid for the destitute Mormons and labeled the nation and its citizens as the basest hypocrites, pretending to be sympathetic to the suffering and oppressed around the world, while “there are few nations on earth whose history can parallel the acts of flagrant, gigantic robbery and wrong which have been committed by our own Government and citizens.” The great injustices of history such as the Jewish Captivity and the expulsions of the Moors and Acadians respectively, paled in comparison to “the robbery and exile which we have inflicted on several Indian tribes.” The writer sarcastically compared the pretended concern for the partition of Poland to the American subjection of Mexico that passed for patriotism. Comparing anti-Mormonism to the likes of witch-burnings, the article derided the atrocities that the American people had “patiently, placidly, unresistingly suffered to be inflicted...upon the poor, deluded fanatics...known as Mormons.” The indictment furthered that the “Country looked on and saw the Mormons driven from their homes” while millions of dollars worth of property was either stolen or destroyed. “Our government,” it continued, “which ought to have protected them, and might have done it, let them be plundered of their all.”⁴³²

Continued Alienation

Despite the fact that there was a slight softening toward the Mormons in the public eye in the Eastern cities thanks to Kane's efforts, and such blistering invective as was occasionally carried by the *Tribune*, the animosity Americans on the frontier had held for the sect for nearly

⁴³² “The Mormons in the Wilderness”, *New York Daily Tribune*, February 17, 1848.

two decades showed little sign of dissipation. Erastus Snow, who had been sent out from Winter Quarters along with several other high-ranking Mormons to various parts of the country with the goal of soliciting funds from both Mormons and “Gentiles”, experienced firsthand the animosity Missourians still held for Mormons. He and his fellow traveling companions assumed pseudonyms on their route to St. Louis for their own safety. Snow explained that the group felt the disguises necessary because they were “in a hostile country from which our people...had formerly been Banished and where Elder Lyman & myself had been imprisoned during former persecutions.” While thus traveling “incog”, as Snow put it, the group on multiple occasions had to listen to “horrid Tales and denunciations of the Mormons” from Missourians unaware of their true identities.⁴³³

The aftermath of the initial Mormon move to Salt Lake was a growing alienation of the Mormon leadership from their short-lived cooperation with the authorities of the Polk administration. The souring relations had already ripened because of federal intransigence on Indian affairs in western Iowa. By the time Young’s advance party of pioneers had reached Salt Lake, the Mormon leadership had come to once again regard the American government as an enemy plotting its destruction. Polk’s actions surrounding the Mormon Battalion were perceived as duplicitous and designed to provoke a Mormon response that would give the nation a pretext to destroy them. The move to Salt Lake removed Mormon leadership from the necessity of having to deal with local federal officials. Far more important was the organization of the emigrating companies and establishment of the new colony.

Still, despite such alienation, Mormons did not attempt to declare their own nation or use Salt Lake as a launching pad for rebellion against the government they rhetorically despised.

⁴³³ Erastus Snow, Journal, January 16, 1848, MS 1329, Box 1, Volume 5, LDS Church Archives.

Instead, Young set about attempting to legitimize Mormon occupation of the area in the form of a massive US territorial government.

While Young organized Mormon settlement in the West, Thomas Kane attempted to sway public opinion in the East. His modest success demonstrated that while thoroughly detested in the realm of public opinion, various high-ranking politicians in the US were willing to take into consideration Mormon citizenship. The Mormons, occupying as they were two loci of power in Iowa and the newly-acquired West, were recognized for their potential to affect the outcome of the organization and political development of those areas. Increasingly, Whig politicians sought to forge alliances with the Mormons in hopes of securing large portions of the West under their ideological banner. Free Soilers and Northern Democrats also saw the Mormon settlement in the West as something that could be used to political advantage. As debates raged over the status of slavery in the territories and the idea of popular sovereignty became increasingly set forth as the solution to all of the tension, those opposed to slavery's expansion could view Mormon settlement in the West as a foothold for anti-slavery forces, despite the fact that a few dozen slaves would be in Utah by 1850. Kane's championing of the Mormon cause naturally persuaded other northerners that the proposed territory of Deseret would not be a slave territory. And, while most newspapers still denounced Mormonism and carried fantastic stories of Mormon barbarity and sedition, others defended the Mormons, lamented their travails, and condemned the treatment they had received.

Though the Mormon leadership had come to increasingly distrust the Polk administration and denounce the corruption of the government by late 1847, the growing politicization of the slavery argument gave the Mormons power out of proportion to their aggregate numbers. The results of the attempts to politicize Mormons were fully displayed in Iowa and the 1848 election

contest. Both parties initially sought to capitalize on Mormon citizenship, though the end result for the Mormons would be greater alienation.

Chapter 7: “*Their Presence, in a Body, Can Nowhere Be Tolerated*”: Partisan Conflicts in Iowa and the Results of the Mormon/Whig Alliance

In Iowa the Mormons had enjoyed at least relative peace from the state government, with the primary harassment coming from the federally appointed Indian agents and military officials. However, the volatility of American politics, especially frontier politics in that sparsely populated state, would once again cause great problems with the Mormons. While the funds collected by Kane and others would help organize more pioneer companies eventually, Brigham Young was also working to further organize the Iowa settlements that now seemed would be less temporary than he had hoped. With the coming of new converts to the faith every year and the destitute condition of those who were trying to ready themselves to follow the others over the mountains, and the planned abandonment of Winter Quarters, the Mormon settlements in western Iowa were bound to be the last terminus for groups of transcontinentally-minded Mormons.

In Iowa the Mormons once again experience the result of partisan politics. Within a year, the group would go from receiving requests to remain in the state from Democrats, to watching the Party of Jackson attack Mormon franchise rights. Though Kane had counseled the Mormon leadership to utterly eschew party loyalties, the Mormon leadership in Iowa instead decided that their long term prospects lay with supporting the Whig Party. This switch in political allegiance led to another episode of anti-Mormon repercussions and further solidified the corrupt nature of the United States in the minds of Mormons.

Iowa had achieved statehood in December of 1846 despite the rapacious political infighting there between Whigs and Democrats. Within a few months of his return to Iowa Young had a committee “appointed to investigate the laws of Iowa and ascertain what steps were

necessary to be taken to affect a county organization.”⁴³⁴ Until the state laws of Iowa, and the subsequent court systems, were extended to them through county organization, Young ordered that the “Bishop’s courts have authority as civil magistrates among the people.”⁴³⁵ Such a move, while pragmatic in Young’s view in the face of no organized legal authority, was the type of melding of Church and State that would continually be off-putting to Americans in general and inspire harsh criticisms by those who viewed the Mormons as religious zealots bent on traitorous artifice if it suited their fanatical, sectarian purposes.

In this case, the theocratic injunction was not the rule long enough to engender to type of community outrage that would similar actions on later occasions. The civil authority of the bishop’s courts was in this case only meant to be a stop-gap measure. By mid January 1848, a petition to organize the Mormon-settled lands into an Iowa county had been created and approved and two Mormon representatives were dispatched to the statehouse to try to secure the legislature’s approval.⁴³⁶ The two returned with assurances that provisions had been undertaken by the district judge to organize Pottawattamie County.

Democratic Entreaties

While in Iowa City, the Mormon delegation received a most unusual request when conversing with the Democratic secretary of state, Elisha Cutler, Jr. In a departure from the Mormons’ previous dealings with state governments, Cutler urged the Mormons *not* to leave the

⁴³⁴ MHC, December 25, 1847, Vol. 17, 130-131.

⁴³⁵ MHC, December 25, 1847, Vol. 17, 130.

⁴³⁶ MHC, January 16, 1848, Vol. 18, 3. Woodruff, *Journal*, Vol. 3, 310. Willard Richards was proud to point out the attempt at a county organization in a letter he writes to fellow church member Andrew L. Lamoreaux. Willard Richards to Andrew L. Lamoreaux, January 22, 1848, Willard Richards Papers, MS 1490, Box 3, Folder 8, LDS Church Archives.

state. While he told the Mormons he wished them to stay in Iowa to “improve the country” it is hard to believe that that political concerns were not chief on his mind.⁴³⁷ The Mormons were considered to be Democratic Party voters and had been on record as voting for James K. Polk. True, the Democratic Governor of Illinois when the Mormons were driven out, Thomas Ford, was widely considered by Mormons to be a villain that had allowed Joseph Smith to be murdered. Despite this, much of the local opposition to the Mormons was political in nature and organized by the Illinois Whigs and Whig newspapers in response to the Mormon move away from that party after the dismissal of Mormon grievances by Henry Clay. Furthermore, the Mormons had materially supported the Mexican War via their battalion. The general division of Democrats and Whigs into pro and anti war camps naturally suggested that the Mormons would continue voting with the Democrats. Iowa was believed to be on the Democratic side of the political ledger by only a slim margin. The governor’s office and the Senate were controlled by the Democratic Party, while the Whigs held a very slim majority in the Iowa House, a majority that was seen as fleeting as more Democrats moved to the new state. The opposing Whigs had taken great pains and spent large sums of money in an attempt to unseat the Democrats controlling the Iowa government.⁴³⁸ Not only would the Mormon population and industry help expedite planned improvements, such as a proposed state road traversing Iowa, their communities in the very sparsely settled western portion of the state would help facilitate the growth of commerce. Most importantly, Mormon votes, if they were cast for the proper Democratic candidate, could very well secure the state against the attempted Whig Party advances and eliminate what slim holdings they enjoyed.

⁴³⁷ MHC, March 6, 1848, Vol. 18, 11.

⁴³⁸ Holt, 237.

The Democrats in Iowa, as they were everywhere else in the nation, were under great pressure because of the growing feeling of patriotic nationalism that favored the probable candidacy of the “Hero of Buena Vista”, General Zachary Taylor. The perceived bungling of the Mexican War and the seeming inability of the Polk administration to bring that conflict to a close in timely fashion or upon agreeable terms hung like a millstone around the necks of the Democratic Party.

It is likely the meeting with Cutler occurred prior to the Secretary’s learning that the President had submitted the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo for ratification by the Senate on February 23, 1848. Many national Whigs had staked out a position of “No Territory” in relation to the ongoing war. Rather than losing all of their Southern support by endorsing the Wilmot Proviso, these Whigs hoped that by not taking any territory from the defeated Mexico the vociferous debates over slavery in the acquired territory would be nipped in the bud without the need of a sectionally divisive commitment for or against slavery’s extension to such lands. Since many northern Whigs had opposed the war as immoral from the outset, such a position seemed for a brief time to be a plausible compromise that would placate that party’s disparate and convoluted interests. Given this widely held Whig position, the possibility that the Mormons would even consider voting the Whig ticket appeared in February 1848 to be very remote. The Mormons had already calculated that their new Great Basin home would become a part of United States sovereign territory in any peace settlement wrangled from Mexico. Brigham Young had just written Thomas Kane again, urging him to press for territorial status as soon as was possible.⁴³⁹ Had the Mormons considered themselves foreign elements cast out of a foreign country they might have joined the Whig lobby on this position, hoping to work out a territorial arrangement with a humiliated and weakened Mexican government rather than a triumphant and

⁴³⁹ MHC, February 12, 1848, Vol. 18, 6-7.

dictatorial American one. But despite some rhetoric to the contrary from both Mormons and their detractors, Mormons still considered themselves Americans. They did not want to break from the nation, merely to leverage out of it a just treatment for the members of their sect.

Democrats in Iowa feared the surging Whig political fortunes and sought to use the Mormons to blunt the effects. Because Iowa Democrats controlling the state legislature believed the Mormons would certainly vote their ticket, they endorsed the organization of the Mormon lands into a county, assigning a Democratically appointed judge the task and even urging the Mormons to tarry longer in the state. It must have been quite refreshing for the Mormon delegation to hear their sect being spoken of in glowing terms and their citizenship being counted as worth of both franchise and permanent settlement. But such sentiments emanating from Democrats would prove themselves very closely tethered to the Mormons' willingness to continue voting the party line.

Early Whig Overtures to the Mormons

Despite Cutler's actions to solidify Mormon support, the Whig Party in Iowa, being bereft of most power since the state's organization over a year ago, was more desperate and therefore more committed to wooing the Mormon vote. The contradiction of the Whig Party's stance toward territorial expansion and the Mormons' ipso facto movement to Mexican lands and petition for territorial status was removed by the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo by the Senate, March 10, 1848. With it, all of the Mexican claims to Upper California, New Mexico, and Texas were renounced in return for a \$15 million cash payment. The illegal Mormon migration to Upper California in Mexican territory was now a settlement in United

States territory, whose particular legal status was still yet to be determined. The Mexican Cession, which had heretofore been merely a hypothetical possibility, became a point of fact, and the Whig attempts to tie their sectional interests together with the No Territory proposal were stillborn. With the end of the war, and the Mexican Cession, the Whigs lost two major platforms on which they had been campaigning.⁴⁴⁰ Nervous and desperate, the Whigs in Iowa determined to make a move to sway the Mormons to vote for the Whig ticket.

That Brigham Young entertained such advances is an interesting development altogether. He recognized quite clearly that the newfound admiration for his people was one of political expediency rather than actual regard. He explained the situation quite clearly, allowing his reservations to be apparent: “The Whig and Democratic Parties were nearly equally balanced in the State and both appeared very solicitous for the welfare of our people.” Young knew what those appearances hinged upon and sardonically commented, “they wanted us to vote at next August election.”⁴⁴¹

Viewing the Whigs as somehow Mormon-friendly was destined to be a difficult task. The Whigs had violently turned against Mormons in Nauvoo when Joseph Smith had gone from a Clay supporter in the 1844 election to a vociferous critic of that revered Whig champion. Whig newspapers in Illinois had been at the forefront of denunciation of the Mormons and advocating their removal from the state. Whig animosity in Illinois had led to the fact that many Whigs were native-born, evangelical Protestants, who maligned Democrats for their pandering to immigrants and Catholics, only furthered anti-Mormon sentiment emanating from the Whig Party.⁴⁴² Only months earlier, a Whig newspaper in Ohio had denounced the Democratic candidate for a local sheriff’s office because his Mormonism was “obnoxious to the moral sense

⁴⁴⁰ Holt, 312.

⁴⁴¹ MHC, March 6, 1848, Vol. 18, 11. Underlined emphasis is in original.

⁴⁴² Holt, 187-188.

of Christian people” and the paper cast dispersions on the “propriety of electing to public office a man who...professed the Mormon faith.”⁴⁴³

Despite the fact that Young believed olive branches from either party were cynically and self-servingly proffered at best, he did not totally eschew them. On March 24, Wilford Woodruff recorded that Sidney Roberts, a delegate from the Whig party, attended a council meeting held by the Church presidency and several other high ranking Mormons in Winter Quarters. While Woodruff did not expound upon the meeting other than to say that he “had some things to lay before the Council which was Attended to”, another present at the meeting, Hosea Stout, was more forthcoming in his journal.⁴⁴⁴ He explained that Roberts had been “sent by the Whigs of Iowa to enlist the Mormons on their side.” There is a great irony in the fact that the Whig representative had to travel outside of Iowa to Indian Territory in order to lobby the Mormon leadership to vote for them in the Iowa elections on the other side of the river. Yet, thousands of Mormons still remained in Iowa on the east side of Missouri, settled on the former Pottawattamie lands. As Young had concluded to vacate Winter Quarters, the Iowa side of the river was destined to have even more Mormons living upon it. The matters “attended to”, according to Stout, were the outlines of a political alliance by which the Mormons would vote the Whig ticket in Iowa in return for the Whigs offering to aid the Mormons. What was particularly offered in this first meeting of Roberts and the Mormons is not recorded, but at least Stout left the meeting convinced that an agreement between the two groups had been reached and that for “final acception it was refered to the authorities on the East side of the river.” Powerful apostles, such as Orson Hyde had not been in attendance, and apparently Young wanted to convene a more full

⁴⁴³ “Newspaper Abuse-The Difference”, *Huron Reflector*, Norwalk, Ohio, October 12, 1847.

⁴⁴⁴ Woodruff, *Journal*, March 24, 1848, Vol. 3, 334.

council before finalizing any decision on the matter. Yet Stout concluded after this first meeting that he had “no doubt but they will go the Whig ticket next August.”⁴⁴⁵

The later meeting set up to gauge the feelings of the Mormons on the Iowa side of the river occurred three days later on March 27, in a political caucus meeting held and organized in the log tabernacle the Mormons had built for holding their religious conferences in what would later be called Kanesville. Along with “60 leading men of the county” Young received representatives of the Iowa central Whig committee to hear their proposals, led again by Sidney Roberts. The much more carefully recorded accounts of the March 27 meeting give a great window to the probable discussions of the first meeting in winter quarters a few days earlier.⁴⁴⁶

The Whigs, in a testament to their political acumen, had done their homework and came to the meeting with the Mormon leaders prepared in a way that seemed to catch Young and others off guard. Rather than simply giving a rote stump speech, the Whig representatives started their presentation by demonstrating to the Mormons that they understood and accepted their grievances against the government and the United States. According to the Mormon account, the Whigs “reviewed, at length, the persecutions heaped upon the saints in Missouri, the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, their leaders, and their cruel expulsion from the states of Missouri and Illinois.”⁴⁴⁷

The fact that the Whigs opened their political salvo by echoing the grievances that the Mormons had pleaded for politicians to recognize for years must have been quite disarming for the high-ranking Mormons in attendance. They were accustomed to being told by cautious politicians that they would be treated fairly if they acted fairly, without full acknowledgment that

⁴⁴⁵ Hosea Stout, Journal, March 24, 1848, Vol. 3, 354. Though the actual page number is 354, it is mislabeled 254. Hosea Stout Papers, MS 8332, LDS Church Archives.

⁴⁴⁶ MHC, March 27, 1848, Vol. 18, 18.

⁴⁴⁷ MHC, March 27, 1848, Vol. 18, 18.

the persecutions they had suffered were in fact legitimate causes of concern. However, the Iowa Whigs cultivated an immediate understanding with their Mormon hearers by not only nodding politely as the Mormons recounted their trials, but instead themselves explaining all of the major wrongs and injustices the Mormons had suffered. They did so with such dexterity that men like Young did not see the need to criticize them for glossing over the past.

The sympathies of their hearers gained, the Whigs proceeded to press their point by criticizing the Democrats for failing to render the Mormons all due and proper aid, despite the allegiance Mormons generally had for the party. Had not Lilburn Boggs who ordered the extermination of Mormons in Missouri been a Democrat? Had not Martin Van Buren who had refused Mormon petitions for help and restoration of the stolen Missouri lands been a Democrat? So too was Thomas Ford, whose guile Mormons blamed for Joseph and Hyrum Smith's murders.

Mormon issues with Democrats in fact ran deeper than the Whigs knew. Though the Mormons had supported James K. Polk and his imperial aspirations, little but lip service had been proffered in return. Polk had failed to provide any governmental support for the suffering Mormons, and Young had long since stopped believing (if he ever had in the first place) in the benign nature of Polk's intentions in the calling of the Mormon Battalion. In addition, Democratically appointed Indian agents were still harassing the Mormons in their settlements. The Democrat Amos Kendall had attempted to extort thousands of acres of land from the Mormons in return for "being their friend" in Washington in the jaded Samuel Brannan affair. Thus, when the Whigs "descanted feelingly on the deception and treachery of the [Democrats]" in their relationship with the Mormons, there were many ready ears. The Whigs pointed out the Democrats had often "asked favors of the Mormons" but in return for Mormon loyalty they had instead "heap[ed] neglect [,] abuse [,] and persecution upon the saints; depriving them from time

to time of civil and religious liberty and the inalienable rights of freemen.” Claiming altruistic reasons for sending their emissaries, the Whigs argued that it was in consequence of their hearing the Democrats’ scheme to systematically deprive the Mormons of their rights that they decided to make the diplomatic mission to the Mormon settlements. They were there to persuade the Mormons to jump from the Democratic ship to the waiting arms of the Whig Party. The Mormons were assured that the Whigs pledged their support for the Mormons and their difficulties and “a firm and unyielding protection to Jew, Gentile, and Christian of every name and denomination, with all other immunities rightfully belonging to every citizen in the land.”⁴⁴⁸

However, this was not all. John M. Coleman, of the State Executive Committee, had sent along with the Whig representatives a private letter for Brigham Young. Coleman had at one time served as Superintendant of Public Buildings under the territorial governorship of the Whig appointee John Chambers in 1842. He had been the driving force behind the erection and completion of the state capitol building.⁴⁴⁹ As such, Coleman knew well the delicacies of Iowa politics and the disadvantaged position the Whig Party had always labored under in the state. His letter to Young attempted to capitalize on his understanding not only with the Mormon story, but of Coleman’s personal acquaintance with Joseph Smith. He opened by telling Young that he was “not a stranger to the troubles with which you have been afflicted, as well in Missouri as in Illinois, having had the Missouri difficulties communicated to me by the late Joseph Smith some years since while traveling through the state of Indiana on his way to Washington City.” Turning specifically to the Mormons’ expulsion from Nauvoo which had brought them to Iowa as a consequence, Coleman wrote with powerful imagery and an understanding of both Mormon

⁴⁴⁸ MHC, March 27, 1848, Vol. 18, 18-19.

⁴⁴⁹ Biographical information of John M. Coleman taken from A.T. Andreas, *A.T. Andreas' Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa* (Chicago: Andreas Atlas Company, 1875).

suffering and the purposes for the westward migration that would have found no objection from Young or other Mormons who read it:

Your more recent troubles in the state of Illinois are vivid in the recollection of all, a lasting monument of violence and bloodshed which will sully the pages of our country's history for ages to come, and which will be read with astonishment by Christian nations throughout the world. Driven, as you have been by lawless violence from two states of this union, and now wending your way as you are, to some chosen spot, some sequestered retreat in the far west, where you can reinstate yourselves in the possession of peaceful homes and quiet firesides – where you can worship according to your own creed...⁴⁵⁰

Coleman argued further that the Mormons would have great difficulties even in their new western home without federal support. In one of his more unpersuasive lines of argument, Coleman exaggerated the threat Native American groups would pose to the nascent Mormon colony and that his long experience with Indians had taught him that they could not be trusted despite any initially friendly overtures. He contended that the best way to give the Mormons “protection from the savage scalping knife” was for the federal government to purchase the land from the various native groups, thereby mitigating the danger in the face of the United States military force that would be used to secure the settlers in the purchased land. Not only would the Mormons find their refuge in the Rocky Mountains, under the Whig plan their settlement and expansion would be welcomed and even sponsored by the federal government, because the central location of their Great Basin home would provide an excellent supply depot both for military expeditions and weary travelers of the overland trails. With prescient understanding,

⁴⁵⁰ MHC, March 27, 1848, Vol. 18, 20. There is no way of knowing if the meeting Coleman alleges that he had with Joseph Smith in Indiana actually occurred, but Smith did travel through Indiana on his way to plead the Mormon's case in Washington D.C., making Coleman's attempt at a personal connection with the Mormon prophet at least plausible, if not verifiable. In any case, Coleman's knowledge that Smith had in fact gone to Washington in an attempt to get federal intervention was information that, while reported by the newspapers at the time it occurred, was not readily known among local politicians who were now nearly a decade removed from the fact.

Coleman explained that he knew the Mormon settlement was destined to become a hub of commerce given the centrality of its location.⁴⁵¹

While the Mormons certainly agreed with Coleman's assessment of their industry in civilizing the Great Basin, the claims that the Mormons needed to be protected from the Indians probably raised only modest interest in the readers, if any at all. The Mormons had completed the move from Illinois and through Iowa and settled on land claimed or inhabited by Indians on both sides of the Missouri River. They had negotiated skillfully with Pottawatomies, Otos, Omahas and Sioux, and their settlement at the Great Salt Lake had not yet occasioned any violence or the threat thereof on the part of Native Americans living in the Great Basin.⁴⁵² The Mormons had a steady tradition of at least relatively congenial relations with the Native American tribes surrounding their settlements, dating back to the early Nauvoo days when Joseph Smith was still alive. Furthermore, the numbers of potential Mormon settlers to the valleys in what would become Utah were quite large, and would only grow larger as Young urged every Mormon who could to make the migration to the new "resting place." Inviting the federal government to have enormous power over the Mormon communities through Coleman's proposed purchase of the land was not well disposed to quick Mormon acceptance.

The Whigs were in the difficult position of trying to convince the Mormons to trust the government, after themselves having rattled off the litany of abuses that the federal government had either inflicted upon the Saints or, more precisely, allowed to be

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, 21-22.

⁴⁵² Historian Ned Blackhawk has attributed the lack of initial violence in the Mormon's Deseret settlement to the fact that it was located in the disputed border area between Ute and Shoshone tribal groups. Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006).

inflicted by mobs and rouge state governments that had exceeded the bounds of the United States constitution. Here though, the message of change also had the greatest chance of success. Coleman contended that because the executive branch had failed to support Mormons in the past and thus allowed misery to visit the sect in the form of its enemies, the 1848 election paved the way for a dramatic shift away from this contentious relationship with the United States. Like all political speeches, there was but one catch; Coleman explained that the Mormons needed to vote in the next election for “the interests you have at stake in the result.”⁴⁵³

With a tone of supreme confidence Coleman declared, “That Gen. Taylor will be the next President there is scarcely a remaining doubt” and the Mormons would certainly be “gratefully remembered by him” if they as a group cast their votes for “the old hero.” Again, Coleman’s conclusions could easily have been waved away by the Mormons listeners. The Mormons had supported Van Buren and Polk, and received little evidence of gratitude; they had voted for Governor Ford also, and received no just recompense. Only naivety would suggest that Taylor would of a certainty be any different in his treatment of the Mormons compared to his indifferent predecessors. But Coleman, after all, was representing the Whigs of Iowa first and foremost. As Coleman was himself running for the position of Secretary of State, there was no small personal interest in the garnering of Mormon votes to the Whig banner. And he urged the Mormons to not just vote for Taylor, who would help them in the newly acquired territories in the West, but to look to their local interests in Iowa by electing “Whig Senators and Representatives from this state through your influence.”⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵³ Ibid, 22. Underlining in original.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid, 23. Underlining in original.

And on this last point, much of the matter hung. The Whigs in Iowa were just shy of capitalizing on Polk's controversial presidency to the effect of winning majorities in the state. They were at least partially pinning their hopes upon the Mormon voting block to help them turn the state to their advantage. Yet, the odds of the state going for the Whigs were still fairly low, and one historian elucidated the chronic Whig weakness in the West as follows: "Beyond Ohio there was no Whig governor, no Whig senator, and only an occasional Whig congressman."⁴⁵⁵ On top of the grim prospects of a reversal of fortunes in an area so generally favoring the Democrats, the Democratic nominee for the office was Lewis Cass, the ardent expansionist Senator from Michigan, who had served as the Secretary of War under the Jackson administration. Cass was a "son of the Northwest" and therefore had great regional appeal in states like Iowa, which were already inclined toward the Democratic Party. Taylor was a national hero, but it was a risk to presume that his celebrity could conquer party loyalty, regional identification and economic interests to the degree necessary for Whigs to carry the state. And Coleman and the other Whig Party faithful in Iowa were asking the Mormons to take dangerous liability in this risk, pledging that a decided stance would be gratefully rewarded should the Whig's prevail and carry the state.

One aspect of Mormon culture greatly strengthened Coleman's argument, probably without his full realization. Dating back to Joseph Smith's efforts with the United States government, the Mormons held a belief in federal, and especially presidential, power that was disproportionate to reality. Expecting federal intervention by the president had always been a myopic hope given the limits to presidential power

⁴⁵⁵ Holman Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor: Soldier in the White House* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), 113.

and the unpopularity of the Mormon cause. Coleman's rhetoric used this Mormon view of presidential power to his advantage by linking the election of Zachary Taylor directly to the fortunes of Mormon territorial petitions in the West.

Brigham Young's Skepticism and Acceptance of Whig Offers

Though Young had many reasons to hesitate at the Whig offer of support, having already experienced in the 1844 election the vehemence with which the Whigs could denounce Mormonism, his frustration with the Democratic Party and its officials was such that he was contemplative about the newly-proffered olive branch. He remarked in that the Whig statements proved that "prominent men of the nation" when they were "unshackled by popular prejudice...readily admitted that we were an industrious, innocent, [and] persecuted people." Nevertheless, Young was ever skeptical of political machinations and the empty flattery that accompanied electioneering. He explained to the Mormon leadership it, "looked rather suspicious, that the Whigs of Iowa, should at this peculiar juncture become deeply interested in our welfare, and all of a sudden grow warm and eloquent upon the subject of our expulsion from Missouri, and the martyrdom of our Prophet and Patriarch, Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and the unparalleled sufferings we had endured in our boasted land of freedom."⁴⁵⁶ The national Whig party had offered no support when those atrocities were being committed, and it was dubious that they now appeared outraged over events that had happened several years earlier.

Despite the ingrained skepticism, and perhaps as a testament to their desperation to be accepted as fellow American citizens, the Mormons determined that an offer of

⁴⁵⁶ MHC, March 27, 1848, Vol. 18, 24. Underlining in original.

protection from the Whigs of dubious sincerity was still better than the apparent hostility the national Democrats had shown them. It is possible the Young reasoned that because the Whigs were in fact desperate to gain and retain Mormon votes to seize power in Iowa that the Mormons would have a better chance exacting the fulfillment of such political promises as were made at the caucus. There is also the fact that the Mormons since the time of Joseph Smith had refused to support those who had openly claimed that they would not have power to aid the Mormons once elected. Taylor was an enigma, with his own party both chaffing at the thought of his less than ideal Whig credentials and, at least in the North, the fact that he was a massive slaveholder.⁴⁵⁷ He had not made a statement disclaiming either power or responsibility to aid the Mormons in their various persecutions.

On the other hand, Lewis Cass, the Democrat emerging as the favorite, had previously gone on record stating that as president he would not have power to aid the Mormons. In 1844, when many thought Cass would gain the nomination, he responded to Joseph Smith's letter asking what his course would be if elected with a coolness and an apparent disinterest in the calamities that had befallen the Mormons. Though he stated that the Mormons should be treated as equal citizens, he did not believe that the government had any power to ensure that such treatment was forthcoming from the states. He had closed the unhelpful letter by stating, "I am bound, however, in candor to add, that if your application for redress...has been, as you say rejected by constituted

⁴⁵⁷ The convoluted way in which both Taylor came to declare himself a Whig and that he obtained that party's nomination to the presidency is explained by Holt in chapters 9 and 10 of his work, as is the regional antipathy toward him as a candidate.

authorities of the State of Missouri, and by the Congress, I do not see what power, the President of the United States can have over the matter, or how he can interfere in it.”⁴⁵⁸

Cass’ statement that the president could not intervene when state militias took the law into their own hands, as the Mormons believed they had, was a ready disqualifier. The Mormon leaders wanted a president that would defend their rights, no matter how unpopular such a stance would be politically and Cass had already stated to Smith that he would not take any proactive steps to this end. And, Zachary Taylor, by sheer omission, had not made similar pronouncements. It was at least plausible that he might change the government’s attitude toward the Mormons; with Cass such a possibility was quite remote indeed.

Yet one cannot but wonder if the move to the Whig Party represented a great error in judgment by Young and the other apostles. The Democratic Party in Iowa had already been quite congenial to their settlements, had recently arranged to organize Pottawattamie County where the Mormons were settled, and Mormon emissaries to Iowa City had returned describing how the secretary of state had urged the Mormons to stay in Iowa and help build up its infrastructure. From a simply pragmatic perspective, because Iowa was a state that had already voted solidly in the Democratic column, nearly all of the state officers and a majority of the legislature, both of which had the power to help or hinder Mormon settlements, were Democrats, as was the Governor. It seems at first glance, that while the Mormons might gain even greater political favors by voting into office a Whig government, the probability of such a turnover in the state’s leadership was at least lower than the possibility that the incumbent Democrats would retain power. In fact, according

⁴⁵⁸ Senator Lewis Cass to General Joseph Smith, December 9, 1843, JSC, MS 155, box 3, folder 5, LDS Church Archives.

to one historian, many national Whigs had already written off the entire Northwest, including Iowa, in the coming election as near-certain wins for the Democrats.⁴⁵⁹ Thus, the Mormons had, at least in Iowa, only marginal potential gains in a victory, while they seemingly had everything to lose if their gamble did not pay off and Democrats, now enraged at their disloyalty to their party, retained control of the state. Were the Mormons so desperate to hear the laudatory cajoling of the Whig delegates that they threw caution to the wind in order to unify with the first party that would recognize both their religion and their grievances as legitimate?

While there is at least something to the fact that the Whigs had made a powerful presentation that was psychologically appealing to the Mormons, when one looks at the larger scene, Young's decision does not seem so rash, emotional, and ill-advised. Zachary Taylor was distrusted by many Whigs who felt he was corrupting the party. They were embittered by his flirtation with running as an independent candidate and his platform that seemed bereft of classic Whig ideology. Still, the fact remained that Taylor was wildly popular in the nation at the time. His massive holdings in slaves, lack of a political record to attack, and cult-hero status assured that he would have broad national appeal, especially tapping into traditionally Democratic southern states. Most important in Young's decision-making was the fact that he did not view Iowa as a permanent settling place for the Mormons who were then living there. He had already been pressing Thomas Kane to push for a territorial organization in the Great Basin as soon as he could. Thus, Young would have easily recognized that whomever was the next president would be largely responsible not only for signing such a bill organizing a territorial government,

⁴⁵⁹ Holman Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor: Soldier in the White House* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966.), 113.

but more importantly for appointing the federal officers to make up both the executive and judicial branches of said territory. In March of 1848, it appeared far more likely to many people that Zachary Taylor's military exploits would carry him to victory and thus the highest office in the land. Perhaps the most persuasive part of the Whig argument had been that if the Mormons allied themselves with the soon-to-be president, he would not forget their loyalty to him once elected, especially in regards to the Great Basin. In this sense, the move to the Whig Party, while quite dangerous in Iowa, was on fairly sound footing considering the Mormons' new settlement in the recently-ceded Mexican lands.

As the results of the votes in their Iowa districts would preclude any doubt that the Mormons had voted for Taylor in a bloc in the presidential election, there was no question that the ire of the Democrats both nationally and in Iowa would be aroused. It made little sense to not at least attempt to install Whig leaders in Iowa in the election for state officers which preceded the presidential election by a few months. Regardless of the outcome in the state races, Mormon support for Taylor in the presidential election would be enough to engender the same wrath from defeated Democrats as the Mormons had previously experienced. Young always viewed the Mormon habitations in Iowa as stop-gap measures, temporary settlements designed only to facilitate the grand migration to the Salt Lake Valley. His political loyalties centered on the future of the new Mormon settlements in what would become Utah, and for those to be vindicated, executive favor had to be culled. Thus, while on record as believing the Whig professions of affection to be dubious, Young determined he would still reciprocate in hopes of political favors. In point of fact, by the time the state election took place, Young knew that he and hundreds

of other Mormons would already be in Salt Lake City, as they planned to leave with dozens more pioneer companies in the spring and summer.

Whatever the deciding factor, or combination thereof, which pushed the Mormons into a political alliance with the Whigs, they came to the decision quite hastily, perhaps testifying to their desperation for political support. The Mormons drafted a resolution which, after again recounting the “outrages, persecutions and...unexampled proscriptions endured by the Latter Day Saints”, stated that they would support the Whigs of Iowa if they would “lift up their hands toward heaven and swear by the Eternal Gods that they would use all their powers to suppress mobocracy, insurrection, rebellion, and violence...such might arise against the Latter-day Saints...even to the sacrifice of all their property, and their lives if need be.” Not only was such an exaggerated oath a steep requirement that the Mormons could not possibly think the Whig politicians would physically perform, they also could not have really expected the Whig politicians to be willing to sacrifice their property and lives to defend the Mormons, let alone political influence should the eventuality arise. On a more practical level, the Mormons also placed their support upon condition that the Whigs would not simply attempt to fill the state offices with “traditional” members of their party, but extend the “full share of Representative and Judicial authority” to the Mormons. These terms agreed to, the Mormons would then “pledge themselves to unite with the Whigs of Iowa at the elections of the current year.”⁴⁶⁰

Despite the fact the Mormon resolution made their support sound conditional, the evidence really indicates that even before the March 27 caucus, following the first meeting with the Whigs and Young in Winter Quarters, the Mormons had agreed to

⁴⁶⁰ MHC, March 27, 1848, Vol. 18, 24.

support the Whigs. The resolution then being sent to Iowa City was more of a restatement of Mormon feelings and positions with regard to politics, and expectations for reward.

Partisan Disputes Within Mormonism and Hyde's Efforts to Persuade

Yet, while Young's account of the March 27 caucus and Hosea Stout's of the earlier March 24 meeting, seem to suggest a unanimity among the Mormon leadership on the question of politics, such was not the case. Some Mormons who were strongly attached to the Democratic Party argued against such an arrangement with the Whigs and Woodruff's account of the caucus explains that there were "speeches made pro & con" on the matter.⁴⁶¹ The Apostle Orson Hyde, who would remain in Iowa along with George A. Smith and Ezra Benson to govern the affairs of the Iowa Mormons after Young and others left, became a particular flashpoint of controversy, both with Mormons and non-Mormons alike. Hyde agreed with the rational that the Democratic Party had already been instruments of mobocracy and terror to the Mormons in the past and as such could not be trusted. A staunch Whig supporter, Hyde would even go so far as to establish a Mormon newspaper, *The Frontier Guardian*, which would consistently advocate Whig politics, candidates, and policies, though after the 1848 election had already concluded. The less than neutral political stance following the agreement with the Whigs in Iowa led to clashes between Hyde and Almon Babbitt. Babbitt, an accomplished lawyer and former member of the Illinois House of Representatives, was an ardent Democrat and did

⁴⁶¹ Woodruff, *Journal*, March 27, 1848, Vol. 3, 335.

not shy away from expressing his displeasure at the course settled on by the Church.⁴⁶²

Babbitt would eventually start a rival newspaper, the *Council Bluffs Bugle*, in which the viewpoint of the Democratic Party was strictly maintained. Eventually, Hyde asserted his apostolic authority and disfellowshipped Babbitt from the Church over his belief that Babbitt had made false statements concerning Hyde's actions in the election. When Brigham Young learned of the action, he chastised Hyde in an 1849 letter which showed how little Young held any real allegiance to the Whig Party:

Now we do not care a groat about your political differences, but we wish to say to you to not allow trivial matters to influence you in the least, and never, no never, no never drag Priesthood into a political Gentile warfare. Let no religious test be required, or the holy influence and power of the Priesthood be brought to bear in any political question. If the intrinsic merits of all such matters will not furnish argument sufficient for all necessary purposes, then let them go, for it is better for the whole political fabric, corrupt as we know it to be, should tatter and go to destruction, than for one Saint to be offended.⁴⁶³

Nevertheless, as the election approached Democrats in Iowa seemed at first to be unaware that an accord had been reached between the Whigs and Mormons. Thinking that they were about to scoop up hundreds of more votes from the Democratic Mormons, they proceeded to fulfill the Mormon request to organize Pottawattamie County. By July, townships had been laid out and polling places designated, though the county remained as yet not formally organized.⁴⁶⁴

Though Brigham Young and other apostles had led hundreds more Mormons away from Iowa in pioneer companies, there remained thousands yet, and thus the Mormon votes figured to

⁴⁶² Roberts, 327. As Leonard Arrington has pointed out, Babbitt's later clashes with Brigham Young over politics and policy in Utah Territory made him a persistent thorn in latter's side. Babbitt would eventually be killed by Indians while en route to Washington D.C. from Salt Lake in 1856.

⁴⁶³ Brigham Young to Orson Hyde, July 20, 1849, MHC, Vol 19, 104. A groat was an English coin worth four pennies. The cynical way in which Brigham Young views American politics is clearly manifest here as is his lack of loyalty to any party.

⁴⁶⁴ *History of Monroe County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1878), 397.

factor prominently in the hotly contested elections for state offices in August. Held more than two months before the 1848 presidential elections, the state elections in Iowa would announce to their Democratic benefactors that the Mormons had sided with the Whigs. The August elections also encompassed the congressional seats for the federal government, and it was upon the district covering the Mormon-settled part of the state that a bitter struggle ensued.

Orson Hyde, one of the leading Mormon apostles left in charge of the remaining Mormons in Iowa, continued his active efforts to support the Whig ticket. Discarding pretenses to propriety, Hyde wrote a letter to the members of the Church in Iowa on July 8, 1848 to “advise and request you to cast your votes at the ensuing election for the Whig candidates for office.” Though Hyde would later claim that he had written the letter as a private citizen who just happened to be a Mormon leader, the wording of the letter had all the trappings of ecclesiastical endorsement. Hyde had introduced himself in the letter’s opening as a “counsellor in the church of God”, a designation which faithful readers would have readily recognized and accepted. Moreover, Hyde explained that he had concluded to support the Whigs because he believed it was in the best interests of the prosperity of both the Mormons and the nation as a whole and invoked God’s blessing upon the readers.⁴⁶⁵

But, neither the Hyde letter alone, nor the decision by Brigham Young and the Church leadership to ally with the Whigs, can be cited as the sole cause of Mormon support for the Whigs in the upcoming election, especially the hotly contested congressional election between Daniel Miller and William Thompson. In fact, there is some doubt as to how quickly the Hyde letter was circulated, even among the more prominent Mormons.

⁴⁶⁵ *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, August 24, 1848.

Both Miller and Thompson hailed from the eastern edge of the state. Miller had a law practice in Fort Madison, only miles from the former Mormon settlement in Nauvoo Illinois and Thompson had a law practice of his own in Mount Pleasant also in the southeastern area of the state. As such, both men were well acquainted with the recent history of the Mormons and their forced expulsion from Illinois, and each man's conduct, also factored into Mormon voting patterns as the Mormons would not easily forget any who had stood against them.

On July 17, Elias Smith, cousin of the deceased founder Joseph Smith who lived in Iowaville, southeast of Ottumwa, wrote a letter to Apostle George A. Smith. Elias Smith was a former bishop and manager of the *Times and Seasons* newspaper that the Mormons had published in Nauvoo before their expulsion. Though family illness prevented him from settling with the main body of the Saints, Elias was still a committed member of the sect and would continue to be so after his eventual move to the Salt Lake Valley. The letter had the pretense of giving a letter of introduction for a millwright who was headed to Council Bluffs to seek work, but the balance of the contents concerned the upcoming election. Elias was unsure of whether or not the Mormons would even be allowed to vote in the coming election, but delicately tried to persuade George A. to encourage others to vote the Whig ticket, at least in the case of Daniel Miller for Congress. Knowing the Mormon penchant for the Democratic Party he wrote, "I hope no party predilections will prevent our friends from voting for our old friend Daniel F. Miller Esq. for Congress, who has invariably advocated the principles of law and good order and equal rights to all, and has at all times opposed the operations of our enemies against us not only in Iowa but in Illinois. Such men should in my opinion be supported

by us as a people in preference to strangers, whether Whig or Democrat.” Yet Elias Smith stepped lightly, for George A. Smith and Orson Hyde were his ecclesiastical superiors. He continued carefully that he “had no wish to dictate” policy to these men, but if he could have a personal interview with both he could better illustrate why he felt Miller’s election would “be advantageous to us [as] a community and to the country in general.”⁴⁶⁶

Elias Smith’s feelings were not solely dictated by his esteem for Daniel Miller, but also his distaste for one of Thompson’s electioneering surrogates. He explained that a certain JC Hall was “a notorious advocate of mobocracy who has often cheered the mobocrats...[with] speeches encouraging them to acts of violence against us in days gone by.” Jonathan C. Hall, the law partner of Congressman Thompson, who would later be representing him in the disputed election, was apparently known to Elias Smith from the days of the Illinois persecutions, having made speeches against the Mormons in Lee County, which was the Iowa county just across the Mississippi River from the Mormon city of Nauvoo. Hall would eventually become a member of the Supreme Court of Iowa in 1854.⁴⁶⁷ However, in 1848, his prior agitations against the Mormons when they were yet in Illinois, at a time when it was no doubt popular, were now remembered by Mormon men like Elias Smith. If he was the representative of William Thompson, a law partner in fact, then Thompson was guilty by association in his view. Hall had apparently been out electioneering for Thompson in the Mormon settlements in Iowa, especially Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah, and Smith hoped he would “receive a cool reception.”

⁴⁶⁶ Elias Smith to George A Smith, July 17, 1848, George A. Smith Papers, MS 1322, Box 4, Folder 11, LDS Church Archives.

⁴⁶⁷ Biographical information for Jonathan C. Hall taken from the Iowa Judicial Branch website operated by the State of Iowa, <http://www.judicial.state.ia.us/wfdata/frame1773-1463/pressrel7.asp>

Elias closed the letter begging George A. Smith's pardon for "any intrusion I may have made upon your political views."⁴⁶⁸

Obviously Elias Smith had no knowledge of the meetings the Whigs had held with the Church leadership in March, nor of the decision to back the Whigs in the upcoming election. It is also clear that he had no knowledge of the Orson Hyde letter which had been written to encourage faithful Mormons to vote the Whig ticket. Taken together with other letters written by prominent Mormons, it appears that Hyde's letter encouraging Mormons to vote the Whig ticket received extremely limited circulation in the areas outside of the Kanesville vicinity. But even without the prodding of an ecclesiastical letter, other factors, such as Thompson's connections to known anti-Mormons and the general bitterness toward the Democrats as the ruling party during their expulsion, motivated many individual Mormons to bolt from the Democratic ranks of their own accord.

Though Hyde's letter had a limited circulation and was not public knowledge prior to the election, the Whigs were unable to contain their jubilation over their expectation of the Mormon tallies when the votes were counted. On election day, as early returns steadily went against the Whigs, Whig leaders made indelicate statements to the effect that the Democrats would "hear from Pottawattamie."⁴⁶⁹ But, the rejoinder, at least in matter of fact, from the Democrats was that they would make sure that they would not.

⁴⁶⁸ Elias Smith to George A Smith, July 17, 1848, George A. Smith Papers, MS 1322, Box 4, Folder 11, LDS Church Archives.

⁴⁶⁹ *History of Monroe County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1878), 397.

Reaction of the Democratic Party to the Mormon/Whig Alliance

The Democrats had begun to grow uneasy with the expected Mormon vote before the election. Reports began circulating of Whig inroads made into the Mormon voting bloc. One Democratic newspaper related the rumor of Whig interference in organizing the Mormon vote as early as July 6, 1848. The paper's editorial comment ominously portended the reaction of the Democratic Party would be if such rumors were true. The shameless Whigs were condemned for "endeavoring to thwart the wishes of the people" by seeking to secure votes of "a remnant of a sect whose customs are so unlike those of a christian community that their presence, in a body, can nowhere be tolerated."⁴⁷⁰ Two weeks later the same Democratic Party organ announced to its readers that the Whigs were attempting to purchase the Mormon vote, another accusation that would have considerable staying power.⁴⁷¹

Thus, by both word of mouth and the media, in the last weeks before the election leaks of a Mormon/Whig alliance started to reach the ears of powerful Democrats in the state and they began to devise a scheme whereby they would not have to contend with the loss of the Mormon vote. There was not time to win back the vote from the treacherous sect, and so the next most accessible course of action was to claim that the Mormon vote was illegal and should not be counted.

As historical ironies go, the attempt by the Democrats in Iowa to disallow the Mormon vote in the August elections is one that is greatly underappreciated. The Democrats argued that the steps taken to organize polling places in Kanessville (Council

⁴⁷⁰ *Keokuk Dispatch*, July 6, 1848, sic.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid*, July 20, 1848.

Bluffs) at which the Mormons could vote had been done so in violation of the statutes organizing the state election. The great irony was that the Democrats had been the ones who had organized those selfsame polling places when they thought the Mormons would constitute a solid Democratic voting bloc. Their certainty about the legality of such moves quickly disintegrated when an excuse was needed to disallow the Mormon votes following the election. Thus, over the next several years as the contested congressional election went all the way to the Halls of Congress, the Democrats would argue, without directly saying so, that they had themselves violated the law in order to create polling places for the Mormons and that their votes should not be counted or considered valid. The contest for the congressional seat between the Whig Daniel Miller and the Democratic incumbent William Thompson, whose district included the Mormon settlements, would achieve national fame. The argument over which man had truly been elected to the United States Congress centered on whether or not the Mormon votes were to be accepted or rejected as invalid.

The Democratic Party premeditated their response to the Mormon vote, according to admissions made in the congressional investigation that followed. Recognizing various signs that the staunch Mormon support for the Democrats was in jeopardy, high-ranking Democrats General Augustus Dodge and General Lysander W. Babbitt held several meetings with other insiders during the week of the election. Dodge was campaigning to become a US senator from Iowa, and as such the results of the state legislative contests were a chief concern.⁴⁷² Babbitt was himself running as a representative for the Iowa state legislature on the Democratic ticket. Dodge's brother-

⁴⁷² The reader will note that senators were selected by a vote of the state legislators, thus whichever party secured the majority in the state legislature usually succeeded in selecting a member of their party as a senator to represent the state in Washington.

in-law and former Territorial Governor, James Clarke, was also a part of the discussions about what to do with the expected Mormon vote. It was concluded that Jonathan C. Hall, the same electioneerer who had soured Elias Smith toward the Thompson campaign, should go to Albia, where the Mormon returns from Pottawattamie would be received and counted following the election. There, Hall would instruct the country clerk to not receive the votes of the Mormons because they were not legal, a task that would not be difficult to accomplish given the fact that the Monroe County clerk was also a Democrat. Hall's forthright testimony is shocking to some degree. He testified in the congressional inquiry that while the Democratic leaders expressed their belief that the Mormon vote would be "illegal and fraudulent, and that it ought, if possible, be suppressed from the canvas", their motivation was that there was a general understanding that if the votes were to be counted they would go strongly in favor of the Whig candidates. There was little doubt that political interests, not legal platitudes, motivated Hall to go to Albia to stop the Mormon vote from being counted.⁴⁷³

Whatever the motivation, Hall succeeded with his goal of blocking the Mormon vote. When the returns came in, Hall and more than a dozen others shouted down the few Whigs present, declaiming that the Mormon votes were illegal and should not be counted. William Pickett, a staunch Whig and Mormon who had organized the Mormons' voting efforts, was in the room for the incident and strenuously protested. But Hall had something far more important than the number of voices on his side to stem Pickett; he had the party allegiance of the county clerk. The primary argument leveled was that because the Kanesville (Council Bluffs) precincts were not legally in the jurisdiction of Monroe County, the clerk had no duty to recognize them. This centered

⁴⁷³ Deposition of J.C. Hall, *House Miscellaneous Documents*, No. 47, 1st Session, 31st Congress, 25-26.

on the Democrats' (new) interpretation of the laws organizing polling places of as yet unorganized counties. The law allowed Monroe County to organize polling places in the inhabited lands to the west, but Democrats argued that Kanesville was not *directly* west. It was slightly north as well, and as such the polling places that had been established were illegal. The clerk, Dudley C. Barber, agreed with his Democratic friends and used the parliamentary trick of refusing to acknowledge that he had received any returns at all from the polling places in the Mormon areas. When the question arose of what should be done with the Mormon votes, Hall brashly stated, "Sweep them out of doors –they are a waste of paper." William Pickett replied how preposterous the line of reasoning was, that the clerk had not received the votes, because they were sitting there in front of the clerk. He had physically received them and they were on his table. To this Barber replied emphatically, "I have not, and I am not going to receive them."⁴⁷⁴

To remove the incriminating evidence of the returns still sitting on the clerk's desk, though they claimed it was to prevent the Whigs and Mormons from perpetrating an election fraud, an anonymous Democrat with Hall's foreknowledge (possibly Hall himself) went back to the clerk's office later, stole the returns and placed them in Hall's baggage. Hall had with great difficulty, and convenient amnesia, attempted to explain to investigators how the poll books with the returns from Kanesville ended up in his possession. He kept them hidden and their whereabouts a secret and had eventually turned them over to his partner, Congressman William Thompson, in early 1849. Thus the Kanesville votes ended up in the hands of the very person in the contest who had the most vested personal interest and therefore should least have had control of the Kanesville poll book. The Mormon votes, if known and accepted, would turn Thompson

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, 23-24.

out of office. Thompson not only secretly held the books, allowing the Democratic media to accuse the Mormons themselves of stealing their own votes, he did not produce them until under pressure from a Congressional inquiry a year later.⁴⁷⁵ Such were the political ethics of the partisan 1840's election campaigns.

The Democratic Secretary of State of Iowa, Elisha Cutler, Jr., who had only five months early encouraged the Mormons to stay in Iowa rather than leave the state, was more than willing to certify the official election results of the hotly contested congressional seat: Thompson was the victor with 6477 votes to Miller's 6091. The tallies did not include the rejected Kanesville votes cast by the Mormons, totaling 523 votes. In effect, 4% of Iowa's voters had been disenfranchised because they had the temerity to vote for the wrong party. The disallowing of the Mormon vote was not merely a miscarriage of laws protecting the elective franchise of citizens, the nullification of the votes led directly to Thompson's re-election. Had the votes been counted, Miller would have narrowly defeated Thompson, as the Mormon votes tallied 493 for Miller and a paltry 30 for Thompson. The dispute continued on for years before the Congress finally ordered a statewide revote, which Miller won.

Thompson's appeal to Congress to reject the Mormon votes betrayed clearly that the Mormons were not merely the unfortunate citizens caught in a political crossfire. They were fundamentally different. Thompson presented a 10-point argument as to why the Mormon votes should not be counted. The first of these directly highlighted the perceived foreignness of the sect, claiming that the Mormons were "unnaturalized aliens" and therefore unable to legally vote. The second, and closely related, was that the Mormons were "non-residents of Iowa" because they had no intention to settle there

⁴⁷⁵ Deposition of J.C. Hall, *House Miscellaneous Documents*, No. 47, 1st Session, 31st Congress, 25.

permanently. He hammered on the transient nature of the Mormon group. Furthermore, he claimed that many of them had not lived in the state long enough to legally vote, and Mormon witnesses were grilled about whether they had lived for six continuous months on the Iowa side of the Missouri River. Of course, nearly all of the Mormons had, because Young had ordered the vacating of Winter Quarters on the Nebraska side of the Missouri River in the fall of 1847. And Mormon witnesses attested to the fact that all of the voters on the roll books, with the exception of one that possibly was not, were in fact citizens of both the United States and of Iowa. In what was clearly a desperation tactic, Thompson also claimed that many of the Mormons who voted were not 21 and therefore not legal voters. On top of all of these claims of foreignness and lack of residency, Thompson argued what Hall had to the clerk when the election returns had first come in to Albia; the polling places were illegal and therefore the votes should not be counted.⁴⁷⁶ To this final accusation Daniel Miller, Thompson's erstwhile Whig opponent in the election, retorted that the "Kanesville precinct was organized by your political friends to aid you in your election contest against me, and...your political friends all regarded Kanesville as a legal place of voting, and the voters there as good voters until after the election was over...and I had beaten you at that precinct." The investigation in fact proved that the Democrats in Iowa had anticipated the Mormon returns going against them and had premeditated the rejection of the votes several days earlier. In any case Miller accurately accused Thompson and his political allies because through their actions "the citizens of Kanesville were disenfranchised of their electoral rights."⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁶ Iowa Contested Elections, *House Miscellaneous Documents*, Report No. 400, 1st Session, 31st Congress, 2.

⁴⁷⁷ Admissions in Reference to Various Matters, B., *House Miscellaneous Documents*, No. 47, 1st Session, 31st Congress, 23.

Larger Consequences of the Iowa Controversy

The Whigs reacted with shock and horror, denouncing the actions of the Democrats in suppressing the returns, especially at the behest of a lowly clerk rather than a court order. The Democrats responded with ferocity as well, claiming that the Mormons had been bribed to vote for the Whigs. Orson Hyde, the vocal apostle, was particularly accused of having been bribed in return for convincing the Mormons to vote for the Whigs. In a dehumanizing comparison, one paper wrote that the Mormons in Iowa had, “like so many cattle”, followed the dictates of Hyde.⁴⁷⁸ One Democratic newspaper even had the temerity to turn the whole affair on its head and claim that it was the Whigs who had concocted a “disgraceful scheme to overrule the people of Iowa, and to deprive them of their free choice, by the agency of 1500 illegal votes, bought for the occasion.” The venomous editor charged that by enlisting (or buying) the Mormon vote the Whig Party had proven that they “fear the voice of a free people as destructive of their schemes, and place their only hope of success, upon merchantable votes and the corruption of the ballot box.”

In the view of Democratic newspaper editors, it was the Mormons who were the defrauding party in the whole affair. They were not real Americans because of their allegiance to a suspect religious group and they were not real Iowans because they had only been driven there in their exile from the nation. To this end, even the very fact that the Mormon votes were disallowed and stolen was also blamed upon the Mormons themselves with the reasoning that Mormons were so diabolical that they had agreed to vote in order to get the money, but stole the returns so that their votes would never be

⁴⁷⁸ *Iowa State Gazette*, August 23, 1848.

counted.⁴⁷⁹ Of course, when the poll books resurfaced in the hands of the very Democrats who had suppressed them, such mind-numbing logic was proven to be the absurdity for which it should have been readily recognized in the first place.

Mormons living in scattered settlements in central and eastern Iowa were confronted with the controversy that many knew little about and were thus at the whim of the local newspapers to glean the relevant information, a decidedly difficult practice given the highly partisan nature of newspapers in the 1840's in general and Iowa in particular. One Mormon man, having heard the rumors that Orson Hyde had been bribed to deliver the Mormon votes to the Whigs reacted by writing to George A Smith, the other apostle in Kanesville. Though he acknowledged that he had never written Smith before, the matter was so troubling that he could not refrain from attempting some independent verification. The writer, Bradford Elliot, was not a new convert to Mormonism, but one who had experienced the turbulent times in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois.⁴⁸⁰ As such, he was greatly concerned at the possibility that Hyde had accepted money from the Whigs and felt that such an act "places us in an unfavorable position and informs the world that we are in market. The highest bidder purchases our votes." Such an arrangement was even worse in Elliot's eyes because, like Brigham Young, he did not believe either party had any real interest in the Mormons and that "both parties have shown enmity toward" the Mormons. Not only was it reported that Hyde had sold the votes, it was also being reported that the Mormons were so corrupt that after they took the money from the Whigs they sought to sell the votes back to the Democratic Party for

⁴⁷⁹ *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, August 26, 1848.

⁴⁸⁰ Elliot had been one of the men that accompanied Joseph Smith on his ultimately abortive mission from Kirtland Ohio to reclaim the lands confiscated from the Mormons in Jackson County, Missouri. That march, known as "Zion's Camp" in Mormon circles, was fraught with difficulties for the men who undertook it.

\$500. He related that nearly everyone in the Mount Pleasant area, from both parties, believed the reports to be true. Perhaps the whole affair troubled Elliot more given the fact that he believed that Lewis Cass would end up winning the general election and the Mormons would be seen backing the wrong party. The implication was that Elliot believed a Cass victory was in the offing and the Mormons should vote for him rather than waste time on the Whigs and Taylor because “neither will befriend us very much” and, he wrote, “If Gen. Taylor is elected he cannot do anything for us for a Large Majority of the United States Senate are of the opposite party.” Like many Mormons, he vented his frustration at the American political system in general, closing the political discussion by adding, “The creeds of both parties are in opposition to the other, and not the good of the people.”⁴⁸¹

While there is no doubt that Orson Hyde used his ecclesiastical influence in an attempt to persuade Mormon voters to select the Whig candidates, his motivation does not seem to have been monetary, as his detractors accused. Hyde explained his position prior to the elections in a frank letter to fellow apostle and leader of the Mormon Church in Iowa, George A. Smith, that he believed the Democrats no longer deserved Mormon votes, having winked at the various injustices that had been conducted against them, from the likes of Governor Boggs of Missouri or Governor Ford of Illinois.

On a deeper lever though, Hyde, like Brigham Young, appreciated the nuances of American politics as they related to the territories recently captured from Mexico. It was widely believed that John C. Fremont, the dashing explorer and adventurer who had carried on an unsanctioned war in California even prior to receiving word of the

⁴⁸¹ Bradford Elliot to George A. Smith, August 20, 1848, George A. Smith Papers, MS 1322, Box 4, Folder 10, LDS Church Archives.

hostilities, would be on the short list of governors for the proposed territory of California. Not just charismatic, Fremont was the son-in-law of the powerful Democratic senator, Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri. Hyde and the Mormons considered Benton their consummate foe for his endorsement of the removal of Mormons from that state. Hyde reasoned to Smith that if a Democrat won the national office, then Benton would certainly be able to use his prowess in the Senate to see to it that his daughter's husband would be appointed governor, not an outlandish belief since Benton was in fact able to get court martial charges against Fremont thrown out after the latter exceeded his authority in California. Hyde argued that if Benton's surrogate was able to control the government of California, which at the time encompassed the Mormons' Great Basin settlement, "Benton would never consent for us to have a separate territorial government in the Great Basin" because such a distinct territory would "curtail the dominions of his son-in-law."⁴⁸²

Hyde's chief concern, like that of Brigham Young's, was not necessarily what the Mormons' political enemies in Iowa would think, nor how they would react, though such matters clearly troubled individual Mormons living in Iowa like Bradford Elliot. Hyde instead saw the importance of gaining some type of political capital to aid the Mormons in the quest for a separate territory or state out of the Mexican Cession. It was clear to him that supporting the Democrats would not guarantee such a result, and might in fact create great opposition to a Mormon territorial/statehood proposal. On the other hand, he told Smith, the Whigs "have assured me, that if they get into office, they will do all in their power to give us a government in the valley and appoint a Governor that is the man

⁴⁸² Orson Hyde to George A. Smith, July 22, 1848, George A. Smith Papers, MS 1322, Box 4, Folder 10, LDS Church Archives.

of our choice.” Yet even Hyde, as strong a supporter of the Whigs as he was, conceded that the Whigs might not follow through on such a promise. Of establishing such a government in Salt Lake Hyde wrote, “This they may do, and then again they may not do it.” But, he added, “we know the democrats will not do it.”⁴⁸³ He voiced a similar feeling in an earlier letter to Smith when he wrote, “The Whigs can certainly do no worse for us than the Democrats have, and they may do better.” The choice for Hyde was one between certain political opposition in the West, and possible negligence to the Saints’ cause, and he affirmed the latter was the most astute course of action, even if the Whigs did not follow through on their promises.⁴⁸⁴ Hyde and Young both saw the Iowa contest as but a minor affair in the grand scheme of Mormon/US relations. In order to secure their proposed territory, and more importantly to have Mormons appointed to the gubernatorial and judicial offices, a national alliance with the Whigs was necessary. The congressional and presidential elections would prove Mormon loyalty to the Whig Party, they hoped, and thus facilitate federal backing in the West.

However loyal the national Whigs might turn out to be in the future, the Iowa Whigs were vehement in their defense of the Mormons and their votes. The Whig press refused to give up the moral high ground in the face of the widely circulated Democratic attacks and reminded the readers in Iowa that, “The Commissioners of Monroe County, who organized the Kanesville precinct...were all Democrats.” They had no problem or question about the legality of the Mormon vote prior to the election when they thought the Mormons would vote for the Democrats, but when they did not, suddenly their votes

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Orson Hyde to George A. Smith, July 8, 1848, George A. Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, MS 1322, Box 4, Folder 10.

were all illegal, the Mormons were alien foreigners, and underage to boot.⁴⁸⁵ Several pointed out the incongruity of the fact that the Democrats were electioneering in Kanesville up to and even on election day; if they did not believe that the precinct was legally organized or that the Mormons were legal voters then why were their surrogates in Kanesville attempting to influence the vote? The Democrats had voted with their feet and with their allocation of resources that they too believed the Mormons could legally vote and that the Kanesville precinct organization was lawful.

In any case, for the local Mormons, the August election was a decided failure. They cast their lot with the Whigs and fell short of victory. The Democrats retained all of the major state offices, the majority in the state legislature, and still controlled the governorship of Iowa. Now, however, the wrath of the Democrats toward the Mormons was nearly unchecked. Democratic newspapers frequently denounced the Mormons as traitors and villains and the Mormons were told, in no uncertain terms, that if they voted for Zachary Taylor in the upcoming presidential election, that the county organization which was underway in Pottawattamie would be rescinded and the Mormons would have their Iowa citizenship taken from them. Apostle George A. Smith informed the Church leaders in Salt Lake of the reaction in a letter to fellow apostle Orson Pratt. “The democrats”, he explained, “threaten to upset our [county] organization should we vote for Gen. Taylor.” Despite the palpable threat, Smith explained that, “a great majority of the people in this county are decidedly opposed to [Democratic candidate Lewis] Cass or [Free Soil Party candidate Martin] Van Buren.” He intimated that the Mormon vote would heavily favor Taylor despite the possible repercussions from angry partisans in the

⁴⁸⁵ *Muscatine Journal*, April 6, 1850.

Democratic Party because the Mormons in Iowa would “not be overthrown except by mobocracy.”⁴⁸⁶

The decision to back Iowa Whigs had national consequences. The ire of the Democratic Party was not just contained to Iowa. Wilford Woodruff visited Thomas Kane in Philadelphia in early October, as the rancor over the state elections was still at its peak. Though Kane was quite busy when Woodruff arrived, he left his matters of business and, as Woodruff reported, “conversed with us with deep interest upon our cause.” Kane must have heard rumblings from his political connections because he told Woodruff that he “had fears that there was trouble brewing against [the Mormons] in the west of Iowa.” Kane asked Woodruff to “give him the earliest information of any thing against” the Mormons in regard to the political strife he saw ahead.⁴⁸⁷

Despite the threats, the full fury of Democratic indignation in Iowa was not unleashed prior to the presidential election. There the Democrats had swept the Whigs completely from power in the House and gained dominance in the state Senate, yet the new legislative assembly would not convene until December 6, a month after the presidential votes were cast. Perhaps the Democrats were hoping their threats would take effect, and, seeing the futility of voting the Whig ticket in Iowa, the Mormons, who were almost universally non-slaveholders, would back Cass rather than the enigmatic and plantation-owning Taylor. Mormon voting history suggested that a switch from party to party in a matter of months was possible.

The lack of solid action against the Mormons by the Democrats also may have been due in part to the media reports of a possible shift of the Mormons back to the

⁴⁸⁶ George A. Smith to Orson Pratt, copied in MHC, received October 19, 1848, Vol. 18, 77.

⁴⁸⁷ Woodruff, *Journal*, October 7, 1848, Vol. 3, 375.

Democratic Party. It was widely reported that a Mormon delegation had visited the Democratic candidate, Senator Lewis Cass, at his home in Detroit, Michigan in early November, just days before the presidential election was to take place. Not only had they spoken to Cass in a personal interview, the Mormons had “received great attention from Cass’s particular friends.” In return for the warm reception and productive meeting, the Mormon elders had allegedly given “confident assurances that the vote of the Mormons in [Iowa] would be given to Cass and [Orlando] Butler.”

There is no way to verify whether or not such a meeting occurred, but the lack of mention of it the historical records of the Mormon Church suggests it was merely a rumor. In any case there were no high ranking Mormon officials, such as apostles, which attended the meeting. Thus, if it occurred at all, the Mormon delegation must have been comprised of men who had little power inside the Church hierarchy. And, given the slow speed at which Orson Hyde’s letter had circulated among Mormons in Iowa, even if such a meeting had occurred, the distances involved from Michigan to Iowa and the logistics involved would have rendered the results of such a meeting mostly moot. Yet it was worrisome enough that Whig papers printed and reprinted the story. One of them could not resist using the rumor to make a digging remark against the Democrats who had been adamant that the Mormon vote in August had been illegal. The writer observed wryly that if in fact the Mormons did cast their vote “as the leaders in question promised in Detroit they would do, and that vote should be necessary to give the State to Cass and Butler, *it will be declared to be legal* and be counted along with the balance of the votes of the State.”⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁸ “Cass and the Mormons”, *Davenport Daily Gazette*, November 23, 1848. The information for the article was taken by the *Gazette* from the *Dubuque Tribune*, though no date is given. Emphasis as in original.

No such crisis of conscience would plague the Democrats, however. When the time for the national election came on November 7, sure enough the Mormons did vote for Zachary Taylor. However, in Iowa, in a scene replicated throughout the northwest, Taylor's popularity was unable to overcome the margin of Democratic voters in the state and the suspicion with which many regarded him for Southern residency and his extensive holdings in slaves. In fact, due to some defections to Van Buren's Free Soil Party, while Taylor only lost by 1300 votes in Iowa, he only garnered 46.5% of the vote, a lower proportion of the voters than the Whig candidates for Congress a few months earlier.⁴⁸⁹ The election had still been close, but Cass had carried the day in Iowa, though he lost the election nationally by 44 electoral votes.

If the Mormon scheme had been to support the Whigs and Taylor because they thought the old general would win and it would be prudent to have the next president, the one determining the status of the land the Mormons now resided on in the Great Basin, favorably disposed toward them, then at least this calculation was correct. Whether Taylor would show any predilections to aid the Mormons and their petition for a territorial or state government remained to be seen. But the Mormons could at least lay claim to loyalty to both Taylor and the Whig Party, even in the losing effort in Iowa.

The further embittered Democrats reacted radically, even for the cutthroat political climate of the late 1840's. Upon the new state legislature's first meeting in early January following the elections, the now virtually unopposed Democrats demonstrated that their threats had not been idle in the least. They quickly introduced the Pottawattamie Bill, designed to retract the county organization for Pottawattamie County where the Mormons lived, that had been set in motion in February of 1847 and had only

⁴⁸⁹ Holt, 373.

recently been completed in September 1848. The Mormon price for their divergent voting habits would be a loss of county courts, sheriffs, assessors, state funds for improvements, etc. Most importantly, the revocation of the county organization would remove the Mormons' ability to erect valid polling places, and the Democrats had already demonstrated that they would make sure the Mormons were not allowed to vote elsewhere, despite the statutes that had been passed allowing this privilege to other citizens in the western reaches of the state. The fiery rhetoric in the Iowa statehouse was not even cloaked by pretenses to some legal reason for the disorganization and disenfranchisement. The bill quickly passed the House and the Democratic President of the Senate, John J. Selman, led that body in pushing for its passage there. He declared his support for the Pottawattamie Bill in view of the fact that the Mormons had proven through their corrupt voting practices that they were "fanatics, outlaws, and vagabonds." They were decried again as foreigners and the distinguished Selman even volunteered to lead the mob that would drive this unsavory group from the boundaries of the state, an image eerily reminiscent of the recent past for the Mormons.⁴⁹⁰ Despite such radical pronouncements and impending consequences of the passage of the Pottawattamie Bill, one Whig observer remarked that the Democrats were not worried about a public backlash, because they "expect to be sustained in their attempts upon Pottawattamie by the *religious* prejudices of [the] community!"⁴⁹¹

This Iowa episode reveals the underlying political nature of anti-Mormonism during this period. As the above newspaper article and Senator Selman's rhetoric demonstrate, religious bigotry was used as a tool to gain political advantage. The

⁴⁹⁰ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, January 18, 1849.

⁴⁹¹ J.G. Edwards in the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, January 11, 1849. Emphasis as in original.

Mormon religion had not radically changed since the spring, when Democrats in the state were courting the Mormons and asking them to make their settlements permanent.

Religious differences had not seemed to bother Democrats in Iowa until the Mormons were no longer loyal party patrons. Once the Mormons proved to be a political liability, the arcane nature of their religion became ready fodder to solidify anti-Mormon sentiment in Iowa. But the distinctiveness of Mormonism as a sect was obviously not the primary motivating factor.

The Whigs, having lost handily in the state elections, and failing to carry the state in presidential balloting that followed, were well-motivated to stand by the Mormons who were now facing great opposition for having voted for them. Despite the obvious political motivation to defend the disenfranchisement of nearly 10% of the Whig voters in the state, the gallant Whig defense of the Mormons following the two elections is nothing short of admirable. Whig newspapers denounced the Democrats for their undemocratic treachery in voiding the Mormon votes and seeking to disenfranchise them legally. And, in the Senate, Francis Springer led the Whig fight against the Pottawattamie Bill with an eloquence and verve that are much more deserving of praise, or even knowledge, than is currently afforded. He rhetorically asked his colleagues across the aisle where the power to disenfranchise voters and revoke the protections of the Bill of Rights came from? If they could disorganize one county because it voted in a Whig fashion, what would stop them from disorganizing others as well? With a prescient foreknowledge of how historians would adjudge such an arbitrary and discriminatory act, Springer declared:

I do not profess to be a prophet...but I will undertake to hazard a prediction, and to say that if it has been decreed that this measure is to pass, the future historian of

the State, in writing the history of its parties, will trace...this crowning outrage upon the great principles which lie at the foundation of our political institutions. The deliberate disenfranchisement of a whole county, containing 4000 or 5000 inhabitants, to condemn it to anarchy, exile and banishment, for no other assignable reason that because they voted as they pleased, to deprive them of the protection of our constitution and laws, of all municipal and political rights, will be a landmark in your history. It is an act that will shock the moral sense of the country...I enter my solemn and indignant protest.⁴⁹²

Springer and other Whig senators of Iowa steadfastly refused to endorse the bill for months, employing parliamentary delaying tactics and utilizing to their advantage the fact that the Democrats needed a 3/4 majority in order to effect the bill's passage because it was affecting the size of an existing county, and thus their small numbers in the Senate were able to withstand the will of the majority Democrats.

Eventually the tactics worked, and the legislature went into its April recess without the Pottawattamie Bill passing the Senate. Orson Hyde's *Frontier Guardian* recognized how close the Democrats came to succeeding in their designs and gave tribute to the Whig senators who had defended their rights with such ferocity: "Our readers may forget as soon as they can, the injustice the Democrats sought to do to us. Indeed, the sooner the better; but never forget that four Whig members of the Senate stood by your interests to the very last hour – manfully defended them, and defeated your oppressors."⁴⁹³

While the support the Whigs of Iowa gave the Mormons was heartening, and unprecedented, the dirty political realities of state partisanship had once again displayed themselves in Iowa. Once again, the federal government appeared to be doing nothing to protect the Mormons in their rights. Once again, the Mormons felt as though their fellow

⁴⁹² Francis Springer, "The Speech of Mr. Springer", as printed in the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, January 18, 1849.

⁴⁹³ *Frontier Guardian*, April 4th, 1849.

Americans treated them as though they were a separate and distinct group of foreigners. In Iowa, the results of the political contretemps were destined to be short-lived, as Young pushed harder and harder for the Mormons there to vacate the land completely and head to “Deseret”, the self-styled name of their new Great Basin home. The new threat of mob violence against the Mormons who were yet in the United States partially motivated this more persistent call to move out. Within a few short years, Iowa would no longer have a Mormon population remaining of any substance or possessing any political power. Most of the Mormons there made their way to the new western settlements in the recently acquired territory added to the American empire or back to other states in the East. By mid 1852, the Kanesville/Council Bluffs area was mostly deserted.

Yet, concurrently, the events in Iowa and the failure of the Mormons’ service in the Mexican War to placate anti-Mormon national sentiment within the United States, despite efforts of men like Kane, further isolated the Mormons from the United States. One lasting result of the Iowa debacle was the semi-official position adopted by the Church over the next decade, though with some variance, to an appearance of political neutrality. The Iowa affair demonstrated how relentless one party could be in assaulting the Mormons, and, if the opposing party was any less assiduous of the cause of the Mormons than had been the Iowa Whigs, severe political repercussions were sure to follow. There is little wonder as to why the Mormons would clamor for a state government throughout the 1850’s: once established, their numbers would ensure that Mormons would be voted into power in the state offices. While the resulting quasi-theocracy would be horrifying to most Americans, such protection from the excesses of American democracy was precisely the goal the Mormons had in mind. Their

experiences in Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and most recently in Iowa, had demonstrated to the Mormons that unless they themselves dominated the state governments in which they lived, they could only hope to remain in the state for a brief time before partisan politics combined with xenophobic anti-Mormonism to unleash more mob violence.

Iowa proved to be the last experience with a state government the majority Mormons would have for decades. The political turmoil there only entrenched Mormon beliefs in the wickedness of the American nation generally and the corrupt nature of political parties generally. More than anything, the Iowa experience proved to the Mormon leadership that control of a state legislature and governorship were essential in protecting their ecclesiastical and civic rights. Following the Iowa debacle, the emphasis shifted from petitioning for a territorial government for Deseret, and instead Mormons there asked that their colony be admitted directly as a state.

The other short term effect of the Iowa contretemps was to bring national recognition the allegiance the Mormons had shown the Whigs in Iowa. Not only did the efforts by Iowa Democrats receive notice in the newspapers, congressional hearings about the stolen Mormon votes in the state election continued for months. Whig leaders like Truman Smith saw the potential Mormons held as political allies in the western empire. The Mormon colony in the Great Basin represented the only major white settlement for hundreds of miles, though the California gold rush quickly lessened the importance of Salt Lake in the equation. Still, as the sectional battle over the expansion of slavery into the territories continued to grow in fury, national Whig politicians regarded the Mormons as a possible key to diffusing such disagreements. Democratic leaders like Lewis Cass and Whig's like Henry Clay pitched the idea of popular

sovereignty as a compromise to arguments over the expansion of slavery. Because this policy rested on the will of the inhabitants of the territory itself, the Mormons in Salt Lake would hold greater political power than they had at any time previously. The relative success of their political efforts in the next few years can be attributed to their growing importance in the sectional controversy.

The Mormons hoped that they would find respite in their new, isolated mountain home. At the same time they readily recognized that the land which they inhabited was fast becoming part of the flashpoint of the slavery/free labor arguments raging in the halls of Congress. Throughout the balance of the 1850's the Mormons viewed the coming Civil War as an inevitability, the logical consequence of a wicked nation having cast out God's chosen people. Joseph Smith's prophecies of a civil war arising "out of the slave question" seemed to be on the brink of fulfillment in 1849 and 1850. On a *realpolitik* level, the federal government which had largely ignored the Mormons aside from Polk's fears of disloyalty during the Mexican War, was forced to directly deal with the Mormons in the coming decade. The Mormons could no longer be disregarded out of hand as the sectional tensions over the extension of slavery grew increasingly ominous. The Mormons, far from maneuvering out of the reach of the American government, had actually placed themselves in a position in which the federal government would be forced to adopt a "Mormon" policy.

Chapter 8: “The Government is Using Us to Save the Nation, We are Using Them to Save Ourselves”: Zachary Taylor, Mormons, and Organizing the Empire.

Zachary Taylor, the battle-hardened soldier, was a puzzling figure. An owner of more than one hundred slaves held at a plantation in Louisiana, he was expected by many to advocate the creation of new slave states out of the unorganized land ceded by Mexico. Indeed, his southern residence and planter status enticed many southerners to vote for him despite the fact that the Whig Party he represented contained the most ardent abolitionists in the nation. Surely, they believed, Taylor understood the anxieties of the Southern planter and the justice of their desire to expand slavery and quash debate about it. Obfuscating Taylor’s intentions was his dearth of speeches endorsing the economic platforms of such orthodox Whig leaders as Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. Furthermore, there was little warmth between Clay, the ideological leader of the Whigs, and Taylor, the political novice and career military man. Conscience Whigs, so named for their opposition to the expansion of slavery and the Mexican War, saw Taylor as a wolf wearing the sheep’s clothing of the Whig Party. They had little doubt that Taylor would come down against the passage of the Wilmot Proviso and on the side of his fellow slave-owners. Many others, including the outgoing President Polk, saw Taylor as woefully unqualified to be president.⁴⁹⁴

Yet, despite the various apprehensions, the key to understanding Taylor was his view of the United States’ national interest. One biographer explained, “First and foremost, Taylor was a soldier. His approach to the Union was a soldier’s approach...he wished to do what he believed was best for the country – what was patriotic – what was national, according to his soldierly standards...Zachary Taylor’s chief concern was not what South or North might think, but how

⁴⁹⁴ Holman Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor: Soldier in the White House* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), 134.

the nation could best be served.”⁴⁹⁵ The arguments were becoming ever more intense over the territory that he had helped acquire when he had commanded the northern invasion force during the war. Taylor, like Polk had before him, saw the argument over slavery’s expansion to the West as politically manufactured but nevertheless dangerous. Though Taylor had no qualms about owning slaves, he had experienced the harshness of similar desert climes firsthand and did not believe that the western territories were capable of sustaining profitable slave ownership.⁴⁹⁶ Extremists in the North and South refused to compromise on the territorial issue. Calhounists in the South argued that the land should be open to slavery without any restriction. Northerners that backed the Wilmot Proviso demanded that slavery should be specifically outlawed in all of the expansive territory. Taylor viewed both groups as espousing dangerous, divisive rhetoric that had no foundation in the economic realities of the parched desert land in the West.⁴⁹⁷

Furthermore, to a man so schooled in the military, Taylor recognized that the American citizens living in the Mexican Cession had no democratic protections. The army was still the only organized, official American presence in these lands and it had been thinly stretched by attempting to carry out both tasks of peacekeeping and bureaucratic administration. A few thousand soldiers were expected to govern a territory so vast it that it took travelers months to get from one end to the other. Little communication infrastructure existed to facilitate governance of the area. Hostile Native Americans refused to acquiesce to American claims of sovereignty. Taylor knew that the army was not prepared for such a governing task. Additionally, because California and New Mexico had been mostly secured by January 1847, by

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid, 174-175. This view of Taylor as a soldier and nationalist first and aloof from the sectional arguments despite his plantation is also reflected by Daniel Walker Howe in his synthesis of the period, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 834.

⁴⁹⁶ Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 208.

⁴⁹⁷ Hamilton, 175-176.

the time Taylor took office in March of 1849, these territories had lacked any administrative infrastructures or US-sanctioned democratic institutions for more than two years.⁴⁹⁸ The influx of thousands of settlers into western California in 1848-49 in the hunt for gold had overwhelmed the army's ability to maintain law and order. A democratic, civilian government was desperately needed to stay the anarchy in California's gold fields.

Yet, attempts at organizing these lands had already met partisan defeats as Congress argued over whether or not slavery should be allowed in these lands that had belonged to a foreign nation less than two years earlier. There existed three main areas of population in the territories wrested from Mexico in the war.

Organizing the Captured Territories

New Mexico was the most populated area with over 60,000 inhabitants. They presented a difficult problem for racist white Americans, however. The New Mexicans were of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry and could not be considered "white" by most Americans, or Congress. The inhabitants spoke Spanish and were almost universally Catholic. The fear of having to absorb a population "whom they held in utter contempt" had been a large part of the reason why the "All Mexico" campaign to annex the entire Mexican nation had failed, as American whites looked with incredulity on the ability of this "lesser" people to form republican institutions.⁴⁹⁹ To make matters worse, the state of Texas, which consistently claimed boundaries far afield from the ones it could justly espouse, alleged that much of the population

⁴⁹⁸ While American forces had defeated Mexican resistance, yet it should be remembered that thousands of Native Americans continued to see themselves as members of sovereign groups within the territory the Mexican Cession encompassed.

⁴⁹⁹ Haynes, 190.

center of New Mexico was, in fact, in Texan territory. Thus Santa Fe was seen by Texan politicians not as the colonial capital of New Mexico, but rather a Texas city on the borders of their frontier.

The second area taken from Mexico was Western California, the area west of the Sierra Nevadas. It had a paltry population of 6000-7000 whites prior to the war. The majority of this existing non-Indian population was Mexican, with a very small, but disproportionally powerful American minority. After the war, the massive invasion of miners and fortune seekers following the discovery of gold brought the population near 100,000 by 1850. It was transformed nearly overnight from a sparsely populated series of missions and villages to the largest population in the US occupied territory in western North America. While this influx created a logistical and local law enforcement nightmare, the western portion of California presented but a small racial problem for the United States compared to New Mexico. By 1850 the Hispanic population had been dwarfed by fortune-seeking Anglos.

Finally, in eastern California, centered in the Salt Lake Valley around 12,000 Mormons comprised the white population. Their numbers were also increasing every year, though not at the exponential rates of those living in the western portion of California. The Mormons presented no racial problems for the United States government either. Rather, their nearly universal whiteness was shaded by their peculiar religious doctrines and their history of clannish exclusiveness and apparent desire to establish a theocratic government. The rumors of Mormon sedition had been in public circulation for so long that most Americans were easily convinced that the smoke of Mormon idiosyncrasies was a sign of a larger fire of fanaticism and disloyalty.

In each of these areas, there existed few civilian control mechanisms. Temporary military governors and local military commanders under their direction were the only administrative

organizations and links to the federal government of the United States. In vast swaths of the gargantuan territory, there was simply no American settlement. In these areas the military only exercised the most nominal control. In reality, Native American groups continued to dominate these areas as they had for centuries.

Foremost on President Taylor's mind was the problem of how these areas fit into the dominating question of slavery. Taylor's battle plan for extricating the nation from the impending political crisis required the new president to attempt a negotiation with the Mormons who were, essentially, living in their Salt Lake settlement autonomously. In the Mormon-held area of California, there were no United States military officers like there were in western California and New Mexico. The Mormon Church dominated all organizations and local governments. It was not that the Mormons did not practice any form of democracy. Rather, because the population in the Great Basin consisted almost universally of adherents to the sect, and the religious leaders were the ones most trusted, most prominent, and most powerful (as well as often the most affluent), elected offices readily filled with men who already held positions in high standing in the Mormon Church hierarchy.

Taylor's Solution to the Territorial Crisis

Taylor offered an innovative solution to the stormy arguments over slavery. The problem, he discerned, was the argument over whether or not Congress had the right to outlaw slavery in the United States' territories, a debate encapsulated by the Wilmot Proviso disagreement. Thus, with the formation of territorial governments, the slavery issue would be continually before the Congress and the nation. Because southern firebrands insisted that

Congress had no right to deny slavery in the territories and abolitionist agitators and free soil adherents in the North avowed the exactly opposite position, Taylor foresaw the devastating effect that organizing these captured Mexican territories would have on national unity. The admission of heavily settled western California or New Mexico, or both, as states to the union would not quench the raging fires of sectionalism surrounding the debated Wilmot Proviso, because there would still be large areas of unorganized territory from the Cession that would fall under the purview of the United States Congress. The admissions of New Mexico and the non-Mormon, more densely populated portion of western California as states would render the remaining territories practically uninhabited except by Mormons and Native Americans. Although these areas were considered to be almost universally desolate and foreboding, the ideological arguments surrounding the extension of slavery could not be put to rest if there existed any portion of Cession land over which Congress could debate.

Taylor therefore attempted to bypass the territorial stage altogether. A state's right to determine whether or not slavery was legal within its borders was well established. If the argument centered on congressional authority over the territories, then giving the areas their own independent state governments would neutralize the foundation of this argument. As historian Michael Holt explains, "The entire Mexican Cession would have to be admitted as states so that no area remained to require territorial organization by Congress."⁵⁰⁰ In Taylor's model, New Mexico, having first solidified a favorable boundary with Texas which claimed most of present day New Mexico to be rightfully hers, would adopt a constitution and petition for a state government to which its existing population entitled it.⁵⁰¹ The inhabitants would decide for themselves whether or not they favored the inclusion of slavery in their state constitution. The

⁵⁰⁰ Holt, 436.

⁵⁰¹ Varon, 208. Taylor's position favoring New Mexico's independence from Texas was in opposition to Polk's who had left office willing to concede the boundaries arbitrarily set by the Texans.

new state would probably encompass much of the boundaries of present day Arizona as well, making it nearly as large as Texas. As far as Alta California was concerned, the vast span of land from the eastern slope of the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean, Taylor envisioned the creation of an immense and expansive state, one that would encompass all of present-day California, Utah, and Nevada and parts of Arizona, Wyoming, and Colorado. In short, he wanted to manufacture the admission of only two states from all of the land that was taken from the Mexicans during the war. Following the model by which Texas was admitted to the union with a specific license to subdivide itself into four separate states,⁵⁰² the massive “Taylor” California would also offer provisions whereby it could subdivide itself as the population increased in the areas further inland. This parliamentary trick would allow the admission of self-governing, local state governments, but prevent the Congress from entering into the destructive and volatile debate over the status of slavery in these territories.

The plan, while innovative, was not entirely new. Taylor’s predecessor, Polk, had attempted an organization of the territory before he left office. While he favored a simple extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific, he was opposed by Stephen Douglas, who had submitted a proposal in December of 1848 to admit the entire Cession as one state, bypassing the territorial stage as well. This unwieldy plan had lacked the backing of written constitutions put forth by the inhabitants of the territories, and made no headway in the divided Congress.⁵⁰³ Taylor’s plan attempted to avoid the same pitfalls.

⁵⁰² After repeated attempts to accomplish the annexation via the means of a treaty ratified by both the United States legislature and that of Texas, John Tyler accomplished the annexation at the end of his presidency through the means of a joint Congressional resolution. This resolution granted Texas the right to subdivide itself into four separate states if it so desired. See “Joint Resolution for Annexing Texas to the United States, Approved March 1, 1845” in Richard Peters, ed., *The Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America*, Vol. 5 (Boston, Chas. C. Little and Jas. Brown, 1850), 797-798.

⁵⁰³ Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 100.

Because the territories were as yet unorganized and under military occupation, Taylor could not simply place a governor at the helm of New Mexico and California and push them to petition for state governments. Nor could he have the occupational military governors undertake this task. Such an action would reek of unconstitutionality. It was crucial for his plan's success that the administration's meddling was kept from the public eye and out of the realm of Congressional debate until after the petitions for statehood had already been made. Presented with a fiat accompli of statehood for the captured territories, Taylor reasoned that it would be much more difficult for the southern firebrands to justify balking on the matter. However, a public knowledge of his interference in the affair would simply vindicate the southern position that the federal government was using its power to suppress slavery in an underhanded and extra-Constitutional manner. He needed to act quietly and swiftly.

He determined that the only way he could discreetly send the men to facilitate the leap over the territorial government to instant statehood was to use the newly-minted Department of the Interior. It had gained the authority over the Indian Affairs division that had previously been a part of the War Department. Calhounists, as well as most congressional Democrats, had opposed the creation of the new department at the same moment a Whig president was about ascend to the presidency and fill that department's positions with loyal political appointees.⁵⁰⁴ Despite this, the bill passed and the department was created one day before Taylor's inauguration. And, the fears of John Calhoun and other Democrats that the new office might be used to strengthen the federal government, and particularly the presidency, were well-founded. Taylor dispatched federal Indian agents for posts in New Mexico and California through the

⁵⁰⁴ Robert M. Utley and Barry MackIntosh, *The Department of Everything Else: Highlights of Interior History* (ParkNet: The National Park Service, 1989), http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/utley-mackintosh/interior1.htm , accessed 08/18/09.

Interior Department. Yet, along with their official duties, these men each carried secret instructions to organize the various areas and rally them behind Taylor's statehood plan.

To ensure that the informal ambassadors he selected would not meet resistance, Taylor carefully selected southern Whigs who shared his feelings about the national problem created by the slavery question. By using southern appointees Taylor hoped his various emissaries would not attract the notice of the firebrands in the South.

James S. Calhoun, a Georgian who had served as the US consul in Cuba a decade earlier and more recently as a colonel in the Mexican War, received an appointment as the Indian agent for New Mexico. He was instructed to quickly bring about a statehood convention.⁵⁰⁵

The Mormon question now entered the picture. To sprawling California, Taylor dispatched two ambassadors instead of one. Though the bulk of the California population lay in the gold fields of the western portion, for the plan to work, Taylor needed Mormon cooperation. He knew that the political balance in Washington was delicate. Opponents of his plan would readily seize upon Mormon opposition to the giant state, not because they cared about the Mormons' rights, but because they could be used for political capital in an argument against granting California statehood with such expansive boundaries, especially as a free state. Thus, rather than sending one ambassador to California, Taylor sent two.

The first appointee was another Georgia Whig, Congressman Thomas Butler King. King was to take the seaward route to western California and negotiate with the Americans there. While the appointment served Taylor's purposes of sending a southern Whig to attempt the negotiation, King brought with him personal baggage in the form of ambitions that would become a major problem for Taylor's grandiose scheme. King had been bitterly disappointed that as the ranking member of the House Naval Affairs Committee he had not been appointed by

⁵⁰⁵ Holt, 437.

Taylor to the post of Secretary of the Navy; the position had been granted to a Virginia moderate instead. Thus, the appointment also had the purpose of attempting to conciliate King's pride at the perceived slight. Unfortunately for Taylor, Congressman King would need more to salve his ego than the secret mission to California. He harbored personal resentments and ambitions which would jeopardize Taylor's entire plan.

The final member of his statehood scheme was General John Wilson from Missouri. Wilson had been appointed federal Indian agent over the entire California territory. He was to make his way to Salt Lake, a centrally located area for such a task, by traveling overland with specific, secret instructions. Taylor instructed Wilson to convince the Mormons to go along with the statehood plan for California, and even send delegates for a proposed convention. Thomas King was to await the arrival of Wilson and only proceed to campaign for a California constitution after the latter had accomplished a hopefully successful negotiation with the Mormons. For the plan to succeed King was to delay any statehood convention put forward by the inhabitants of western California. The two-pronged mission was to cover thousands of miles, and secretly deal people who were hundreds of miles distant from one another. Yet if successful, the sectional crisis in the nation would be averted. In his inauguration speech, Taylor took no position on the territorial controversy, ignoring the proverbial elephant in the room, and hopefully buying time for his solution to work.⁵⁰⁶

Taylor's plan, though secret from the public, appears to have been readily discussed by members of his cabinet and with one of the leading Whig organizers at the time, Truman Smith of Connecticut. Smith, who operated in the late 1840's like the equivalent of a national party chairperson in modern times, had used his extensive influence to support Taylor's candidacy and

⁵⁰⁶ Morrison, 103-104.

had been instrumental in securing Taylor's nomination at the convention.⁵⁰⁷ In fact, it is entirely possible that the plan partly resulted from his authorship. John Wilson references the fact that Smith had been present at the meeting held between President Taylor, Thomas King, and himself when their plan was laid out for the California statehood proposition. Lending credence to the intimacy with which Smith had been associated with the plan is the fact that Taylor attempted to appoint Smith to be the nation's first head of the Department of the Interior. It was the single most important post regarding territorial affairs and it would have made Smith the direct supervisor of the Indian agent/ambassadors Taylor dispatched. Smith declined the position because he had recently been elected to the Senate by the Connecticut legislature, but he was obviously consulted on the portentous matter as the emissaries prepared to sally forth on their western mission. His fear of sectionalism, as well as the considerable political acumen he possessed, could easily have produced authorship of Taylor's plan for California's admission. Despite his decision to decline the cabinet post, Smith continued to function as though he were Wilson's superior. In fact, once Wilson had actually met with the Brigham Young and the Mormons in Salt Lake, he first reported to Truman Smith even before he notified Taylor.⁵⁰⁸ And, when Wilson encountered by chance John Bernhisel outside of Ft. Kearny, in present day Nebraska, he displayed to the Mormon emissary his letters of introduction to prove his good intentions. One was written by Truman Smith.⁵⁰⁹

The participants regarded Mormon acquiescence to the proposal to be the most difficult part of the plan. The Mormons would have to choose to be joined to the much larger population of western California in order to form the new state. This would render the Mormons once

⁵⁰⁷ Holt, 324-325.

⁵⁰⁸ General John Wilson to President Zachary Taylor, December 24, 1849, Ewing Family Papers, LOC. He asked Smith to pass on the contents of the communiqué to the Commander-in-Chief.

⁵⁰⁹ MHC, June 24, 1849, Vol. 19, 94.

again susceptible to the majoritarian politics of American democracy. Given the Mormon quest for isolation and their previous experiences as a minority in a state government, it is not surprising that the Whig conspirators questioned their chance of success with Brigham Young.

Mormon Movements Toward a State Government in Deseret

The Mormons had not been idle as they awaited the decision of the Congress concerning their status. They had petitioned for a territorial government through the political influence of Thomas Kane as early as 1848, but he had eventually withdrawn the petition after he learned that President Polk had no intention of appointing Mormons to head the territorial offices. Kane knew better than most that if non-Mormons were appointed to rule over the Great Basin territory, in spite of the fact that the white population was almost universally Mormon, conflict between the “gentile” civil authorities and the seemingly omnipotent ecclesiastical authorities would be inevitable and messy. He told John Bernhisel and Wilford Woodruff that the Mormons needed to be governed by their own people and “not military politicians strutting around in your midst and usurping authority over you.”⁵¹⁰ Kane, feeling the conspicuous volatility in the political scene, strictly charged the Mormons to plot a neutral course through the slavery-antislavery controversy as they attempted to instead form a state government, one in which the Mormons could elect their own leaders.

The Mormons shared Kane’s feelings about the necessity of being governed politically by some of their own, making the Taylor plan seem even less likely to achieve its desired result. In fact, in late 1848, in the interim between Zachary Taylor’s election and his ascension to the presidency, the sentiments of high-ranking Mormons about the possibility of such a proposed

⁵¹⁰ MHC, November 26, 1849, Vol. 19, 161-162.

union were expressly negative. Willard Richards one of Young's two counselors, wrote Kane about the rumor that there would be an attempt to unify the Mormon settlements into a larger California territory encompassing the miners to the west. Richards stated that experience had proven that because of "mobocracy and Governmental misrule" the Mormons could not "exist in an organized government with others" without being scapegoated and subjected to mob violence. He told Kane further:

Already it is whispered, (true or false we know not,) that Congress has organized Western California into a Territorial Government; and that we are or are about to be, annexed thereunto; but this can never be; or, if it is, it can never accomplish its intended object. What would be the natural result of such a union? The same as in former days, when our Governors, Judges, and Legislators lived at a remote distance; and were alike ignorant of our wishes, necessities, [or] true character...⁵¹¹

Recounting the ways in which governmental leaders in Missouri and Illinois had "served" them, Richards emphatically expressed that the Mormons would not consent to be ruled by unjust, unfair, and wicked men, and told Kane to press the point home to all that asked. Mormon experience had taught them that American democracy was only too free in allowing the masses to impose violently their will upon the minority. Richard's feelings reflected the generally held beliefs in letters of other apostles: the Mormons must not be joined to western California in either territorial or state governance for fear of yet another wave of political oppression.

To this end, the Mormons did call a convention for statehood in 1849 (though the number of people who would have had the chance to attend from the far-flung boundaries of the proposed state was quite small), elected leaders to potentially fill state offices, and dispatched Almon Babbitt to Washington as the House representative of the hoped-for state. Babbitt went with a copy of the proposed state's constitution. Brigham Young, of course, was the

⁵¹¹ Willard Richards to Thomas L. Kane, December 12, 1848, Willard Richards Papers, MS 1490, Box 3, Folder 9, LDS Church Archives.

gubernatorial choice for the proposed state. The constitution of Deseret, the name the Mormons chose for their possible state, deliberately said nothing about slavery, hoping that such an exclusion could prevent the proposal from going down to defeat in the sectional political climate in Washington.

Still, while the Mormon Constitution was absent a stance on slavery, the fact that Mormons were more tied to free soil ideology through their connections with Thomas Kane was made evident by the following extract of a letter Willard Richards sent to Thomas Kane explaining the state government they had provisionally formed, only days before General John Wilson arrived to present the Taylor plan:

Of slavery, anti-slavery, Wilmot Proviso, etc., we in our organization have remained silent, left them to the operation of common law. Yet if Ex-president Polk will come out on free soil ism, he will go into the chair again. Will Col. Kane look to this thing. Our vote once exalted him, it is ready to do it again; hoping to see our tried friend T.[homas] L. K.[ane] Secretary of State.⁵¹²

First Encounter with Zachary Taylor and Mormon Misgivings of Federal Intentions

Not only were the Mormons seeking their own state separate from the other settled portion of California, a direct contradiction to Taylor's plan, Mormon sentiments toward Zachary Taylor had been sullied only months after the great Whig's victory. While he was still just the President-elect, waiting for the March inauguration, Taylor had an exchange with a leading Mormon who had come to Louisiana seeking donations to benefit the destitute Mormons in Iowa. Charles M. Johnson, who had been a leader in the Mormons' local militia in Iowa and was

⁵¹² Willard Richards to Thomas L. Kane, July 24, 1849, Willard Richards Papers, MS 1490, Box 3, Folder 10, LDS Church Archives.

now one of those sent to the “gentile” states to attempt to collect money for the suffering, encountered Taylor outside of his home in Baton Rouge.

In their chance meeting in the street, Taylor, no doubt weighed down by the barrage of potential office seekers since his election, was quite hesitant even to carry on a conversation with Johnson. Yet his hesitancy turned to anger when he learned that his petitioner requested his “benevolent influence in behalf of that portion of the unfortunate Mormons who are now abiding (temporarily) on the East Bank of the Missouri River in a very destitute condition in want of many necessaries to say nothing of the luxuries and comforts of life.” Johnson recorded that General Taylor had, “in quite a bustle”, emphatically responded, “What have I to do with the Mormons? My position forbids me having any thing to do with them either directly or indirectly.” Taylor accused Johnson of “impertinence” to even dare approach him on the matter. When Johnson explained he had not solely been enquiring about Taylor’s presidential powers, but as his influence and wealth as a private citizen, Taylor waived off this suggestion as well, repeating that he could “have nothing to do with it at all.” Taylor gave some ground however, stating to Johnson, “I have no doubt Your people have been much wronged and very much abused & misrepresented” but he explained that he had enough families of men who had fought under his command and their widows and children to worry about and that he did not need to “look so far from home for objects of charity.” Seizing upon this reference to military service, Johnson related the fact that so many were suffering because the Mormon Battalion had volunteered to fight in the war and left families behind on the plains. Johnson hoped, as the Mormons did for decades following the event, that the service of the Battalion would alone be enough to sway those skeptical about the Mormons. But in Taylor’s case it was not. Of the Mormons’ service in the war he averred “it is a matter that I had nothing to do with and once

again I say I cannot have anything to do with it.” At that, the newly-elected president briskly turned and left the importuning Mormon standing there in the street.⁵¹³

That Johnson had been deluded into expecting more from Taylor in the way of sympathy was evident by his reaction to the conversation. He was stunned. He wrote George A. Smith of the experience saying that the conversation left him with feelings that were “difficult to describe.” Johnson had no doubt that Taylor’s refusal to help the Mormons stemmed from his fear that such a relationship would damage him politically. Like Martin Van Buren before him, Taylor had nearly parroted the same words (at least in the way Johnson chose to remember them) that the President could do nothing to help the hundreds of destitute and suffering Mormons in Iowa. Johnson lamented, undoubtedly thinking of the Mormon votes cast for Taylor, “I have never been in my life so much disappointed in any man.”⁵¹⁴

The sense of Mormon misgivings toward the government, despite the Whig victory, was manifestly felt by non-Mormons who traveled through Salt Lake on their way to California. William Kelly, a British adventurer on his way to California related the events of his visit in mid-1849. To his surprise, given the reports he had heard about Mormons generally, he and his party were quite kindly received. Kelly attributed the cordiality to the fact that his group was “mostly all foreigners, and not obnoxious to the prejudice they naturally entertain against Americans, who destroyed their first city, and banished them to this remote location.” In Kelly’s view, not only did the Americans see the Mormons as a distinct and hated group, but Mormons returned the favor, seeing Americans in general as a totally separate and despised group clearly differentiated from their clannish sect. In fact, Kelly at least perceived that when his group was first making its way into the valley it was treated with great coldness and a type of silent hostility

⁵¹³ Charles M. Johnson to George A. Smith, June 22, 1849, George A. Smith Papers, George A. Smith Papers, MS 1322, Box 4, Folder 12, LDS Church Archives. Spelling and underlining as in original.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

which he attributed to the fact that the Mormons thought his collection of travelers to be Americans. When they were “undeceived” of this notion, Kelly related that not only did Mormons greet him with warmth but with offers of places to stay and meals to eat. Kelly’s perception of Mormon feelings toward the government was also affected by a sermon he heard preached on the Temple Grounds while camped outside the city. The speaker (quite possibly Brigham Young, though Kelly makes no attempt to identify him in any manner aside from the topic of his sermon) referenced the “barbarous treatment they had received at the hands of the Americans...and expressed a belief that their avarice would yet induce them to covet their possessions at Salt Lake; but he entertained a hope that the Mormons by that time would be strong enough to guard and maintain their rights and independence.”⁵¹⁵

Another pioneer from a company headed west, this one a thoroughly American one, also recounted his experiences in 1849. William Lorton’s account of the Mormon reception to his party was generally favorable as well. In fact, Lorton described an episode in which one of the captains of his emigrating company was rumored to have boasted about wanting to kill Joseph Smith several years earlier when Smith had traveled through his town. Rumors had made it back to the company that Brigham Young had learned of this and wanted the group out of the Salt Lake Valley. Yet, an actual encounter between Young and the captain laid this rumor to rest, and Lorton recorded of the meeting that: “B.[righam] told him that he did not care what people said & bade him go in peace. B.[righam] said man after man had passed through this place boasting of having fired our homes & driven us from our cities, & one made his boast of having fired the first shot at our prophet, but we forgive them inasmuch as we have been forgiven.”⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ William Kelley, *Across the Rocky Mountains from New York to California: With a Visit to the Celebrated Mormon Colony, at the Great Salt Lake* (London: Simms and M’Intyre, 1852), 158-163.

⁵¹⁶ William Lorton diaries, August 15, 1849, Vol. III, 10, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, MSS 190.

The emigrant company was given both assistance and aid with its travels. This led Lorton to conclude that the Mormon settlement in Salt Lake was “destined to be the great stopping place between the States, Oregon & Cal, the emigrant, will only provide himself with provisions sufficient to last to this place.”⁵¹⁷ In this last assessment, Lorton foresaw the importance the Mormon settlement would have as the flood of emigrants poured westward. The Mormons might have sought isolation in their mountain home, but external events were going to shape their relationship to the nation. As the United States sought to solidify its hold upon its new Western empire, the Mormons would have to negotiate their new relationship to the nation they had only recently abandoned in search of peace.

Despite, Lorton’s more amicable view of the Mormon settlement, William Kelly’s observation was that the Mormons were not only seeking to maintain their “independence” but that they regarded Americans with such animosity that little room for compromise was possible. Given the tensions between Americans and Mormons, and the latter’s predilection for a separate state government, combined with the report from a trusted Mormon that Taylor was no different than any of the politicians before him, it is a singular occurrence that Taylor’s plan met with any success at all among the Mormons when his ambassador, John Wilson, arrived in Salt Lake.

Wilson’s Negotiations with the Mormons in Salt Lake City

Wilson’s letters to Washington read like the communiqués of an ambassador to a foreign head of state, an indication of the way in which he and the administration viewed the Mormons. As Wilson explained in a letter to the President, “I found the Mormons with a Constitution already made and actually in force.” Despite this unfortunate turn of events, Wilson explained,

⁵¹⁷ Ibid, 23.

“I called on Brigham Young, he treated me with great cordiality & [I] at once delivered him the message you had directed me, that they should receive from the administration the same support & protection with all other good citizens that they should not be molested by mobs or unlawful assemblies etc. if the admin. could by any means prevent it.” Penurious necessity had brought Taylor to promise as president that which he had refused to even consider as president-elect when Charles Johnson had met him on the streets of Baton Rouge only months earlier. The language was also important. The Mormons were not just American citizens, but “good” ones at that, and the administration pledged to defend them from the recurring mob violence that had descended upon them in all of their previous habitations. Still, despite such a position, Wilson set conditions upon such forthcoming aid that reflected the tenuous way in which Mormons could be considered Americans. Mormon citizenship would be recognized similarly to all Americans, and protected as such, if the Mormons remained in “obedience to the laws of the land...and continued to act as good citizens.”⁵¹⁸ This language also demonstrates the way in the administration viewed Mormons as a group apart from other citizens. Had he been talking to any other group of white Americans, it is doubtful that Wilson would have felt the need to place the caveat upon the promised governmental protection.

After Wilson made these initial points to Young, the latter’s response was gracious but reserved toward Taylor because “they had been deceived by former admins. so much that they had felt timid in trusting to declarations of this kind.” Nevertheless, Young assured Wilson that he had influenced the Mormons in Iowa to vote for Taylor. Young’s primary purpose for his part in the election fiasco in Iowa the previous year had been to secure good relations with the incoming presidential administration. He had gambled that Taylor, given the popular enthusiasm for the heroic general, would emerge victorious. This, combined with disaffection for the Polk

⁵¹⁸ General John Wilson to President Zachary Taylor, December 24, 1849, Ewing Family Papers, LOC.

administration and Democrats in general, had led him to accept the Iowa Whig Party's argument that the Mormons should cast their lot with them. The fact that a Taylor-appointed agent was standing before him months after the election and seeking to negotiate rather than merely dictate terms to the Mormon people seemed a validation of Young's decision.

Realizing the gravity of Wilson's mission, Young proceeded to call together other Church leaders in what Wilson termed a "secret" meeting with the administration official. Wilson was impressed by the group once they were assembled and wrote Taylor that they were "very intelligent men." He restated the administration's congenial position toward the Mormons. The topic of conversation quickly turned to the entire point of Wilson's mission when the Mormons presented Wilson with a copy of their proposed state constitution and asked Wilson to help get President Taylor to endorse the document since both were professing amity toward the reviled sect.⁵¹⁹

Maneuvering with deftness, Wilson flatly refused to contemplate such an endorsement, quickly couching his reasons in circumstances other than the secret mission he was then on to create the giant state of California. He told the Mormons that their constitution was not truly republican because they had not gained the consent of the few scattered settlements of Americans living outside of the Great Basin, that the boundaries they had drawn were arbitrary rather than negotiated, and that alone the Mormons did not possess the population to warrant an independent state government. The final point played right into Wilson's purpose.⁵²⁰

Even more pertinent was the deafening silence of Deseret's constitution regarding slavery in the proposed state. Wilson explained to the gathered leaders that "this alone would defeat it before Congress." The Mormons had hoped, following their cue from Kane's advice, that by not

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

taking a stance on slavery they would be able to expedite their admission to the Union, as neither the North nor South would be galvanized into opposition. Yet, while such a position might have worked prior to the Mexican War and would even gain some traction in the clamor over popular sovereignty in the early 1850's, the pre-Compromise political climate was as partisan and sectional as it had ever been. The Mormons would not simply be able to ignore the great issue of the day and back their way into statehood. The lack of a statement on slavery was something that was readily reported by various newspapers, especially in the North. One Ohio newspaper opined derisively that the Mormon constitution made no mention of slavery or the Wilmot Proviso because these issues had not "entered into the imaginations of the law-givers as important for their welfare."⁵²¹

Wilson explained that something larger was at stake than the mere settlement of disputed boundaries between the Mormon's proposed state and those living in western California. The slavery issue had grown so heated and the country had become so divided that a Congressional argument over slavery in the territories was threatening to become "dangerous to the stability of the union." Having explained that the very nation was at stake, Wilson reported to the president that he "boldly declared to them I saw no way to avoid it but for the people east & west of the Sierra to form one state and this I told them was the opinion of you & your friends that you and them greatly desired this to be effected." He urged the Mormons to abandon their own attempts at a state constitution and elect representatives that could speak for them in the larger state constitutional convention he anticipated in western California.⁵²² In doing so, Wilson himself acknowledged at least tacitly that he believed the Mormons to be patriotic Americans. It would

⁵²¹ "The State of Deseret", *The Daily Sanduskyan*, October 17, 1849.

⁵²² General John Wilson to President Zachary Taylor, December 24, 1849, Ewing Family Papers, LOC.

certainly have been a useless gesture to appeal to the national pride of Mormons if in fact the Mormons had none.

Meanwhile Young foresaw the potential for calamity, even before Wilson arrived with Taylor's message. Preaching from the pulpit the previous Sunday, Young had warned:

It was not the people of the United States that had persecuted us, but sin that dwells within them – that has done all the evil... The very days that we are experiencing now have been told you in the United States for the last 18 years. God Almighty will give the United States a pill that will puke them to death, and that is worse than lobelia. I am prophet enough to prophesy the downfall of the government that has driven us out. Eighteen years ago, I told them of it. Wo to the United States! I see them going to death and destruction.⁵²³

Now Taylor's operative was meeting with Young, asking for the Mormons' help to avert the very catastrophe of which Young had prophesied. The Mormons' would be the saviors of the nation by their accommodation of the administration's plan.

To allay fears that the settlement in the Great Basin would come to be dominated by the non-Mormon government in western California, Wilson further explained that the new state constitution would presumably contain a provision specifically designed for the Mormons to break away from the larger area of California as soon as they reached the requisite population. As nuanced as such a constitution sounded, Texas had just been admitted to the union only a few years earlier with such a provision. Thus, the Mormons would not be forever abandoning their hopes of a Mormon-dominated state, but rather just temporarily uniting with the much more populated western portion of California for the purposes of admission and organization. This provision was considered essential by Young and other Mormon leaders who did not want to again be a minority in a Gentile-ruled state. Wilson was careful, as he had been instructed, not to advocate an anti-slavery or pro-slavery constitution for the proposed state of California. He

⁵²³ MHC, August, 26, 1849, Vol. 19, 122. Lobelia was a plant used by Thomsonian or herbalist physicians to induce vomiting.

wrote Taylor that he had specifically told them that the “administration disclaimed all right to inter meddle with any feature of the constitution to be formed.”⁵²⁴

Mormon Reaction to Taylor’s Plan

Despite the fact that the Mormon aspect of Taylor’s enterprise had been seen as the great sticking point of the entire plan, Wilson reported that the Mormon response was all he could have hoped. Not only did they quickly agree to the scheme, the Mormons swiftly elected delegates and designated them with the task to travel to Western California to take part in the proposed convention.

Amasa Lyman, an apostle designated to be one of the delegates, received a letter from Brigham Young and his counselors explaining the meeting with Wilson, and both the reasons the Mormons acquiesced to the plan and the instructions Lyman was to follow. Young related the particulars of the meeting in much the way Wilson had to President Taylor. Wilson had appealed to the Mormons’ patriotism, explaining that the state of the union and nation were at stake, and the Mormons had responded. But on a more practical than ideological level, Young sensed that the current imbroglio in the Congress over the slavery issue provided an opportunity to the Mormons to gain statehood that might not exist otherwise. Wilson’s very presence suggested that the Mormons had gained political significance that they had never enjoyed in the United States. Joseph Smith had begged federal authorities to notice the Mormons to no avail; Brigham Young was now negotiating with President Taylor’s hand-picked emissary. As the Mormons moved to the periphery of American control, they gained importance in the American empire.

⁵²⁴ General John Wilson to President Zachary Taylor, December 24, 1849, Ewing Family Papers, LOC.

Young wanted to act swiftly, before a compromise could be reached and the various elements in the nation returned to no longer caring for the Mormons, their votes, or their loyalty. He told Lyman, “The present is a favorable moment for us to secure a State charter. Should the Wilmot Proviso, or Slave question, by any means, become settled before our admission to the Union, politicians might feel themselves more independent, and our interests might not lie so near their hearts.”⁵²⁵

Even though Young was cooperating with Wilson and the Taylor Plan, he also did not back off the attempt of Almon Babbitt and John Bernhisel to secure ratification of the Deseret constitution which was already being pushed in Washington. In Young’s view, if the Deseret constitution were accepted while the discussions over western California were ongoing, it would not materially damage the goals of Taylor’s initiative, as the area still would not be under the purview of Congress.⁵²⁶ However, despite Young’s hedging of bets, this hope did not have a high likelihood of being realized, given the fact that Wilson had readily pointed out that, as written, the Deseret constitution did not take a position on slavery.

While the Deseret constitution contained no provision on slavery, it was not because the Mormons were angling for a proslavery constitution. There were Mormons in Salt Lake who had in fact brought their slaves with them across the plains, though there were only a paltry few. While the Mormon position on slavery was certainly short of abolitionist, there was little effort made to keep the practice legalized. Young had no doubt that the forthcoming California constitution would in fact bar slavery from the state. He told Lyman that if the other delegates wished to include the Wilmot Proviso as a part of the state’s constitution, Lyman should make no objection. Young believed that technically speaking the Proviso was out of place in a

⁵²⁵ Brigham Young to Amasa Lyman, September 6, 1849, MHC, Vol. 19, 126.

⁵²⁶ Ibid, 128.

constitution, and more properly belonged in the realm of “common law”, but had no objections to it being added to the document.⁵²⁷

While Lyman could readily assent to slavery being banned from the territory, Young emphatically dictated that he should not budge at all on the principle that Deseret would become a state separate from Western California in 1851. He wanted this provision not only to be written into the document, but to ensure that no measures could be taken to alter that portion of the constitution once it was ratified. He obviously feared that the Mormons’ minority status inside of the state would not allow them to prevent such a move if the non-Mormon majority conspired to thwart the planned separation in the future.⁵²⁸

Though many contemporary critics accused the Mormons of seeking to create their own independent nation or of disloyalty to both the Union and core American values, the Mormons believed that their best chance of protection from mob violence was to obtain a union with the United States in the form of a state government. True, they sought the state government to have greater autonomy and the ability to protect and isolate themselves from non-Mormon forces and influences. And, it would be argued, democracy operated on a lesser plane in Utah because the Church was more powerful than the government. Yet even these points are made in the context of the Mormons actively, at times desperately, seeking union with the United States, not separation. It was the fact that the Mormons wanted to emulate US institutions and forms that so disgusted both politicians and citizens alike. If statehood were granted, Mormons would be codified and legitimized in their claimed status as Americans, and this was something, especially after polygamy was fully exposed and thoroughly denounced, Americans were simply not willing to accept. But the argument over slavery was such that, at least for the time being, the

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

⁵²⁸ Ibid, 127.

Taylor administration was willing to allow both Mexicans in New Mexico and Mormons in California to take up the American mantle. Later years and later administrations would not be so inclined to deign either group such equivalent inclusion inside the American empire.

Congressman King's Plotting and the Formation of California

Wilson, his entourage of Mormon delegates escorting him, headed off for Western California in what would prove to be a futile attempt to complete the president's statehood plan. Though the administration had considered the two great hurdles to be Mormon recalcitrance and partisan Congressional infighting, more basic factors such as ambition, localism, and partisanship caused the plan to come apart at the seams.

When Wilson and the Mormons arrived in California on December 9, 1849, he found to his horror that the locals had tired of waiting for the federal government to act. They had written a constitution of their own already, called a constitutional convention in June, and ratified the document in September. The document, while excluding slavery from its dominion, did not include the unsettled areas east of the Sierra Nevadas or the Mormon settlements in the Great Basin. The entire Taylor plan had hinged upon the ability to make a single, colossal state of the entirety of Mexican California. The document Californians had already ratified only included California at its present-day boundaries, thus leaving all of Eastern California open to the machinations of a bitterly partisan Congress in the formation of territorial governments.

Congressman Thomas Butler King, the emissary Taylor had sent to San Francisco, had at once been both the most difficult member of the enterprise to work with and the most difficult to for the administration to justify. While James Calhoun and John Wilson had been appointed to

New Mexico and California respectively as federal Indian agents, no such formal title existed for King. The administration referred to him in official documents as a “bearer of special dispatches and special agent to California.” The transparency of the Taylor administration’s meddling in California’s statehood controversy was evident in King’s very title. Once California’s application for statehood arrived in Washington, pro-slavery congressmen and senators shrilly accused the administration of interfering through King to sway Californians to adopt a free labor constitution. The administration attempted to deflect such accusations by submitting, through the State Department, King’s report on his activities in California, which claimed to be innocuous and incidental to the formation of the state government. In fact, King, a slaveholder himself, might very well have been telling the truth when he claimed in the resulting firestorm: “I had no secret instructions, verbal or written, from the President or anyone else, what to say to the people of California on the subject of slavery; nor was it ever hinted or intimated to me that I was expected to attempt to influence their action in the slightest degree on that subject.”⁵²⁹

Wilson operated under similar instructions not to discuss the slavery issue.

Yet while evidence shows that King had been told not to agitate on the slavery question in any way, his report to Congress was really only a half truth. He had been dispatched with secret instructions, garnered in a cabinet meeting which included the leading Whig organizer in Congress, to create the California Taylor envisioned with help of John Wilson’s negotiations with the Mormons. And while he might have been charged to make no statements concerning slavery in the new state, President Taylor and Truman Smith both knew that a rapidly organized California would almost certainly be admitted to the Union as a free state, because neither the brevity of time nor the temperament of the inhabitants of the land had allowed for any type of

⁵²⁹ T. Butler King’s Report on California, March 27, 1850, House of Representatives Ex. Doc. No. 59, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 5. Included and printed in President Taylor’s March 25 message to Congress.

slave society to blossom. Conversely, southern leaders' sentiments and speeches clearly demonstrated that territorial, rather than state, organization was believed to be the precursor to the importation of slavery from the Southern states.⁵³⁰ Slavery needed time to take root as a peculiar institution in far flung territories, but Southerners reasoned that as long as California remained under the purview of Congress they might well be able to effect a slave status there.

The irascible King had arrived in California one day after the military governor, General Bennett C. Riley, frustrated with the limbo in which congressional wrangling had left the area, had taken his own initiative on the statehood matter and issued a proclamation calling for a constitutional convention to meet September 1, 1849. He was prompted to action because the situation was rapidly deteriorating into lawlessness in Western California. As the thousands of newly-arrived settlers swamped and overwhelmed the existing government structures, the military had attempted to maintain order through a series of appointed (sometimes elected) local officials, known as *alcaldes*. The *alcaldes* had legislative, executive, and judiciary power over their appointed regions. The awkward, seemingly despotic, system was both reviled for being undemocratic, unrepresentative, and corrupt in nature and, contradictorily, for its weakness in failing to protect personal and property rights. The system had produced so much frustration that several cities had simply taken it upon themselves to abolish the *alcaldes* and create impromptu local legislatures which had no legitimate authority, but operated as though they did. The anarchy of the situation had prompted Riley's predecessor, General Richard Barnes Mason, to resign by citing personal reservations about the legality of military government operating with impunity when the war was long since over.⁵³¹

⁵³⁰ Richard Sewall, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980), 192-193.

⁵³¹ David Alan Johnson, *Founding the Far West: California, Oregon, and Nevada, 1840-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 29-30.

Riley wasted little time taking action to quell the growing settler revolts. He had to at least promise the people that the representative government they wanted was in the offing. If Congress would not provide civil government for the area, California would present them with their own fiat accompli of a ratified constitution which they would forward to Washington for approval.

Although he had arrived literally a day late, King certainly could have tried to stem the tide toward a convention if he had chosen to take such action. Despite being pressured by local events, Riley would likely have acquiesced to the plans of his Commander-in-Chief, especially if King placed the issue in the nationalistic terms that only the Taylor course could prevent acerbic arguments that might rend the union to pieces. Riley and King could have either lobbied the convention to include the entirety of Eastern as well as Western California, or found convenient delays to push the convention back just long enough to receive word from John Wilson's mission to the Mormons. At the very least, King could have ascertained the situation as he had previously agreed to do. He could have sent the dispatch he promised to Salt Lake to get word to Wilson of the situation in Western California and to check on the status of Wilson's Mormon enterprise. However, King did nothing demonstrable to slow the course of events. It is possible that having presented his orders from the President, Riley's grim relation of events in Western California caused King to abandon the purposes for which he had been sent. In truth, it appears far more likely that King saw an opportunity to gain for himself the power and prestige that Taylor's administration had denied him by failing to appoint him to a prominent post. King not only made no attempt to slow down the convention process or sway the Californians to include

the Mormons in proposed state boundaries, he helped make the rounds with Riley and other leaders to publicize and encourage the speedy adoption of a state constitution.⁵³²

Wilson's Reaction to King's Failure

Wilson angrily related the actions of King in several letters to both President Taylor and Secretary Ewing. In the intervening months between the time the convention convened and when Wilson and the Mormons finally arrived, King had passed himself off as the mouthpiece of Taylor, specially assigned to organize Western California into a state government. King was the embodiment of what American settlers had been clamoring for over the past year: federal recognition of their desire for a state government. Instantly a hero, he looked to capitalize on these accolades by obtaining one of the national Senate seats for the new state. King conveniently suppressed the arrangement he had made with Wilson and the overarching plan of the Taylor administration. These facts were simply two pieces of baggage that King did not wish to explain to Californians who would neither be happy with any delay nor countenance affiliation with the Mormon settlements in their state. Not only had King attempted no communication with Wilson while the latter en route from Salt Lake to San Francisco, King apparently tried to avoid him even after he had arrived. Worse still, King simply denied that any plan to include the Mormons in California's statehood attempts ever existed at all, and that the administration had not made any such plans.⁵³³

Wilson, who had made an arduous, months-long trek across the entire continent, having surprisingly (at least in his mind) swayed the Mormons to accept the nationalistic plan, could

⁵³² Holt, 439. Wilson makes clear in his letter to Taylor that the local Whigs very much believed that Thomas King had every ability to slow the statehood convention process if he had even attempted such a course.

⁵³³ General John Wilson to President Zachary Taylor, December 24, 1849, Ewing Family Papers, LOC.

hardly contain his anger at King's corrupt attempts at self-aggrandizement. Wilson believed that King's senatorial scheme came at the expense of not only the administration, but the very peace of the republic itself. He wrote President Taylor that "Mr. King declares that he had [no] possible association with me in my visit to Salt Lake, that his coming here had nothing to do whatever with my going there – that there was to be no such thing as an understanding & was no understanding by the President and Cabinet that his & my coming to California was to have any common or connected purpose." Not only did King deny that there had ever been a Taylor Plan for California, of which the two men were emissaries, he belittled John Wilson's position further by holding forth that the only connection the two men had was that King had used his influence to gain Wilson's appointment as Indian Agent for the area.⁵³⁴

King's traitorous actions to both the Whig Party and the Taylor administration were made worse by the fact that, according to Wilson, he had struck a deal with the "locos", the derogatory term Whigs used for Democrats, to hurriedly ratify a state constitution. The Democrats, in turn, promised to use their numbers in the new state legislature to vote him in as one of the senators. As they had in Iowa, many local Whigs preferred to take a slow approach toward applying for statehood, as their constituency was always more powerful in states that were more well-established. They reasoned that those who had more interest in the banking, tariff, and internal improvement policies of the Whig party tended to be those who had more wealth. Many local Whigs chafed under the call to an immediate convention that King was promulgating upon his arrival, as they were fairly certain they would lose out in early elections. The 1852 presidential election just a few years later demonstrated the strength of Democrats in California by their solid victory over the Whigs. The Democrats outperformed the Whigs in the elections that

⁵³⁴ General John Wilson to President Zachary Taylor, December 24, 1849, Ewing Family Papers, LOC. Separate, undated letter included with the longer letter of this date.

accompanied the statehood convention as well, with a Democrat achieving the governorship of the proposed state once Congress ratified said document. When local Whigs protested King's position that great haste was needed despite the disadvantage this caused the Whig Party, however, King claimed he was operating under the authority and direction of President, using Taylor's name to "keep Whigs from saying a word" publicly against the course of an early statehood convention. As Wilson told his Commander-in-Chief, "He holds forth here that his word is all that is needed at Washington to effect anything with you & the Cabinet & that if he say nay so will you & Cabinet."⁵³⁵ If in fact, as Wilson and other Whigs alleged, King had sold his party's soul for the chance to become a California senator, the Democrats in California did not fulfill their end of the bargain, as King never received the Senate seat and the glory he so clearly prized. Once seated, the legislature reportedly took over 150 divided, inconclusive votes and adjourned in July of 1851 without electing a senator, though King's name was on many of the ballots cast.⁵³⁶

Wilson believed that the president's plan had anticipated an April or May 1850 convention at the earliest, yet King had acted with such deliberate haste that many Californians had not only not voted on the proposed constitution, they had not even seen it. Wilson was frustrated by King's protestations to having had no knowledge of the administration's plan. King was supposed to have tried to convince Western Californians to "accept the Mormon people as part of their state." Instead, Wilson now suspected that King was actually the author of an article criticizing any sort of proposed union. Wilson rhetorically asked the President if there had been no arrangement, as King claimed, "what [was the] use of sending me by the mormon city at all, what [was the] use of seeking an arrangement; if it was worth making, it was worth

⁵³⁵ General John Wilson to President Zachary Taylor, December 24, 1849, Ewing Family Papers, LOC.

⁵³⁶ *Deseret News*, July 26, 1851.

using.” Wilson assured President Taylor that he would do all that he could to get the Mormon delegation a hearing in the newly formed legislature and try to have the approved constitution thrown out in favor of another that included the Mormons. Of Taylor, he asked for validation that he could use to prove Thomas King had become a rogue representative of the administration. Wilson realized the long odds for success in hoping for a change in the constitution of the state, especially since he would be presenting his petition to men who had been elected under the pretext of that document. Until the United States Congress approved the de facto government of the new “state”, there was no legal authority for the legislature or the governor and appointees on which to operate, except upon the expectation that their actions would be validated after the fact by Washington. The sitting California legislature-elect would foreseeably be skeptical of anything that might make their power seem illegitimate in the interim, especially if the cause was a union with the Mormons. Consequently, Wilson asked the president to make sure that the “Mormons are to be fairly dealt with” regardless of the end result of his attempt.⁵³⁷

Further Mormon Attempts to Secure the Taylor Plan for California

The Mormons and Wilson pressed forward with their attempt to sway the sitting government in Sacramento. The determination was made to petition the governor directly with an address in hopes of securing his blessing on the proposal to rewrite the constitution to include the Great Basin settlement. Amasa Lyman, the Mormon delegate to the proposed statehood

⁵³⁷ Ibid. Wilson would in fact receive such vindication from the administration months later in a letter from Secretary of the Interior Thomas Ewing. Wilson’s response letter of May 13, 1850 leaves very little doubt that there was in fact an administration plan to merge the two areas into one state and that Wilson had performed admirably while King had disappointed the hopes of all involved. See John Wilson to Thomas Ewing, Ewing Family Papers, Box 54, LOC.

convention, recorded several meetings with John Wilson in his journal. The two collaborated in writing their appeal to the governor, completing it January 10, 1850.⁵³⁸

The document they sent constitutes one of the most nationalistic pronouncements found in early Mormon records. The letter acknowledged the difficulties which distance and terrain presented in relation to communication between the two portions of California. If the two areas were received as separate states into the union, boundary disputes would have to be settled. But the primary argument made in the document is that the Mormon people had a much higher goal in mind regarding the statehood of both areas: the preservation of the Union. Recounting the agitation over the issue of slavery, and the proposition of uniting both East and West California into one gargantuan state, the petitioners explained that Mormons living in the Great Basin “have reason to believe that a sacrifice is demanded of their hands for the benefit of the Union, and they are prepared to make it.” The document called upon those living in West California to join with them in this patriotic endeavor “and put to rest forever...that excitement in relation to slavery which has so deeply agitated the people of the United States in years past, and which, unless the people of California settle it is likely to continue to increase the already too angry state of public feeling.”⁵³⁹

If the willingness of the Mormons to submit to the authority of the more populous West was not enough evidence, the letter also specifically vouched for the patriotism and Americanism of the Mormon people. This portion of the address probably carries Wilson’s touch, as he was aware of the countless rumors of Mormon plans for revolt, insurrection, or disloyalty that had

⁵³⁸ Amasa Lyman, Journal, January 10, 1850, MS 829, Box 1, Folder 5, Vol. 10, LDS Church Archives. The memorial itself was dated January 8, 1850, and was so entered into the record of the proceedings of the Senate of California. Yet, Lyman’s journal makes clear that while the document may have been originally dated January 8, when he and Wilson began crafting the message, it was not finished until January 10.

⁵³⁹ Amasa Lyman and John Wilson to Governor Peter H. Burnett, January 8, 1850, *Journal of the Senate of California, Appendix*, Vol. 1, 436.

circulated for years. If the people of California needed to be reassured of Mormon loyalty to make such a union, he hoped his position as a presidential appointee could to dispel such anxiety. Also, because many of the newspaper accounts of Mormonism highlighted the immigrant make-up of the sect, it was important to explain that most were in fact citizens of the United States. The Mormons were described to the governor as an “intelligent, moral and industrious people who yield to none in their devotion to the only free country on earth, where most of them have had their birth, while the rest have made it their home, for the love and admirations they have for free institutions.” The Mormons wanted to save the nation from its present troubles because of their “love of liberty.” Again reiterating the contentions existing in Congress over the question of slavery in the territories, Lyman and Wilson urged that the presently accepted constitution of California be thrown out and redrawn “with the view of forming for the present one State, to cover all the territory acquired from Mexico as included in California.”⁵⁴⁰

The sitting, though not yet federally sanctioned, governor of California was Democrat Peter Hardeman Burnett. By an interesting historical intertwining of fate and circumstance, Burnett was no stranger to the Mormons, though his last association with them was a decade removed. Burnett had at one time been a frontier lawyer in Missouri and had, along with Alexander Doniphan (whom Burnett considered a dear friend), defended imprisoned Mormon Church leaders during the violence in Missouri that had come to be known as the Mormon War. Burnett outlined in his memoirs that he had been a member of one of the Missouri militia companies called out to defend the state from alleged Mormon depredations. During the panic of a perceived Mormon assault, he confessed “A fearful impulse came over me, such as I had never felt before.” That alarm had been a false one and Burnett had along with Doniphan returned to defending the Mormons despite his experience of serving in the militia against them. Although it

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid, 437, 440.

is possible nostalgic bravado colored his memories, Burnett claimed in fact that he and Doniphan had been so worried for their safety and the safety of their clients that in one instance he had his hand on his pistol during Doniphan's summation before the court, fearing that the unruly, anti-Mormon mobs would target either of them for defending the likes of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon.⁵⁴¹ Burnett had experienced firsthand the lawlessness of anti-Mormon mob violence and had left in his memoirs a favorable impression of Joseph Smith. Burnett was one of the few non-Mormons in 1880 who could claim he personally knew Joseph Smith and heard him preach while he was in Missouri.

Despite his history with Mormonism, or perhaps because of it, Burnett did not respond favorably to the importunings of the Mormon delegation and federal Indian Agent John Wilson. Having received the address written by Wilson and Lyman, Burnett forwarded it on to the legislature with a negative commentary accompanying it. The precise reasons for his rejection of the plan are impossible to discern. Although his own experiences with the Mormons might have softened his personal bias against them which other leaders might have readily held, it is also possible that having experienced firsthand the violence and hatred the Mormon presence as a minority in a state could engender, Burnett simply did not want to create the conditions by which a repetition of the Missouri fiasco could occur. The publicized mob violence and animosity toward the Mormons especially in Illinois, but even lately in Iowa, served to brand the Mormons as a destabilizing force inside of a state, whether the Mormons were guilty of instigation of these problems or not. With the Mormon presence in California, both in the San Francisco area and the expatriates of the disbanded Mormon Battalion in the southern portion of the state, Burnett well knew the animosity of the majority of Californians to Mormonism.

⁵⁴¹ Peter H. Burnett, *Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1880), 55, 61.

Burnett's record as governor indicated that he wanted to prevent other destabilizing forces from entering the state. In fact, his first gubernatorial act was to argue that the proposed state and its newly formed legislature should pass laws that would prohibit all blacks, slave or free, from living in their territory. In his view, the very nature of free blacks, being at once residents of the state but at the same time denied suffrage and equal status with whites, was a recipe for civil unrest. He argued at his inaugural address that blacks should be banned from the state entirely, condescendingly explaining of the race:

There is, in my opinion, but one of two consistent courses to take in reference to this class of population; either to admit them to the full and free enjoyment of all the privileges guaranteed by the Constitution to others, or exclude them from the State. If we permit them to settle in our State, under existing circumstances, we consign them, by our own institutions, and the usages of our own society, to a subordinate and degraded position, which is in itself but a species of slavery. They would be placed in a situation where they would have no efficient motives for moral or intellectual improvement, but must remain in our midst, sensible of their degradation, unhappy themselves, enemies to the institutions and the society whose usages have placed them there, and for ever fit teachers in all the schools of ignorance, vice, and idleness... It could be no favor, and no kindness, to permit that class of population to settle in the State under such humiliating conditions, although they might think otherwise; while it would be a most serious injury to us.⁵⁴²

If blacks were to be kept out on the basis of their inability to amalgamate with the society at large, Mormons would naturally, especially given Burnett's experiences in Missouri, fit into a similar category. Of course, the Mormons were white, and thus free from the immediate taint of prejudice that free blacks endured at the hands of the white majority. But Mormon history had proven time and again that their whiteness was not a barrier to hostility on the part of the majority. They were historically incapable of living among those not of their faith without mob violence resulting. The same man who wanted to exclude blacks for the public good would certainly want to exclude Mormons for nearly identical reasons. And, as Burnett expounded

⁵⁴² Governor Peter H. Burnett, *Inaugural Address*, December 20, 1849.

upon the matter it seemed as if he was almost hinting at exclusion of Mormons when he averred, “We have certainly the right to prevent any class of population from settling in our State, that we may deem injurious to our society.”⁵⁴³

Publicly, Burnett’s stated reasons for the rejection of the Mormon petition were based upon points of mere practicality. The remoteness of the Great Basin from Western California and the intervening mountain ranges made communications necessarily more difficult and would thus increase the administrative costs of such a union. Additionally, Burnett argued to the legislature, accepting the Mormon plan for unification would cause even greater delays in the process of achieving statehood for those living in Western California. The existing constitution would have to be scrapped, a new convention called, a new document created, and then that document would have to be once again forwarded on to Congress for approval. Given the fact that the frustration with the lack of a state government apparatus had spurred the early call to a convention in the first place, an additional delay on the basis of including the Mormons was certain to create civil unrest of some kind.

These objections to a union, while substantive, all hinged upon the fact that Burnett rejected the essential point of the Mormon position: that the citizens of California needed to make these sacrifices to preserve the peace and sanctity of the Union. In his assessment to the legislature he argued that this “great sacrifice on our part...is improper and unnecessary in and of itself; and all this we are asked to do, for the mere purpose of relieving Congress of its responsibility of deciding upon the question of slavery.” Certainly Burnett did not see the national crisis in the same light as did either Wilson or the Taylor administration. Had he believed, as many administration officials did, that the crisis was spiraling out of control and might end in real conflict, Burnett might have been more sympathetic to a plan which required of

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

Californians “so great a sacrifice of time, means, dignity, independence, to settle a question, the decision of which rightly rests with others.” Union with the Mormons in the Great Basin would result in a “humiliating and unreasonable condition.”⁵⁴⁴ Burnett dismissed the central, motivating factor of the entire proposal. He did not think the arguments over slavery in the territories would become unmanageable and lead to greater unrest, or even an unthinkable civil war.

Simple partisanship might have been another unmentioned factor as well. While Democrats in Western California were clearly in the majority, the gap was not an unbridgeable one for the Whigs in the proposed state. This was evident in the 1852 presidential election when fewer than 5,000 votes separated Franklin Pierce from the defeated Whig, Winfield Scott. The Mormons had made a well-publicized shift away from the Democratic Party in the 1848 elections in Iowa, and the messy congressional investigation of the electoral fraud there was still underway. Not only had they publicly endorsed Taylor in Iowa, the Mormon delegation was now in California, with a Taylor administration federal appointee, John Wilson, as one of their delegates to the proposed new constitutional convention. That Wilson was a high-standing Whig would have been readily evident with the company he kept once he arrived. Burnett would have been foolish to assume that the disposition of the Mormon voting bloc would be anything other than solidly Whig. The address from Wilson and Lyman spoke of thousands more Mormons who would soon be moving from Iowa to Salt Lake, joining the 12,000 already there. If the Mormons voted the Whig ticket en masse, the inclusion of the Mormon settlements inside California’s boundaries could readily tip the balance from Democrat to Whig in both congressional and presidential elections. Burnett himself might no longer be voted in as the

⁵⁴⁴ Peter H. Burnett, “Executive Message relative to Deseret”, *Journal of the Senate of California, Appendix*, Vol. 1, 432-435.

governor in that scenario. Even though the plan was to break Deseret off in the near future and have it form its own state, the 1852 presidential elections would mostly likely still have been in play before such secession occurred. It is possible that the astute Truman Smith had this very political dynamic in mind when he threw his support behind the California scheme that would include the now-Whiggish Mormons.

Whatever the underlying reason for the petition's rejection, the legislature discarded the call to a new convention and instead busied itself with disputing the ridiculously expansive area the Mormons had claimed to be a part of Deseret. Though Wilson hoped that through persistence he might be able to still achieve his goal, any real hope of the Taylor California died in the face of the governor's report.

Reasons for the Failure of the Taylor Plan

The Taylor Plan for California, whether through the machinations of King, the recalcitrance of Burnett, or the combination of these and other factors, was stillborn. Whether or not the plan could have succeeded is debatable. The opposition to the admission of California as a free state was so strong that if the entirety of California and the Cession was up for statehood, the cries of pro-slavery legislators could only be heightened. Still, presented with a constitution for the proposed Taylor California, the opposition in Congress would have been more difficult. Democrats, especially those in the North, were increasingly settling on the concept of popular sovereignty as their primary argument for how slavery should be determined in the territories. Stephen Douglas rested his compromise plan upon the idea of popular sovereignty. If the population in California was calling for statehood with a constitution in which its constituents

decided to prohibit slavery, opposition to the constitution undermined the very argument espoused in the championing of popular sovereignty. Still, perhaps the foremost authority on the matter, historian Michael Holt, has concluded that “substantial potential support for Taylor’s policy existed both in Congress and in the country. But its adoption depended on an extraordinarily large number of cards falling into place. Almost none of them did.”⁵⁴⁵ Congressman King’s card never even made it into the deck.

Regardless of the potential for the success of the Taylor California plan, had a constitution been written that did include both Western and Eastern California, the fact remains that the Mormons had acted more dutifully and loyal than the Taylor administration could possibly have hoped. Of all of the foreseeable hurdles the grand plan needed to overcome, the original architects had assumed Mormon willingness to go along would be the greatest. The plan had grossly underestimated the logistical nightmare of the task at hand, covering thousands of miles with three separate representatives of the administration, each without any real ability to communicate either with each other or with the Taylor administration. And, it revealed a fundamental misunderstanding of the Mormons and their relationship to the United States. Rhetoric had filled the newspapers for years, much of it from Mormon leaders themselves, claiming Mormon intransigence and antipathy toward the nation, bordering on seditious hatred. But Mormon leadership primarily wanted the group to be left in peace and free from the mob violence of the American majority that surrounded them in their various settlements. They sought out a state government for precisely the protections such an institution provided.

In the end, it was partisan wrangling and Congressman King’s insatiable appetite for fame and attention that doomed the already unwieldy plan to certain destruction, not the Mormons’ unwillingness to prove themselves loyal citizens and re-unite with the country in a

⁵⁴⁵ Holt, 466.

homecoming of statehood. King's mission proved to be a double failure to the administration. He had botched the entire purpose of his mission, but when the news of his mission to California became public it led to electoral defeats for Southern Whigs in Georgia who were seen as complicit with the administration's attempt to "ban" slavery in the territories taken in the Cession.⁵⁴⁶

The Mormons' willingness to ally with the highest levels of the United States government was not a spate of idealism. There certainly was commonality in the rhetoric used by the two entities. "Ambassador" John Wilson had called upon the Mormons' sense of nationalism and pride in the nation they claimed to love to get them to agree to the administration plan for the sake of sparing the Union. President Taylor and a substantial number of leading Whigs, many of them Southerners and slaveholders themselves, had undertaken the grandiose California scheme because they feared that the growing bellicosity over the question of slavery in the territories might rip the nation apart. For the Mormons' part, Brigham Young and other prominent Mormons had apocalyptically predicted that the slavery arguments were going to rend the nation and that the resulting turmoil would be the deserved punishment from God for the treatment the Mormons had received. Yet, when presented with the Taylor administration's plan to prevent this very "punishment" from occurring, the Mormon leadership acquiesced to the sacrifice it entailed of Mormon independence. As in other cases, fiery Mormon rhetoric did not trump pragmatism when presented with a way both to ingratiate themselves with the administration and, most importantly, to obtain a separate state government. Young made no illusions that their decision to support the government's plan was ultimately one he felt to be in the best interests of the society which he led, explaining to Lyman that "while the

⁵⁴⁶ Holt, 451.

government is using us to save the nation, we are using them to save ourselves.”⁵⁴⁷ The implication was that, professed patriotism notwithstanding, the Mormon leadership would not have gone along with Taylor’s schemes had they not considered it to be in the Church’s best interest in the long term, the fate of the country (both literally and spiritually) be damned. Had Wilson presented a plan that did not eventually entail a separate Mormon state, only the slightest of probabilities existed that Brigham Young would have acquiesced. Still, as this case so ably demonstrates, Brigham Young was capable of raining rhetorical fire and brimstone, but often cooled the inferno in the face of practical circumstances.

Regardless of the self-serving reasons motivating Mormon loyalty to the nation at large and specifically toward the administration, the fact remained that the Mormons had chosen the administration over defiance. The plethora of news reports of Mormon hostility to the American government failed to conform to the reality of the situation. They had proven their professed loyalty while others, especially Congressman Thomas King, had proven quite the opposite. John Wilson had recognized this stance and accordingly urged Zachary Taylor to do whatever he could to see that the Mormons received “fair” treatment from the Commander-in-Chief in what was now sure to be a prolonged, argumentative process over the status of Deseret and the other Cession territories.⁵⁴⁸

William Smith and Anti-Mormon Petitions

Despite the failure of Taylor’s plan, Young still had his original iron in the fire. Almon Babbitt and John Bernhisel had pressed on to Washington D.C., despite Wilson’s attempt to

⁵⁴⁷ Brigham Young to Amasa Lyman, September 6, 1849, MHC, Vol. 19, 129.

⁵⁴⁸ General John Wilson to President Zachary Taylor, December 24, 1849, Ewing Family Papers, LOC.

dissuade them en route. They aimed to present the Deseret constitution that had been crafted before Wilson had arrived on his mission. Yet at the same time Wilson was writing his letter about Mormon dutifulness and loyalty, Taylor was in receipt of an entirely different communication, one that painted a far different portrait of the Mormons in Salt Lake than the letters he would receive from Wilson months later. Joseph Smith's younger brother, William Smith, had sent a remonstrance to Congress concerning the Mormons who followed Brigham Young and its damning rhetoric reverberated inside the halls of Congress. As the delegate representing the proposed and provisional state of Deseret, John Bernhisel, explained, it "created quite a sensation in both wings of the Capitol."⁵⁴⁹

William Smith had become an apostle of the Church in its early years. He had several times displayed erratic behavior and had frequent conflicts with his older brother Joseph and the Church in general. At one time, his position in the Church had even been suspended. After Joseph and Hyrum were murdered, William maintained a prominent position under Brigham Young's initial leadership and obtained the high office of patriarch. But William chafed under the rule of Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles for several reasons, not the least of which was his belief that the authority to run the Church in the wake of the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum was something that was passed down through lineal descent. Though there is evidence William practiced plural marriage himself, he claimed to oppose the limited and secret practice. William denounced "spiritual wifery" and held that Joseph's young son, Joseph Smith III, should be the rightful leader of the Church when he reached the proper age. He affirmed such a position just two months before his stubbornness on this point caused him to be excommunicated. He had written his friend Jesse Little in August of 1845 that:

⁵⁴⁹ John Bernhisel to Brigham Young, March 21, 1850, MHC, June 8, 1850, Vol. 20, 41.

Joseph [is] his Fathers successor although some people would fain make us believe that the Twelve are to be the perpetual heads of this Church to the exclusion of the Smith family, but every one who has read the book of Doctrine and Covenants must be aware that Priesthood authority is hereditary and descends from Father to son and therefore Josephs oldest son will take his place when he arrives to the age of a maturity. The twelve are however the Presidents for the time being but when Josephs successor comes they take their former place. I merely make these remarks lest a false impression might get abroad concerning this matter...There seems to be a severe influence working against me and the Smith family in this place, which makes our situation very unpleasant...⁵⁵⁰

After his excommunication, Smith attempted to place himself at the forefront of several splinter groups that claimed to have rightful control of the Mormon movement. Already furious that the bulk of the Church now looked to Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as the legitimate leaders of the Church, Smith was further enraged to learn that Young's Mormons were now petitioning for political legitimacy in the form of a state or territory in the Union. Worse still, such a state would obviously elect Brigham to be the governor, completing his hold over the Mormons both politically and religiously. To prevent this from happening, Smith produced a rambling, scathing indictment of the Mormons living in the Great Basin, and of Young personally. Smith persuaded several Kentucky politicians to deliver his philippic in Washington, including Whig senator Joseph Underwood and Democratic congressman Richard Henry Stanton. The politicians presented the diatribe to both the House and Senate, where it was referred to the Committee on the Territories, and ordered to be printed. Smith wasted no time in asserting that "Salt Lake Mormonism is diametrically in opposition to the pure principles of virtue, liberty, and equality, and that the rulers of the Salt Lake church are bitter and inveterate enemies to our government."⁵⁵¹

⁵⁵⁰ William Smith to J.C. Little, August 20, 1845, Jesse Little Correspondence, MS 14691, LDS Church Archives.

⁵⁵¹ William Smith, "Remonstrance of William Smith et al., of Covington, Kentucky, Against the Admission of Deseret into the Union." House Miscellaneous Documents, No. 43, 31st Congress, 1st Session, December 31, 1849.

This opening salvo was calculated to arouse suspicion of the already enigmatic and dubious sect in the minds of patriotic politicians. Smith highlighted the fact that Brigham Young had been elected to be the new governor of the state if Congress accepted their proposed constitution. Playing upon the anti-Catholic sentiment still prominent in the American political arena, William Smith juxtaposed Young's overwhelming power to that of the Pope's, writing, that "Their intention is to unite church and state; and whilst the political power of the Roman pontiff is passing away, this American tyrant, is endeavoring to establish a new order of political popery in the recesses of the mountains of America."⁵⁵²

While similar claims had been bandied about in American newspapers for years, William Smith claimed to have intimate knowledge of a secret Mormon temple ceremony in which 1500 Mormons swore an oath to "avenge the blood of Joseph Smith on this nation" by secretly educating both the adults and the children to "carry out hostilities against this nation" in perpetuity. Given the peculiarity of Mormon doctrines and the rumored rebellions that had continually accompanied the Mexican War, it is not surprising that some, including President Taylor, took such allegations very seriously. And, coming as it did from the dead prophet's brother, it certainly carried more weight than the average rumor of dubious veracity.

If the treasonous designs of the Mormons were not enough to convince Washington of the impending peril that flirting with Mormon statehood entailed, Smith appealed to the morality of the body politic. Though evidence suggests that Smith had himself practiced polygamy when the doctrine was first secretly introduced in Nauvoo, Smith sought to shock the legislators of the nation with the fact that Brigham Young and the Salt Lake Mormons were practicing polygamy, something the Mormons in Salt Lake had yet to disclose openly to the public. Not only was this practice equated with barbarism in and of itself, but Smith maintained that many of these

⁵⁵² Ibid.

women, as well as men, were being forcibly held and exploited in the territory. Deseret's "inhabitants would rejoice if they could extricate themselves from the miseries, cruelties, oppression and degradation in which they are placed by the stratagems and deceit of these task-masters." He rattled off the litany of alleged crimes, sins, immoralities, and treasonable offenses and rhetorically flourished, "Surely your honorable body will not lend your aid to legalise adultery, fornication, incest, and all manner of wickedness." In fact, the entire purpose of the Mormon out migration was to "escape the punishment" they should have received. Contradictorily, Smith argued that it was "for their country's good" that the Mormons had left, only to argue a few lines later that the Congress should "send an armed force to bring them back from their hiding-place."⁵⁵³

William Smith tipped his hand as to what might have motivated his harangue aside from his professed patriotic motivations or to "save the helpless females of the Salt Lake territory from a life of misery, degradation, and vice." Apart from his demagoguery and treason, Brigham Young had personally hired assassins to kill him, "the true and lineal successor in the presidency" and "lawful president of the church", in order to further his illegal takeover of the organization. Still, his primary point of the remonstrance was that the Mormons in Deseret "have been guilty of murders, treason, fornication, robbery, counterfeiting, swindling, blasphemy, and usurpation of power both political and ecclesiastical" and Congress needed to prevent statehood for the area at least, if it was unable to raise an army to punish the Mormons for their crimes.

Though the invective of this publication caused the "sensation" Bernhisel reported, the veracity of the claims made by Smith were quickly called into question. Senator Underwood and Congressman Stanton, only three months after the congressional publication of the Smith

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

remonstrance, gave their consent to publish a retraction sent by Smith's co-author, Isaac Sheen, in the *National Era*. Sheen insisted that Smith's "complaints against the Deseret Mormons are unworthy of any attention... I find that his accusations against the Deseret Mormons are the ebullitions of a malicious heart, and have been made by him to divert attention from his own outrageous villainy and licentiousness."⁵⁵⁴ Not only had his co-author abandoned and denounced him, Smith himself demonstrated the lack of depth to his allegations as he continued to make attempts to get Brigham Young to re-admit him into a position of power inside the church, seeking a "reconciliation" with the Salt Lake Mormons as early as 1853. If Smith really believed Young was intent upon his murder, such an action only a few years later seemed quite unsound judgment.⁵⁵⁵

Popular Reaction to Accusations

The damage of the Smith remonstrance had already been done, however. Newspapers inside the capital and across the country reported the alleged treasonable designs of the Mormons. In Norwalk, Ohio the *Huron Reflector* reported that Smith's communication described how the Mormons had vowed oaths against the United States and sought an independent nation because "the Salt Lake Mormons will not be content with anything less than a free and independent government."⁵⁵⁶ Ironically, this report was published at the very time Mormons were trying to convince California legislators to include their settlements inside the borders of the newly-formed state.

⁵⁵⁴ "The Mormons", *The National Era*, May 30, 1850.

⁵⁵⁵ Paul M. Edwards, "William B. Smith: Persistent Pretender", *Dialogue*, Vol. 18, Number 2, (Sum) 1985, 131.

⁵⁵⁶ "Mormon State", *The Huron Reflector*, Jan 1, 1850.

William Smith also published a newspaper from his headquarters in Covington, Kentucky, where a small number of disaffected Mormons had rallied behind him as the true leader of the Mormon movement. The *Melchisedek and Aaronic Herald* made up for its enigmatic name by dazzling its readers with “inside” information into the supposed atrocities being committed by the Mormons in the Great Basin. These stories, however parochial and fantastic, often made their way into prominent newspapers in major cities; a juicy rumor about philandering or murdering Mormons quickly caught the eyes of potential readers. In one instance, Smith again claimed to have intimate knowledge of the depravity of the Mormons in Salt Lake, shrouded in the elitist secrecy for which mid 19th century Americans showed great aversion. The Mormons in Salt Lake were “under the government of a secret lodge. In this lodge Brigham Young has been crowned as king, and sits there upon a throne erected for him.” Under the direction of this absolutist authoritarian the Mormons were doing worse than the oft-made allegations of inciting the Indians to violence against emigrating groups on the overland trail. He claimed the Mormons were in fact “armed, dressed and painted -- having the appearance of Indians -- ...stationed on the way to California and Oregon, for the purpose of robbing the emigrants. Many murders and robberies have already been committed by these demons in human shape, which have been published to the world and attributed to the Indians.” This explosive allegation was reprinted, without commentary modifying its claims, in the *New Jersey Gazette* within a month of its original publication.⁵⁵⁷

It was not only disgruntled former members of the Church who expressed their opposition to a state in Deseret. Prominent Illinois Democratic Congressman John Wentworth presented what he called a “remonstrance from the State of Illinois against the admission into the

⁵⁵⁷ “The Mormons of Deseret or Salt Lake”, *The New Jersey Gazette*, March 13, 1850. Originally published as “The Salt Lake Banditti” in the *Melchisedek and Aaronic Herald*, Vol. 1, No. 8., February, 1850.

Union of the Salt Lake Mormons, as a distinct political organization.” The petitioners set forth allegations similar to those of the William Smith harangue, such as the “treasonable designs of the Salt Lake Mormons” who were “in favor of a Kingly Government, are robbers and murderers, and that these men are all in favor of polygamy.”⁵⁵⁸ Rather than submitting the memorial to the Committee on the Territories as had Smith’s allegation, Wentworth, perhaps trying to underline the threat the Mormon’s were posing to the security of the nation, instead submitted this petition to Committee on Military Affairs. Weeks later Senator Underwood from Kentucky followed up on his initial petition from Smith with a second. It outlined many of the same accusations as the first and argued that his evidence should be taken not only to “show the impropriety of admitting Deseret into the Union, but also to convince government that no Salt Lake Mormon should be allowed to hold any office, either at Salt Lake valley or Council Bluffs.”⁵⁵⁹

The *Daily National Intelligencer* published an editorial which excoriated the Mormons in the Great Basin as “fanatics” which had “founded a few straggling settlements on the public land of the United States – of which they do not own an inch; of which the Indian title has not been extinguished.” The writer did not think the Mormons deserved more than “five or six townships” much less a large territorial organization. He was incredulous that “Congress is asked to make to this sect, not of Christians but of Mormons, of believers not in Jesus Christ but of Joe Smith, a more than imperial grant” by the “act of admission, on terms of equal membership, to this Union of States!” As Joseph Smith had played the role of “Mahomet” for his followers, so too were they seeking to found “a new Mormon caliphate on this continent.” Clearly the author saw a dangerous distinction between white Americans and American

⁵⁵⁸ “State of Deseret”, *The Congressional Globe*, Feb 26, 1850.

⁵⁵⁹ “The Latter-Day Saints”, *The Congressional Globe*, March 15, 1850.

Mormons, a variance that rested primarily on the religious tenets of the latter. This was magnified by the fact that the geography of Mormon settlement gave “them complete control of our line of communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.”⁵⁶⁰

Although these various denunciations received great circulation and attracted political sponsorship, not every newspaper wholeheartedly agreed with the invectives. The editor of the *Oneida Morning Herald*, for instance, praised an Ohio newspaper for retracting an assertion previously made in its pages that the Mormons were attempting to establish a theocratic government. Having examined the proposed republican constitution of Deseret and finding it similar to each other state, this editor felt the charge of Mormon monarchism was unfounded.⁵⁶¹ Another paper dedicated a large section to debunking William Smith’s claims in particular. The editor recounted the experiences of the Mormons being prevailed upon to serve in the Mexican War and promptly enlisting, and asked his readers: “Would this have been the case had they sworn to avenge their wrongs against the government and people of the United States?” The argument that the Mormons wanted an independent kingdom or separate nation was as absurd to this writer as was the constant claim of Mormon treason and disloyalty because, “we find them now knocking at our doors for admission into our Union, at a time when another populous and less remote community are in no hurry for such a consummation. Does this look like settled hostility to the United States?” He noted the ambitions that had led Smith to make his outlandish claims and he even justified the ridiculous expanse of territory Deseret was claiming as being no different than the arbitrary and huge borders Texas and California had claimed themselves. Importantly though, this editor also believed that reports about Mormon polygamy were simply outlandish lies, though it was in this aspect that the remonstrance of William Smith carried the

⁵⁶⁰ “The State of Deseret?”, *Daily National Intelligencer*, February 27, 1850.

⁵⁶¹ “State of Deseret”, *Oneida Morning Herald*, January 1, 1850.

most weight. Many Mormons at Salt Lake were, in fact, practicing polygamy, even if it was not the scandalous sexual slavery often depicted. Thus, the sanguine editor concluded, “We have no sympathies or regards for this Mormon people; but, judging from what we have formerly heard and latterly known of them, we deem these accusations to be entirely absurd and impossible.”⁵⁶²

Taylor’s Reaction to Accusations Against the Mormons

Notwithstanding the few showings of support for the Mormons in the press, such was the public mystery which surrounded the Mormons that the majority of publications both circulated and accepted the rumors William Smith and others presented about the excesses of Mormonism. President Taylor’s support of the Mormons and their statehood petition precipitously declined after receipt of the Smith memorial. Questions of loyalty and patriotism lodged deeply in the president’s mind, and he began to think twice about his proposed statehood venture uniting the Mormons with the remainder of California, having not yet learned of that mission’s utter failure. The entire purpose of his plan for California was to prevent the Union from being rent; now the Mormons seemed to be fixated on destroying it themselves. As John Bernhisel reported to Brigham Young, “Since my first meeting with him, he has been somewhat prejudiced against us by the slanderous reports in circulation.”⁵⁶³

Taylor appears to have taken a negative attitude toward the Mormons despite the letters John Wilson sent, his ambassador who had undertaken to persuade the Mormons to fall in line with the administration’s scheme. Wilson praised the Mormons and their willingness to sacrifice for the nation. Perhaps Taylor feared, as had many politicians before him, that alliance with the

⁵⁶² “The Mormons of Deseret”, *Geuaga Republican*, April 16, 1850. Apparently reprinted from the *Washington Republic*.

⁵⁶³ John Bernhisel to Brigham Young, March 21, 1850, MHC, June 8, 1850, Vol. 20, 43.

Mormons simply constituted something too politically volatile, especially with the reports against them currently in circulation. All of the political capital the Mormons had hoped they had been building with the Chief Executive had with the arrival of one libel-filled screed disintegrated. They believed that serving in the military during the Mexican War had proven their patriotism. Politically they believed that by voting for Taylor while in the minority in Iowa and supporting his statehood scheme even at a great risk to their own independence should have earned them presidential sanction. Nevertheless, by February, following the president's address to Congress concerning the territorial issue, papers as far away as London were reporting that Taylor was "not favourable to the admission of the Mormon state of Deseret as a Mormon state."⁵⁶⁴

The Importance of Mormons to the Arguments Over the Mexican Cession

Although Taylor withdrew his support for the Mormons, and seemed uninterested and even unwilling to create a territory for Deseret, much less a state, John Bernhisel and Almon Babbitt found others in the legislative branch who still offered their support. The Mormons still presented an interesting political anomaly for those in Washington. The group was almost universally hated, despised, and reviled by the American public and American press. Yet they now occupied, by the thousands, a central location astride the overland communication route between the increasingly valuable and populous West Coast. Furthermore, they were quickly becoming tinder in the fire of the growing slavery argument. If California were to be admitted as a free state and the other territories of the Mexican Cession were to be organized upon the principle popular sovereignty, Northern Democrats, split as they were between slavery's

⁵⁶⁴ *London Nonconformist*, February 6, 1850.

expansion and limitation in the territories, especially saw the value of the Mormon territory of Deseret. Whigs and Democrats opposed to the expansion of slavery viewed the only half dozen or so slaves being held in the proposed territory to be a great auger that any state formed there would come in as another free state.

Accommodationist Whigs and Democrats, seeking to find a political compromise in the midst of the heated debate, also saw the perfect opportunity with the Mormon territorial/state petition. The proposed constitution made no mention of slavery, yet the inhabitants owned almost none and showed no impetus to acquire any. Many argued that in the absence of direct legislation to the contrary, the Mexican laws outlawing slavery remained in force. For the Whigs who took this position, the absence of pro-slavery law was as good as a prohibition against the practice. Deseret was the perfect poster child of the proposed popular sovereignty resolution to the slavery crisis. Champions of popular sovereignty in its various forms such as Stephen Douglas, Henry Clay, and Lewis Cass could comfortably propose that the decision be left up to Deseret because they perceived little threat of the move leading to the expansion of slavery. Bernhisel reported that even Democrats staunchly opposed to the expansion of slavery such as the renowned David Wilmot had treated him “with courtesy and kind offers.”⁵⁶⁵ Lewis Cass, the author of the popular sovereignty idea, perhaps hoping to move the Mormons back into the Democratic fold, told Bernhisel that he heartily endorsed not just a territorial government for Deseret, but a state constitution.⁵⁶⁶

Fellow Democrat Stephen Douglas also told Bernhisel he favored the territorial organization, especially with the proposed constitution the Mormons had already sent as it did not mention slavery. Douglas was already presenting his compromise plan to the various power

⁵⁶⁵ No doubt Thomas Kane’s close relationship with Wilmot contributed to this cordial treatment.

⁵⁶⁶ John Bernhisel to Brigham Young, March 21, 1850, MHC, June 8, 1850, Vol. 20, 44.

brokers in the Senate, and the key feature to the compromise was that the New Mexico and Utah territories would be organized as territories but without the prohibition or legalization of slavery. These territories would instead make this determination at the time of their admission to the Union.

Senator Truman Smith, the powerful Whig leader from Connecticut who had organized the entire Taylor scheme for California and must have been frustrated with its failure, also informed Bernhisel that he would support a territorial rather than state organization of Deseret. This was a very noticeable break from President Taylor, who, having had his Cession statehood scheme fail, argued that areas such as Deseret should be left unorganized until they warranted statehood rather than granting them territorial status. Again, this new Taylor plan prevented Congress from having an argument over authority in the territories. When Bernhisel protested to Senator Smith that the Mormons feared a territorial government because it would allow the President to “appoint broken down politicians for officers that might not be acceptable to us”, Smith sympathetically explained that because the Mormons had “been badly and unjustly treated, I want to do the handsome and generous thing for you, though I cannot agree with your religion.” Smith had received word from John Wilson on the helpfulness of the Mormons in carrying out the administration scheme. He appeared willing, even if the president was not, to reward the Mormons’ loyalty by pushing for a special caveat in their territorial organization that allowed the Mormons to elect their own territorial officers rather than have them appointed, as was the standard practice.⁵⁶⁷

The ambiguity about slavery in Deseret proved to have both positive and negative effects, yet on the whole the course once suggested by Thomas Kane proved to be the most judicious politically. Southerners were refusing the admission of California to the Union despite the fact

⁵⁶⁷ John Bernhisel to Brigham Young, March 21, 1850, MHC, June 8, 1850, Vol. 20, 46.

that its residents overwhelmingly rejected slavery and their elected governor was seeking to prevent all blacks, both free and slave, from even entering its borders. Southerners were more united in their position than the disparate positions held in the North. Had Deseret petitioned for a state banning slavery, it would have been confronted with similar opposition from Southern statesmen. Bernhisel reported this general finding to Brigham Young, telling him that “the Constitution is highly approved by the South because it contains no clause inhibiting the introduction of slavery.”⁵⁶⁸ Mormons were known to hail mainly from the Northern states, as well as thousands who had come from England where the working class had pushed for the abolition of slavery within the British Empire. Joseph Smith’s candidacy for president had included a graduated emancipation plank on his platform. It is possible these factors set the bar low for Southerners who had assumed the Mormon state would attempt admission with a constitution prohibiting slavery. In addition, some newspaper reports in the South vastly overstated the number of slaves in Deseret, perhaps in a frenzy of wishful thinking. A correspondent writing from Salt Lake for the *New Orleans Crescent* reported that “there is a great number of settlers from Alabama and Mississippi, who have come to this place with their negroes, and hold them here the same as they did formerly.”⁵⁶⁹

Of course, the lack of a prohibition against the “peculiar institution” raised the ire of “Free Soilers and many other northern members” who objected to the omission. The freshman Senator William Seward met with John Bernhisel and told him he “did not like” the Deseret

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, 40.

⁵⁶⁹ Reprinted in “The Mormons of Salt Lake”, *Painesville Telegraph*, February 6, 1850. The census of the Utah Territory in 1850 revealed that there were only 50 blacks in the entire territory and nearly half of that number were free men. Ambiguity existed in the fact that it is possible that at least some of those slaves were actually counted although they were part of an emigrant train headed through the territory. There certainly were slaves in the territory, and some prominent Mormons hailing from Southern states such as Charles C. Rich were listed as the owners. Still, if these figures are accurate, given the total population listed of Utah Territory, fewer than one half of one percent of the residents of the territory were black and only half of those were slaves. This made slavery a negligible aspect of the Great Basin settlement, although for the slaves held there the institution was real enough.

constitution because it “lacked a provision inhibiting slavery.” The former New York governor was only weeks away from forever becoming the legislative face of those opposed to slavery by giving his ostentatious and courageous “Higher Law” speech to the Senate. But Seward was not so off put by the Deseret memorial that he was unkind to Bernhisel. Rather he requested information about Joseph Smith, the Golden Plates, the Book of Mormon, and the organization of the Church.⁵⁷⁰ The fact that Mormons were not known as advocates or practitioners of slavery allowed northerners to be upset that the Deseret constitution did not outlaw the practice, but it did not preclude northern support. Especially with a patron such as the Free Soiler Thomas Kane, it was highly unlikely that Deseret, or Utah as it would be called, would enter the Union as a slave state.⁵⁷¹ Thus, the position of saying nothing on the topic of slavery had prevented reactionary opposition from Southerners, but had not completely eliminated support from those in the North. All of these arguments about whether Deseret would be admitted as a free or slave state proved to be meaningless because the political, religious, and social opposition to the admission of Mormon-dominated Utah would still exist nearly half a century later, long after arguments over slave and free territories were rendered moot by the carnage of the Civil War.

Mormon Fears of Being Exploited by a Territorial Organization

As the debates over Deseret’s status continued to be mired in the partisan and sectional wrangling of Congress, Bernhisel’s reported conversations between Truman Smith and Stephen Douglas, among other statesmen, began to worry Brigham Young and other leading Mormons.

⁵⁷⁰ MHC, June 8, 1850, Vol. 20, 45.

⁵⁷¹ Stephen Douglas and others had objected to the name Deseret because they believed it sounded too much like “desert”, and the land in the Great Basin was unappealing enough without such a misunderstanding. They pushed for the name Utah as the final designation, referring to the Ute Indian tribes that dominated the area.

Bernhisel's fear that "broken down politicians" would be appointed by the President if a territorial government was established for Deseret became a palpable one in Salt Lake as the Mormons there realized that Zachary Taylor had been tainted by the anti-Mormon rhetoric circulating in the Eastern press and on Capitol Hill. This fear was certainly exaggerated when Almon Babbitt, the other delegate from Deseret, provided a more damning report of the President with whom the Mormons believed they had until recently cemented an alliance based on their loyalty and support of his Taylor's presidency and his plans. He reported to Young and the Mormon leaders that Taylor:

...is not our friend; this I know for myself beyond a doubt. He did say before twenty members of Congress that he would veto any bill passed, state or territorial, for the Mormons, - that they were a pack of outlaws, and had been driven out of two States and were not fit for self-government. I went to him in person with Col. Warren and charged these sayings upon him and he owned that he had so said; and tried to reason with me in relation "to the absurdity of the Mormons asking for a State or Territorial government."⁵⁷²

Whether the content of this exchange is wholly accurate is debatable. It will be remembered that Almon Babbitt was such a fiercely partisan Democrat that he had challenged apostle Orson Hyde when the latter had attempted to persuade the Mormons in Iowa to vote the Whig ticket. Babbitt appears to have not cast aside his partisan mantle with his appointment as a delegate for the provisional state or territory of Deseret, even though the Mormon leadership deliberately wanted to plot a course of neutrality between the parties and the sections. In fact, so tactless was Babbitt's partisanship that Thomas Kane would write a letter later that year denouncing him to Young and requesting that Babbitt not be returned as a representative for the Mormons in Washington D.C.⁵⁷³ Babbitt eagerly seized on Taylor's reported comments and his

⁵⁷² MHC, Vol. 20, August 20, 1850, 74-75. Excerpt from the letter sent by Almon Babbitt July 7, 1850.

⁵⁷³ Thomas Kane to Brigham Young et. al, September 24, 1850. MHC, Vol. 20, 134. Babbitt's Iowa confrontation with Orson Hyde is explained in Chapter 6.

souring views on the Mormons and must have reported the exchange to the prophet with a great degree of personal vindication.

The Mormons held a justifiable fear that aspiring politicians would be sent as federal officers to govern the Territory of Deseret. The spoils system competition for federal offices that accompanied electoral victories had become more entrenched in the years following its inception under the Andrew Jackson administration. Of course, such appointments had taken place even before Jackson. Not only were the Mormons convinced that Taylor had abandoned them, his cabinet, already charged with corruption, was widely perceived as readily filling federal posts for the purposes of political leverage rather than attending to national interest. The cabinet officer who would have the most say in any federal appointments to Deseret would undoubtedly be Secretary of Interior, Thomas Ewing. Ewing had previously served (briefly) as the Secretary of the Treasury for the William Henry Harrison administration. Though his tenure was only a few months in that position, Ewing earned a reputation for callousness that stuck with him. He purged in wholesale fashion all of the federal appointees under his purview, including the lowest level clerks, that he deemed insufficiently loyal to the Whig Party, the president, or himself. His actions earned him the epithet “Butcher Ewing” in the press. So petty were his removals, he even replaced the floor sweeper and the doorman in the department, according to one accusation.⁵⁷⁴

Fearing that a malicious Taylor, reinforced by a cutthroat Ewing, if forced to accept an organization of Utah Territory, would forego appointing any Mormons to positions of territorial power, the provisional assembly determined in September to withdraw the application for a territorial organization. Instead, the delegates were to “use all proper means to procure an early admission into the Union as a state.” The Mormons would rather govern themselves through the

⁵⁷⁴ *Extra Globe*, July 28, 1841.

provisional state assembly they had created than allow the vagaries of a territorial government organization to place anti-Mormons at the head of the government.⁵⁷⁵ This sentiment was expressed by newly ordained apostle Franklin Richards as he wrote his uncle Levi who was serving a mission in England. He explained of the arguments taking place in Congress, “I hope they will forget to organize a Territory in the Basin for the inhabitants are better off without than with it.”⁵⁷⁶ Ironically, the result of the Mormons’ lost faith in the Taylor was to adopt the very position that Taylor was now championing: leaving the Cession lands unorganized until they were admitted as states, skipping the territorial stage and allowing the residents of these lands to conduct their own affairs in the short term.

Whether or not Zachary Taylor would have signed any compromise bill that included the formation of Deseret as a territory after being jaded by the accounts of polygamy, tyranny, and treason is lost to the uncertainty of unfolding historical events. His personal opposition to the Mormons dovetailed nicely with the position to which he stubbornly clung - that the areas lying outside the confines of California should not be organized at all until they petitioned for statehood, thus bypassing congressional wrangling about the slavery issue. Questions of whether or not Taylor would have caved from his position as the rising tensions found politicians openly speaking of secession were left unanswered by his death, though a chief biographer believed any bill organizing the territories, including Utah Territory, would have triggered a veto from “Old Rough and Ready.”⁵⁷⁷ On July 9, 1850, two days after Babbitt sent his excoriating letter, Taylor died after a five-day bout of acute gastroenteritis.

The Mormon experience during the Taylor administration had been a roller coaster ride. Having first feared that Taylor would not validate their support for him for president, they soon

⁵⁷⁵ MHC, Vol. 20, September 11, 1850, 84.

⁵⁷⁶ Franklin D. Richards to Levi Richards, June 25, 1850, Levi Richards Papers MS 1284, LDS Church Archives.

⁵⁷⁷ Hamilton, 383.

found themselves actively cooperating with Taylor's agent in creating California statehood. Persuaded that they needed to act in concert with the administration, even if the California scheme was less than ideal, Mormon leaders determined to give their support to the enterprise. That Taylor's California plan failed was not due to Mormon recalcitrance. Rather, political and social realities in California made the proposed arrangement impossible. Nevertheless, the Mormons expected to receive executive support for their territorial petition because they had dutifully carried out Taylor's request.

William Smith's remonstrance, along with other petitions and newspaper accounts, persuaded Taylor that the Mormons should not be allowed either a territorial or state government. Both of Taylor's positions with respect to the Mormons were self-serving. When the Mormons were needed for his California statehood plan to work, he courted Mormon favor. When that proposal failed and Taylor adopted a plan of non-organization for the Cession lands, it also benefitted Taylor that he could then use Mormon sedition and immorality as a just cause to disprove any territorial petition from Deseret.

By early 1850, the Mormon relations to the US government had soured noticeably, but not because of Mormon efforts to eschew the administration's power. Rather, the Taylor experience proved that Mormons citizenship and their American identity was continually at the mercy of party politics. The Mormons had failed to win executive backing by volunteering a battalion of troops. They had failed to garner support when they had defied political sensibilities and voted for the Whig Party in Iowa and Zachary Taylor as President. And, they had failed to gain recognition of their citizenship even after defying the prevailing notions of the cabinet by supporting a statehood scheme that made Mormons a minority in California. Agreeing to Taylor's California proposal had gone directly against Mormon sensibilities prior to the arrival

of John Wilson in Salt Lake. But even this sacrifice proved to be meaningless. For Mormon leaders, it was becoming apparent that nothing could be done to cull executive favor.

Chapter 9: “Zachary Taylor is Dead and in Hell and I am Glad of It.”: Alienation and Conflict as the Result of the Organization of Utah Territory

In the wake of Zachary Taylor’s death, the Mormons came the closest they ever would to being regarded in similar terms of other American citizens. Taylor had become an impediment to Mormon statehood aspirations and had personally vowed to never sign a bill creating a territory or state for the Mormons in Utah. With Taylor’s death, another enigmatic Whig took up the presidency. Millard Fillmore’s attempts to settle the slavery question in the Cession territories would prove to be a boon for Mormon efforts to achieve self-government. However, the creation of Utah Territory would paradoxically light the fuse that would lead to the Utah War in 1857-58, the occupation of Utah during the Civil War, and the decades of US/Mormon strife that followed. The creation of Utah territory altered forever the relations between the United States and Mormons. Over the course of the late 1840’s and early 1850’s the Mormons had surprisingly become key to the internal security of the sprawling continental American empire. Though the nation’s claims now stretched from “sea to shining sea”, the latter sea could only be reached for most emigrants through the arduous and difficult transcontinental trek that led through hundreds of miles of territory dominated by the Indians and now, in the Great Basin, the Mormons.

No doubt Truman Smith and President Fillmore hoped that they had earned the votes of Mormons for the Whig Party in perpetuity through such a magnanimous action. Yet in a few short years, the Whig Party would be dead and in its place would rise a party that viewed Mormonism as a much more evil and malevolent force in the nation. Even before the formation of the Republican Party, however, the Mormons realized their fears of non-Mormons holding

office in the territory, federal agents who attempted to assert American sovereignty in place of the Mormon religion.

The formation of Utah Territory, rather than incorporating Mormons into the nation, set them on a collision course that would lead to war. The territorial organization would counter intuitively result in making the nation see Mormons as more foreign rather than more American. Territory organization brought Americans face to face with the difficult question of whether Mormons should be accepted as American citizens. Political and logistic realities came into direct conflict with the religious and cultural ideals the nation held. The initial clashes with territorial officials over these issues led to a permanent shift in public opinion against the Mormons.

Prior to the creation of Utah Territory, the federal government had only interacted with the Mormons sporadically and even then generally out of fear, especially during the Mexican War. Contrary to the beliefs of Mormon leaders, religious bigotry was not the primary motivation in actions taken, or especially not taken, in relation to the Church. The federal policy on Mormons originated from President Polk's foreign relations anxieties, not his Presbyterian upbringing. Mormons failed to recognize just how foreign their ethnic group was to Americans, choosing to believe that most ill-treatment derived from bigoted sectarianism. Instead, general apathy and intermittent fear-based responses characterized these early relations. The government interacted with the Mormons only when it saw its interests, either foreign or domestic, threatened. While foreign concerns heralded US policy toward Mormonism, national politics affected Mormon/US relations substantially in the years following the Mexican War. National political concerns, complicated by local party rivalries, motivated the positions taken by government officials, including the creation of Utah Territory. The substantiated revelation of

the Mormon practice of polygamy, resulting from the incorporation of Utah Territory, changed the government's interactions with Mormons dramatically. The goodwill of many reforming advocates and politicians evaporated. Anti-polygamy sentiment was so strong, that the Mormons became a nationally toxic political liability.

Utah Territory and the Compromise of 1850

Utah Territory's creation hinged upon the larger political realities facing the embattled Congress in 1850. Stephen Douglas had been steadily building support for his various compromise measures to diffuse the sectional feud. His plan included a settlement of the Texas-New Mexico boundary, a fugitive slave bill, the abolition of the slave trade in Washington D.C., the admission of California as state, and the organization of Utah and New Mexico into territories that would decide for themselves whether to permit slavery at some point prior to each statehood petition. Indispensable to Douglas' plan was the new commander-in-chief. Vice President Millard Fillmore was anxious to secure a Union-saving compromise upon his ascension.

Throughout the summer and early fall of 1850, Stephen Douglas had cajoled and promised, horse-traded and browbeat, until he secured the passage of the various bills that would make up the Compromise of 1850. The heated rhetoric over the territories had hung like an ever-darkening cloud over Washington and the nation in general. The crucial feature of the Compromise, the bill that was at the heart of the entire matter for it directly addressed the overarching question of slavery in the territories, was the bill that would create the Utah Territory. While the bill admitting California passed in the House with a robust margin, 150-56,

the bill establishing the Utah Territory nearly went down to defeat. By the thinnest of margins the bill mustered only 97 votes for and 86 against. Nearly all of the opposition came from Northern congressman. The portentous vote only succeeded because so many simply did not show up for the vote. They chose to absent themselves rather than put their name on record as supporting the bill which represented the death of the Wilmot Proviso that was so heartily championed by many in the North. As Michael Holt notes, 26 of the northern congressman who had conveniently absented themselves from the Utah vote had just hours earlier cast their vote in favor of California statehood.⁵⁷⁸ That they were now indisposed was no accident. The closeness of the vote was highlighted by the fact that free soil advocates had attempted at the last minute to amend the Utah Bill to include the contested Wilmot Proviso. The amendment failed on a vote of 69-78.⁵⁷⁹ The last vestiges of hope for the Wilmot Proviso died with the passage of the Utah Bill. When the time came for Utah to advance from territory to state, it would be “received into the Union, with or without slavery, as their constitution may prescribe at the time of her admission.”⁵⁸⁰

After the Utah bill passed a boisterous celebration erupted in the capital. Its passage virtually guaranteed that the other parts of the Compromise of 1850 would also become law. Congressmen and senators who had feared secession might result if the plan failed, drank away the night in toasting and reveling. Fireworks lit up the Washington sky and the admission of California and the creation of Utah were honored by a one hundred gun salute, as bands regaled the onlookers with patriotic music.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁸ Holt, 542.

⁵⁷⁹ “Good News from Washington”, *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, September 9, 1850.

⁵⁸⁰ “An Act to Establish a Territorial Government in Utah”, *Newport Daily News*, September 17, 1850.

⁵⁸¹ Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 188-189.

Of course, not everyone celebrated the passage of the various bills. Southern firebrands resented the resort to popular sovereignty in the territories and the threatened use of force against Texas if it attempted to martially resolve its border dispute with New Mexico. In the North thousands were appalled, not only at the tacit acceptance of slavery in the territories, but at the Fugitive Slave Act, which gave broad authority to Southern slave catchers to reclaim runaway slaves hiding in Northern states. One letter from Pennsylvania, signed “A Legion of Opinions”, excoriated Fillmore for having “forever disgraced this Republic by giving that most infamous Slave law your signature.” The writer bitterly referenced the fact that Fillmore, as a northern Whig, should never have acceded to the compromise, “Our happy city is all in confusion by your conduct you vile traitor!”⁵⁸² Upon hearing that Fillmore had given way and signed the hated Fugitive Slave Act, and recalling the way in which John Tyler had betrayed anti-slavery Whigs through the annexation of Texas, the Whig senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio exclaimed, “God save us from Whig Vice Presidents.”⁵⁸³ Anti-slavery editors were also attacking the creation of Utah and New Mexico territories as a part of a conspiracy of the “slave power” to annex more territories for the purpose of creating slave states, as well as dividing California into a free north and a slave south.⁵⁸⁴

Mormon Fears of Territorial Organization

For the Mormons’ part, they now found themselves in the position of having a territorial

⁵⁸² Anonymous letter to Milliard Fillmore, September 5, 1850, Millard Fillmore Papers, General Correspondence, LOC, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society and State University College at Oswego, New York.

⁵⁸³ Holt, 572. The irony of course is that Milliard Fillmore had been one of the Whigs in Congress opposed to the annexation of Texas when John Tyler had forced that treaty upon the legislature.

⁵⁸⁴ “The Slave Power”, *The Wisconsin Free Democrat*, July 9, 1851. The *Democrat* was reporting information it had received from the *National Era*.

government for which they had intermittently petitioned since 1847, but for which they had determined earlier in the year to withdraw their application. They greatly feared that a territorial government would result in dictatorial federal control, with non-Mormons and non-residents filling the federal offices created by the territorial organization. Such control by outsiders would negate to some degree the autonomy the Mormons had been searching for in their desert settlement. Zachary Taylor's communications to Almon Babbitt demonstrated to Mormons in Salt Lake that he was no different than any president that had preceded him. In fact, Taylor was worse because he seemed to have gained a personal animosity for the sect, rather than the callous indifference portrayed by Van Buren or Polk. The Mormons decided to prevent Taylor from exercising bigoted control over them by cancelling their territorial petition and holding out for a state government, and perhaps a friendly administration.

Before they learned of the formation of Utah Territory, Mormon leaders Daniel H. Wells, Parley P. Pratt, and Orson Spencer, sent a letter to Almon Babbitt and John Bernhisel who were representing the proposed state in Washington. Acting in their legislative offices as members of the provisional state assembly, they expressed their grave misgivings about any territorial government that would leave the Mormon people with leaders that were not selected from among them. The men instructed Babbitt and Bernhisel to "urge our claims for admission as a state." The Mormon leaders believed that Deseret's population and expansive boundaries should not be sufficient reasons to derail the organization of state. They trusted that the ideals of republicanism would prevail and they would be granted a government that allowed Mormons to elect their own leaders. Still, there was no expression of defiance to the Congress if it chose to organize the area as a territory rather than a state and give it a name, Utah, which the inhabitants did not want. The Mormon leaders explained that if the territory had already been created

“regardless of all our feelings in the matter then we have only to yield our quiet acquiesce.” The long lines of communication did not permit the writers to know that the Territory of Utah had in fact been created three days prior to their authorship of the letter.⁵⁸⁵

This letter represents the dualistic nature of the leadership of Deseret/Utah. Wells and Pratt were the religious superiors to Babbitt and Bernhisel within the Latter-day Saint church, yet they were also members of the legislative assembly. Though the letter made no reference to this religious hierarchy, the communiqué doubtless carried more weight than it would have if Babbitt and Bernhisel were not receiving it from men who were both their secular and ecclesiastical superiors at the same time.

This dual authority was destined to plague the Mormons and their territorial organization. The fact that high-ranking Church officers would also fill positions in the legislative assembly, the judiciary, and the local governments was something for which the territory and its people would be constantly harangued by critics. For the Mormons’ part, they generally did not see an issue with the political/religious power consolidation. As there were virtually no non-Mormons living in the newly-created territory, sheer mathematics dictated that the vast majority, if not all, elected office holders representing the people would themselves be Mormons. And, if the people were going to choose leaders, it made sense that they would choose politically the same men whom they had endorsed religiously. Their very membership in the Church and their willingness to endure extreme hardships to follow it on the difficult and deadly sojourn from Illinois to Utah, suggested a level of devotion and loyalty to the men who led them. Many other Mormons had not made the journey to the West. Some had followed other leaders such as Sidney Rigdon or William Smith who professed to be the rightful authorities following Joseph Smith’s death. A

⁵⁸⁵ Daniel H. Wells, Parley P. Pratt, and Orson Spencer to Almon Babbitt and John Bernhisel, September 10, 1850, Brigham Young Letterpress Copy Books (BYLCB), LDS Church Archives, CR 1234 1, Box 1.

sizable number had followed James Jesse Strang and eventually moved to Wisconsin and Beaver Island, Michigan. Still others simply choose to remain in their eastern settlements and established homes rather than take part in the long and tortuous journey to the unknown West. Those that had followed Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles generally had strong beliefs motivating such adherence.

The Mormons also had a long history of voting for those men who were members of their faith. This was epitomized by Joseph Smith's failed presidential bid. He had claimed to run precisely for the purpose of giving the Mormons someone for whom they could vote with a clear conscience. Smith had been the chief executive in Nauvoo, a mayor whose secular power was quite great given the liberal charter granted the city by the state of Illinois. The faithful Mormons living in the city by the thousands saw no issue with Smith being both the reigning political authority and, as they believed him to be, God's chosen prophet on the earth. Of course, the dissenters from within the faith and opponents from without saw such consolidation of power as perhaps the greatest threat that Smith posed. For evidence they could easily point to Smith's ordered destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, the paper printed by disaffected and excommunicated Mormons which the city council had deemed a libelous nuisance to be removed.

Fillmore's new presidency marked a dramatic departure from the policies of his predecessor. This was not only exhibited by the compromise bills designed to settle the territorial debate. Fillmore's actions toward the Mormons seemed to reveal an acceptance of the Mormons as a legitimate American ethnicity. However reluctantly, Fillmore accepted the Mormon version of republicanism as legitimate. While he had betrayed anti-slavery Whigs, he had won the hearts of the Mormons, who named their new territorial capital in his honor. And,

while John Bernhisel would lament that only some of the appointed federal officers were from among the ranks of those living in Utah and members of the Mormon Church, the highest office, that of territorial governor, went to Brigham Young, and the Senate confirmed his appointment.

Such an action by the Senate, confirming a sitting President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the federal governor of Utah, would be unthinkable even a decade later. Young's appointment as Governor of Utah Territory finally gave to Mormons the political power they believed they deserved. At last they would not be at the mercy of the capricious state legislatures or need to constantly curry favor with the governor of the state. The Mormons had long sought, dating back to Joseph Smith's presidential campaign, to merge ecclesiastical and political control into the hands of the same leaders.

With the creation of Utah Territory, the Mormons ceased to be a group operating outside of the bounds of US legislative authority. In a few short years they had gone from living illegally in Mexican territory, to living in limbo in unorganized United States territory, to having a duly designated territorial government. And while the boundaries of Utah Territory were barely a third of the expansive borders of the proposed State of Deseret, Brigham Young now held extensive political authority over hundreds of miles of United States territory. Like other Americans, the Mormons now had the unfettered ability to elect whomever they chose to their territorial legislature.

It seemed that that golden age of Mormon Americanism was about to dawn. Unfortunately for the Mormons, that same light also exposed Mormons to scrutiny that they had previously avoided. Mormon political cohesion went from a benign fact to a potentially dangerous problem for the federal government. Mormons were now in positions of political power and this allowed accusations of misrule and corruption to go far deeper than just the

ridicule of a benighted sect. Most importantly, the Mormon practice of polygamy, variously denied and hidden for years, could no longer be maintained as a secret. The polygamy controversy would permanently alter the relationship of Mormons to the US government and test the limits of their American identity.

By the time Bernhisel received Young's instructions to withdraw the territorial portion of the petition, the creation of Utah Territory was already accomplished. In granting this power to Young, Fillmore had made a practical choice. Nearly every inhabitant of the territory was a Mormon who feared a repetition of past tragedies were they to be governed by an outside appointee who could not be voted out. The Mormons had concluded that the territorial form government was worse in many ways than even the corrupt state governments of Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa. At least in each of these states the parties would occasionally pander to Mormon voters. A federally appointed governor, supported by federal judges, would have no local check to his power. The Mormons feared the extension of federal control under the guise of a territorial government because it could lead to the arbitrary and potentially dictatorial rule of federal appointees. Such men, usually career politicians and office seekers, would be vested with immense power over inhabitants to whom they did not have accountability. The Mormons would have no recourse by which to remove them if they proved, as had nearly every other politico they had encountered, to be unwilling to respect the wishes of the Mormons to practice their religion in peace and vote as they desired.

For their part, federal authorities often harbored similar fears. The Mormons held an apparently fanatical adherence to a sect which was thoroughly despised, accused of disloyalty, and audaciously claimed American Christianity to be corrupt and fallen. They had been abused and driven from the nation, and the fact that their grievances against the government held some

legitimacy made officials all the more suspicious, as President Polk demonstrated during the Mexican War. How could federal authority be exercised among a people that did not consider the United States government to be the highest sovereign power operative in their lives? In many cases, the fear of what Mormons might have the power to do caused officials to overreact to any actions and statements Mormons actually made. With Utah Territory, the federal government would be making its first attempt to control and assimilate the Mormons on its own terms.

Mormon and Non-Mormon Territorial Appointees

Though they had ultimately decided against it, Mormon reaction to territorial organization when it was no longer a theoretical possibility was cautiously optimistic. While most of the territorial appointments went to non-Mormons, the key position of territorial governor went to Brigham Young. Thomas Kane had long lobbied, to three separate presidents, that only a Mormon governor could be effective in the territory, and John Bernhisel had made similar arguments in his associations with Truman Smith and other Whig leaders. Kane's defense of the Mormons had reached national attention with his widely published 1850 speech to the Pennsylvania Historical Society in which he strenuously defended the Mormons, portraying them as innocent and misunderstood victims of the intolerance of society.

Milliard Fillmore had first offered the governorship to Thomas Kane, whose patronage of the Saints and political connections, made him a logical, if dangerous choice. Kane was technically a member of the Democratic Party, and thus would hopefully be more acceptable to Democrats than a Whig appointee. Kane was, however, well-known to be connected with David

Wilmot and the free soil movement, and his appointment would have been greeted with great opposition by Southerners notwithstanding his party affiliation. Still, Fillmore may have been hoping that Kane's appointment to a territory that was now under the controversial rule of popular sovereignty would placate the embittered Northerners who were deserting Fillmore and the Whigs by the thousands in the wake of the Compromise of 1850. Kane refused the offer, but urged Fillmore to appoint Brigham Young instead, personally vouching for his loyalty and credentials. Fillmore consented and Young received the appointment, but the president filled most of the remaining positions with non-Mormon, perennial office-seekers.⁵⁸⁶

Lemuel G. Brandebury, a Pennsylvanian, accepted the appointment to be the chief judge of the territory only after Fillmore's first selection to fill the position refused. Brandebury had wearied federal officials with his attempts to gain a patronage appointment. Failing to obtain a position in the General Land Office, he and his friends lobbied for him to find a place in the Treasury Department. Notwithstanding the fact that powerful Whigs and free soil advocates, such as the governor of Pennsylvania and the formidable Thaddeus Stevens, endorsed Brandebury, his petitions for office failed. When former congressman Joseph Buffington refused to accept Fillmore's initial offer, numerous letters were sent to Fillmore recommending Brandebury for the position. The most interesting support came from the opinionated Almon Babbitt, the outspoken Mormon delegate then in Washington D.C. Despite his persistent quest to achieve a federal appointment, taking a job located in the remote and foreign wilderness of Utah was undesirable enough that Brandebury actually decided to write Fillmore and withdraw his application on two occasions. Fillmore pushed the nomination nevertheless, and Brandebury reluctantly accepted the appointment after it had been ratified by the Senate. Thus, the

⁵⁸⁶ Michael J. Grow, "The Suffering Saints: Thomas L. Kane, Democratic Reform, and the Mormon Question in Antebellum America", *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, No. 4 (Winter 2009): 703.

Mormons, who had withdrawn their application for a territory but were granted one anyway, now had a territorial chief justice who had withdrawn his application for the position, but still received it. It was an inauspicious start to the process of federal appointments for Utah.

More profound for the impact on federal relations with the Mormons was the appointment of Alabaman Perry Brocchus to fill one of the associate justice positions for the territory. Brocchus, like Brandebury, had busily attempted to secure a patronage appointment from the Polk, Taylor, and Fillmore administrations, but to no avail. Although a Democrat, Brocchus had unsuccessfully lobbied Polk for a position in the supreme courts of Minnesota and Oregon territories when they were organized. But his pestering persistence eventually paid dividends, and Fillmore nominated him to serve as a justice for Utah Territory.⁵⁸⁷ One historian has characterized Brocchus as “unquestionably pompous and somewhat foolish” and as having an “infatuation with his own voice.”⁵⁸⁸ Even as Brocchus was travelling to Salt Lake he had designed to make a 4th of July speech to not only his traveling companions but to nearby trains of migrating Mormons and others bound for Utah Territory as well. Ossian Taylor, a non-Mormon who was heading West with some of his relatives that were members of the Church, left an account of Brocchus’ call to hear his speech. After they had ended their travels for the day they were greeted by a messenger instructing them to head forward another half a mile in order to be present when Judge Brocchus delivered his speech. They complied and the speech was delivered in a “statesmenlike” fashion.⁵⁸⁹ Again, in Fillmore’s difficult position, appointing a southern Democrat to the office would appear to balance out the appointment of a northerner with free soil connections. Political expediency and the ability to rid himself of the petty nuisance of

⁵⁸⁷ Thomas G. Alexander, “Carpetbaggers, Reprobates, and Liars: Federal Judges and the Utah War (1857-1858)”, *The Historian*, Vol. 70, 2 (May 2008): 215-216.

⁵⁸⁸ Norman F. Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict: 1850-1859* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 23.

⁵⁸⁹ Ossian Taylor, *Memorandum of a trip across the plains*, July 4, 1851, typescript, 24, MS 7567, LDS Church Archives.

patronage requests likely played a larger role in his appointments than did his assessment of the abilities of each man.

Fillmore appointed Broughton D. Harris, a lawyer and newspaper editor from Vermont, to be the territorial secretary. Harris was only twenty-seven years of age and had no political experience. Despite this, he had received the endorsement of Whig politician Jacob Collamer, Zachary Taylor's first Postmaster General who went on to serve in the Senate. Harris readily accepted the position as a great opportunity and with none of the reticence that characterized Brandebury's feelings.⁵⁹⁰

Rounding out the nominations with mostly non-Mormon men to serve as Indian agents and sub-agents, Fillmore did appoint another Mormon to serve as a territorial justice. Zerubbabel Snow, an Ohio Democrat and brother of Apostle Erastus Snow, was also added to the list of appointments. Though a Mormon, Zerubbabel was not so anxiously engaged in the "building of the Kingdom" as was his brother. Broughton Harris' wife Sarah, who with her husband traveled with the Snows across the plains, described the Snows adherence to Mormonism in this way: "They were Mormons from theory only, never having lived with the Mormons, but having read about them as an industrious, law-abiding people, and they were greatly attracted by the descriptions of the ideal haven of rest-the Promised Land-in the heart of the Rocky Mountains." Harris maintained that Zerubbabel and his wife Susan had heard rumors of polygamy but that Snow's brothers had paid him a visit after his appointment as a territorial judge and convinced him that there was no plural marriage in Utah and that he should accept the appointment.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁹⁰ Mary R. Cabot, *The Annals of Brattleboro* (Brattleboro, Vermont: E. L. Hildreth & Co., 1922), 685-686.

⁵⁹¹ Sarah Hollister Harris, *An Unwritten Chapter of Salt Lake, 1851- 1901* (New York: privately printed, 1901), 14.

Fillmore's motivation for Snow's appointment is even more unclear than many of the others. Snow had few endorsements and in fact Fillmore had been reproved for his choice by Secretary of the Interior Alexander H. H. Stuart.⁵⁹² Stuart stated in a matter of fact manner that Snow was "a man of bad character, no talent, and has always been a loco foco."⁵⁹³ The comment on Snow's character may have been a reference to his Mormonism, but obviously Stuart, a strong adherent to the spoils system, had political considerations in mind as well. Fillmore was already sending Democrat Perry Brocchus, and the appointment of Snow was a doubly dangerous proposition, being both a Mormon and a member of the opposition party. Stuart, like many other Whigs, saw Fillmore as too willing an accommodationist with his appointments and his policy. Curiously, Stuart did not mention the fact that Snow had a brother in the highest echelons of Mormon theocracy. It is likely that he was not aware of this fact, or he would have included the information in making his opposition to Fillmore. Fillmore probably saw Snow, despite the Secretary's objections, as an appointment from the electorally important Northwest. As though he laid out the appointments with both a directional and political compass, Fillmore had appointed one Southern Democrat, one Northwestern Democrat, one New England Whig, and one Northern Whig. All of these were in addition to Brigham Young, whose political allegiance was often more inscrutable than the doctrines espoused from the Mormon pulpit. He also likely reasoned that appointing one Mormon judge would further pacify the Mormons toward the other non-Mormon territorial appointees. Political and sectional considerations were

⁵⁹² Most of Taylor's cabinet was replaced when Fillmore took over the presidency. Thomas Ewing left his position to represent Ohio in the Senate. Fillmore's replacement, Thomas McKennan, resigned the position only 11 days after his appointment. The Virginian, Alexander Stuart, had only been serving in this position which nominally regulated the territories for less than a month when Fillmore's judicial appointments were made.

⁵⁹³ Alexander H. H. Stuart to Millard Fillmore, September 28, 1850, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, M873, Reel 82, National Archives.

paramount on Fillmore's mind at most times, and it would be naïve to think that his Utah appointments were any different.

Initial Reactions to Territorial Officials

The federal officials began arriving in Utah throughout the late summer of 1851. At first, they appeared to be greeted with feelings of amity. Most travelled in the company of high-ranking Mormon officials who served as their guides to Salt Lake. All experienced the long and arduous overland trek from the civilized East to the primitive Great Basin. This alone added to the feeling of remoteness each experienced. The appointees traveled through hundreds of miles of territory that were inhabited and controlled by Native Americans. However, some had a more difficult journey than others. Perry Brocchus experienced a particularly harrowing ordeal along with the other members of his party. Not long into their journey across Indian Territory, in present day Nebraska, Brocchus and his traveling companions were assailed by an enormous party of Pawnee Indians who took nearly one thousand dollars worth of "clothing, arms, and equipment, provisions, etc." The raiders forced the travelers to give even the clothes off of their back. The pretentious and proud Judge Brocchus, who had wasted no opportunities to convince his traveling companions of his intellect and abilities, was left standing in only his underwear. In fact, as the story was recorded, even his underwear was demanded of him.⁵⁹⁴

By the time the federal appointees arrived in Utah Territory, they certainly believed that they were on the equivalent of foreign soil. They had traveled a thousand miles through territory only inhabited by Indians that they deemed derisively and fearfully as "savages." When they arrived in Great Salt Lake City, instead of a refined and beautiful city, such as those they left in

⁵⁹⁴ MHC, July 11, 1851, Vol. 21, 54.

the East, they found a collection of dusty homes and fields. Worse than the lack of refinements or accoutrements were the “foreign” people inhabiting the territory, with their heretical religion that professed a form of Christianity and what seemed to be a fanatical devotion to a rigid hierarchical authority of Church leaders.

Thomas Kane had been hesitant about the non-Mormon appointees to Utah Territory. As the recognized gentile liaison with the group Kane had been “strongly pressed” by Fillmore and his associates to give his “personal authentication of the character and position of Messrs. Brandebury and Brocchus.” Kane balked. He felt he could not endorse the men, because he did not know their character, despite what their “crack admirers” maintained. He wrote Young, “I cannot speak with full confidence of persons not individually known to me; still less of the class of persons who are the customary applicants for Executive favor at Washington.” Kane was well aware that territorial appointees were often the very lowest class of office seekers, who owed their position to persistence and politics rather than having acquitted themselves capable and judicious. Still, he hoped the Mormons would for the sake of their own interest “receive them cordially.”⁵⁹⁵

Despite Kane’s reservations, the Mormons appeared quite willing to accept both the newly-created territory and the federal appointees assigned to administer it. As in the case with Taylor, the Mormons acquiesced to federal authority. Young no doubt relished the thought of having both the reigns of ecclesiastical and political power with his gubernatorial appointment, and there was no reason to expect that the non-Mormon appointees would be able to affect the society adversely with a Mormon legislature, Mormon judges, and a Mormon governor opposing them. Their connection with the United States was celebrated. John Bernhisel later reported to Congress that when news of the territorial organization had reached the Mormons it “was greeted

⁵⁹⁵ Thomas Kane to Brigham Young, April 7, 1851, TLK Papers.

by the firing of cannon and every other demonstration of enthusiastic joy.”⁵⁹⁶ Like other Americans, the Mormons celebrated the 4th of July in 1851 with great revelry, parades, speeches, swimming, and bands. Wilford Woodruff recorded in his diary that “It was as pleasant a fourth of July as I ever spent.”⁵⁹⁷

Bernhisel met with Brigham Young privately after his arrival, and corroborated the information Thomas Kane had sent in his letter, indicting Babbitt for his lack of diplomatic deportment in conversations with federal officials in the nation’s capital. Kane, Bernhisel, and Young believed that Babbitt’s conduct had been so detrimental that it had cost the Mormons more federal appointments of men who were adherents to the sect and residents of Utah. Young explained that if it were not for Babbitt’s “vain, headstrong, and foolish conduct in Washington, all the U.S. officers, with the exception of one or two of the judges, in all human probability, could have been secured of our own nomination. The Senators in Congress could not comprehend how we came to elect such an immoral man as Babbitt for our Delegate.”⁵⁹⁸

Though Babbitt had been a member of the Church since 1835, his devotion to the Church had been called into question by Joseph Smith. Through a purported divine revelation Mormonism’s founder maintained that the Lord had proclaimed: “And with my servant Almon Babbitt, there are many things with which I am not pleased; behold, he aspireth to establish his counsel instead of the counsel which I have ordained, even that of the Presidency of my Church; and he setteth up a golden calf for the worship of my people.”⁵⁹⁹ Nothing could have been more galling than for Young to read Kane’s similar report that Babbitt had sought to raise his estimation in the eyes

⁵⁹⁶ John Bernhisel to Millard Fillmore, “Utah: Message from the President of the United States transmitting Information in reference to the condition of affairs in the Territory of Utah”, *House Executive Document*, No. 25, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, (hereafter *HED* 25), 3.

⁵⁹⁷ Woodruff, July 4, 1851, Vol. 4, 44.

⁵⁹⁸ MHC, July 11, 1851, Vol. 21, 55.

⁵⁹⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 124:84.

of Washington politicians by trivializing his faith. He had “made light of his religion and intimated his connection with it to be of the slightest.”⁶⁰⁰

Young had chided Orson Hyde when the latter’s Whiggish political leanings in Iowa had led to conflict between Babbitt and himself, causing greater problems with anti-Mormons in the community at large. Young now awaited the opportunity to reprimand Babbitt for his indiscretions in Washington which appeared to have had a far more destructive impact. Babbitt’s lack of tact was even more of an affront to Young given the fact that Babbitt had, in an attempt to prevent political opposition to Deseret statehood over fears of theocracy, urged Brigham Young not to be a signatory to the constitution as the potential state’s governor.⁶⁰¹

Babbitt’s conduct in Washington would be the least of the Mormons’ concerns by the end of the summer of 1851. In just a few short months after their arrival in the territory, Justices Brandebury and Brocchus, as well as Secretary Harris and several Indian agents, left Utah Territory. They published claims far and wide of Mormon treachery, debauchery, immorality, and sedition.

That conflict would occur between federal appointees and the legislature of a territory was not only common, it was the rule. Territorial appointees were generally men of great ambition to gain fame and political glory, but had various attributes which prevented them from landing the cherry patronage jobs doled out to the various departments of government. Some, like Harris, were far too young and inexperienced to expect a prominent position in the East. Others, like Brocchus, were men of obvious ambition, but of small political capital and talents. They were low level politicians who sought the steady paycheck and social standing associated with political appointments. Many were willing to side with either party, send numerous letters,

⁶⁰⁰ Thomas Kane to Brigham Young, February 19, 1851, TLK Papers.

⁶⁰¹ “Remarks”, *Deseret News*, March 16, 1854.

and make dozens of calls upon the president in order achieve their hoped for appointment. As one historian has explained of the appointments to the territories generated by the spoils system, the men receiving appointment were usually, “hacks, defeated congressmen, or jobless relatives of congressmen and cabinet members... There were good, able federal officers who identified with a territory and made it their home, but they were the exception rather than the rule.” These men had no allegiance to the people over whom they served and often saw the appointment to a territorial job as a possible means to gaining wealth from the power their position granted them in a developing area.⁶⁰² Historian Earl Pomeroy completed a scathing study of the abilities and devotion of federal officials over the course of three decades, from 1861 to 1890. Though slightly later than the Mormon issues in 1851, all of the same factors of patronage and talent existed. Pomeroy quantified the lack of talent like this: “Of four hundred and twenty-four governors, secretaries, and judges of this period two hundred and eighty-eight did not fill out their four-year terms, and only sixty were recommissioned.”⁶⁰³ Amazingly, nearly 70% of appointed officials abandoned their appointments for one reason or another. It seems as though everyone wanted to acquire the territory and bask in the glory of the expanding westward empire, but no one really wanted to run it.

Given the propensity of most US administrators to find something wrong with their western appointments and quit for home, the probability was that several officials would have left Utah in disgust even if it had not been inhabited by a peculiar and hated religious sect. The fact that it was thusly inhabited made the likelihood of difficulties between the appointees and the people even higher. The territorial system itself, clumsy and condescending, manipulative

⁶⁰² Howard R. Lamar, *The Far Southwest: A Territorial History, 1846-1912* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 10.

⁶⁰³ Earl S. Pomeroy, “Carpet-baggers in the Territories 1861 to 1890”, *The Historian*, Vol. 2, 1 (December 1939), 53.

and arbitrary, was a broken system more often than not. It demonstrated the difficulty with which the United States could easily absorb new-captured lands. The territorial system only worked as well as it did because the United States could count on anxious thousands of anxious white settlers from the East moving to the new territories and thus Americanizing them by default, rather than relying on the awkward and dictatorial political system of federally appointed officers. When territories filled with Americans who embraced American republicanism as an ideal, territorial disputes rested on arguments over which party should rule, rather than whether the United States held legitimate authority. The process by which most territories were rapidly filled with American settlers belied the inadequacies and anti-democratic measures taken by US officials in those territories, like Utah, which had an existing population which did not share an equal assessment of either American sovereignty or established forms of republicanism. But the failure of the appointments to Utah Territory in the late summer of 1851 would garner national attention, a congressional investigation, and establish recurrent themes in federal relations with the Mormons throughout the remainder of the century. The failure of the Utah territorial system demonstrated the realities of American imperialism: the conquered would be forced to submit to the will of the conquerors, by force of arms if necessary.

Conflict Between Mormons and Federal Officials and the Denunciation of Zachary Taylor

The perceived slights began almost immediately from the time the first appointees began to arrive. Judge Brandebury was apparently chagrined that Governor Brigham Young did not immediately make time to meet with him upon his arrival to the territory. Young had been forced to cancel the first appointment he had with Brandebury, and when Brandebury came to

meet with Young for a second time, he was told the Governor was not in, a claim Brandebury obviously took for a lie. Writing later in defense of his flight from the territory, Brandebury claimed that it was well-known in the Mormon community that Young had deliberately avoided the first interview as a way of showing his disgust that non-Mormons would be appointed to rule over the Mormons.⁶⁰⁴

By Independence Day, only one of the appointed judges, Chief Justice Brandebury, had arrived in the territory. Secretary Broughton Harris and Judge Zerubbabel Snow arrived in Salt Lake on July 19, along with two Indian agents and the two Mormon delegates returning from Washington, Almon Babbitt and John Bernhisel. The Mormons greeted the federal officers and their families with cordiality, “bringing champagne, preserved fruits, and many other delicacies” in the company of a large welcoming body before the group had even reached Salt Lake.⁶⁰⁵

Though greeted with a positive reception, Harris soon was greatly at odds with Governor Young.

A few days after the party’s arrival, Young met with Harris, Snow, and Babbitt in his office. Already seething at Babbitt over his ultra-partisan conduct in Washington that had been verified by Thomas Kane and John Bernhisel, Babbitt did nothing during the course of this interview to assuage Young’s anger. Babbitt had been entrusted with \$20,000 of federal funds to build a state house for the new territory, and Young requested it from him. As Babbitt had no official position in the new territory, his retention of the money had no legal standing, especially since he had been instructed to deposit the money with the governor. However, Babbitt and Harris both countered that before any allocations could be made, the territory would have to have a census taken and another election of officials to the legislature would have to occur. Young had just ordered a census only a few months previously and objected. Taking yet another census

⁶⁰⁴ “Report of Messrs. Brandebury, Brocchus, and Harris to the President of the United States”, *HED* 25, 9-10.

⁶⁰⁵ Harris, 30.

would be both expensive and time consuming and further delay both the building of a state house and the seating of duly elected territorial representatives. But Harris argued that Young's earlier census was not valid as he, as territorial secretary, had not been present in the territory and because it had not been recorded upon the official government forms he brought with him. The ensuing elections were thus invalid because no official apportionment could have taken place without an official census.⁶⁰⁶ Such bureaucratic obduracy angered Young, as did Babbitt's willingness to both withhold federal funds and side with Harris in the argument. Harris was also refusing to turn over the funds entrusted to him for the expenditures of the legislature, another \$24,000, on the same grounds. Neither man budged even when confronted with the fact that Harris had arrived to his post much later than he should have, therefore necessitating a census without his presence.⁶⁰⁷

Young's view of how elections should be conducted created further tension with the federal authorities in the territory. Having experienced the ways in which outsiders could exploit political divisions and partisan divides, most recently in Iowa, Young sent out instructions in his office as President of the Church, instructing members in the upcoming election. He wrote:

I wish to say a word or two in relation to the approaching Election. Always remember to keep your politics in subjection; let there be no division in Israel; but come to the polls with the voice of one man, let there not be a single dissenting vote. If any of the brethren have preferences let their claims be canvassed prior to the Election day, in a convention; and then and there, agree upon whom you will run; and then all support the candidate that has been selected. have but one candidate for each office, when you come to the polls. and let perfect union characterize all your works, from this time henceforth and forever.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁶ MHC, July 23, 1851, Vol. 21, 56.

⁶⁰⁷ Norman F. Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict, 1850-1859* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 24.

⁶⁰⁸ Brigham Young to the Brethren, July 21, 1851, BYLCB, CR 1234 1, Box 1, LDS Church Archives, sic.

Young wanted to present a unified face in all electoral politics for several reasons. First, Young often warned members of the Church not to become caught up in their various political beliefs. The Church had experienced rough dealings from politicians hailing from each of the major parties, and Young instructed his followers to look to the Church as the great instructor of what was and was not important, not a political party or demagogue. He wanted to avoid the potential rifts, both personal and national, that might result from hotly contested elections. Given the proclivity of newsmen to print the slightest rumor about Mormonism, rancorous elections would no doubt have led to negative headlines highlighting Mormon division.

Young's political discretion was also a product of Thomas Kane's direct advice. Kane had implored the Mormons to "persevere in your political Neutrality." He realized that recent relations with the Whigs had induced Mormons to feel close to their cause but strongly advised against any partisanship on the part of the Mormons. This warning went beyond simply not committing to a particular party; Kane wanted the Mormons to avoid all contentious political questions, especially slavery. Kane admitted that his own anti-slavery feeling stirred him to ask the Mormons to come out against the dreaded practice, but he believed nothing but political problems could result from the Mormons adopting a definite free soil stance. If they took a stance on the issue Kane ominously warned, "I see that you can make yourselves enemies; you can hardly hope to gain permanent or useful friends." As long as the Mormons remained a political enigma, Kane reasoned that both parties would court the Mormons, hoping to curry their favor when Utah became a state. He assured Young that "an open union with one party or section, while it ensures the hostility of the opposition, by no means ensures" good treatment from the chosen party.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁹ Thomas Kane to Brigham Young and others, Feb 19, 1851, TLK Papers.

Assiduously following Kane's counsel, Young proposed this convention-style primary system to keep the debates about policies and candidates out of the public eye. He wanted Mormons to present a united and unanimous political front to the outside world. There would be a process of selection, and men would have their voices heard, but the resulting elections reeked of undemocratic process to critics who believed that Young was merely dictating to his mindless followers for whom their votes should be cast. And, there was at least some truth in this. Though he had not yet had his more infuriating meeting with Almon Babbitt, Young had already been convinced that Babbitt could not be retained as a territorial delegate, and that position should be held by the much more judicious, and loyal, John Bernhisel. He outlined his opinions in a letter circulated to members of the Church. He did not directly order his people to vote for Bernhisel in the letter, but he made his feelings on the matter plain in a postscript. He explained, "Our choice for Delegates to the House of Rep of U.S. is Dr. J. M. Bernhisel." After listing some men he would be "pleased" to have elected to the territorial legislature as well, Young concluded by writing, "These are our wishes in relation to the election, and you will do right if you comply with them." Written as it was only a few days before his tense meeting with Babbitt and Harris, it seems Young had not anticipated problems with either man, merely commenting that most of the territorial officers had now arrived and that he hoped the new judges would have very little to do because the Mormons should not be breaking the law.⁶¹⁰

Federal officers could never easily accept such meddling by Mormon Church officials in Utah's political arena. That a religious leader would instruct his followers for whom they should cast their ballots seemed anathema to American democracy. Americans saw no similar problems with political leaders instructing party followers how they should vote. However, Americans

⁶¹⁰ Brigham Young to the Brethren, July 21, 1851, BYLCB, CR 1234 1, Box 1, LDS Church Archives, sic.

eschewed religious influences in secular politics when they became overt or emanated from a hated minority sect such as Mormonism or Catholicism.

Young's power among the residents of Utah Territory, the oddity of their religious beliefs, and the remoteness of the post all contributed to the growing rift between some of the federal appointees and the Mormons. These American, yet peculiarly foreign, people practiced a religion which apparently incorporated plural marriage, a practice readily associated with the barbarism decried in Muslim countries. What seemed to be most disturbing to these men was the fact that the Mormons spared no derisive intonation when disparaging the wrongs they had suffered at the hands of the federal and state governments. Criticism of the federal government for doing nothing to aid the Mormons in Missouri or Illinois was not merely the collective public memory of the populace who had lived through the events, it was a point often referenced from the pulpit in rousing sermons that brought such ill-treatment to the remembrance of the hearers. This aspect of Mormon theology/political ideology was on open and boisterous display to the newly-arrived federal officeholders as the Mormons commemorated their arrival in the Salt Lake Valley on July 24, 1851.

While the Mormons had celebrated the 4th of July with vigor, their celebration of what would come to be called Pioneer Day was even more spectacular. Cannons were fired, songs were sung, speeches were given, and poems were delivered. Women and men drank various toasts to individuals and groups. The assembled celebrants heard one fiery speech from Daniel H. Wells, a man who had been a prominent defender of Mormonism from the Nauvoo period (though he was not baptized into the church until 1846). Wells would become an apostle and one of Brigham Young's counselors in 1856. He recounted the tragic history of the Mormon people and their suffering. He highlighted the failures of both state and federal governments to

protect the people from rampaging mob violence. And, in his most sweeping indictment, claimed that the federal government had deliberately ordered the Mormon Battalion into service in the Mexican War in order to facilitate the destruction of the hard-pressed people while they were in dire straits. It was Wells' turn to cast aspersions of uncivilized, barbarous conduct. The United States government had the "barbarity, under such peculiar circumstances, to make such a requirement" which "could have no other object in view than to finish, by utter extermination, the work which had so ruthlessly begun."⁶¹¹ Such a charge shocked the federal appointees to the point that they seemed to have gleaned little else from Wells' oration. Judge Brocchus referenced this specific aspect when making his later denunciation of the Saints to the federal authorities.⁶¹²

Though Perry Brocchus was not present at the celebration or for the speeches, he took it upon himself to recount the details of what had been spoken. No doubt Harris and Brandebury along with others had informed Brocchus of the words expressed in the speech. What was not recounted in their disparaging communication was the fact that Wells had not made indictments alone against the government. The Mormon position, while scathingly critical of some government officials and the lack of aid forthcoming from the federal government for the oppressed minority, was nearly always one of veneration of the institutions of the United States. The Mormons felt that they were being justly critical of the officers of government who had so marvelously failed them in the days of their penury and past tribulation. For Mormons the distinction was clear: Love the nation, hate the leaders in power positions which corrupted the country. Along with his criticism, Wells had also firmly stated the Mormons' position in relation to the United States. Wells had thundered:

⁶¹¹ *Deseret News*, August 19, 1851.

⁶¹² *HED* 25, 5.

Should we, for reasons such as these, wrap ourselves in the mantle of insulted rights, dignity, and pride, even though inclosing in our arms the innocent victims of treachery and blood-stained honor, and seek the overthrow of that government, of that country, of those institutions, whose only fault is the want of good and faithful administrators, who dare, in the hour of their country's peril, step forth and stem the torrent that threatens to engulf all in the widespread vortex of anarchy and ruin. Those who have indulged such sentiments concerning us, have not read Mormonism aright; for never, no never will we desert our country's cause; never will we be found arrayed by the side of her enemies, although she herself may cherish them in her own bosom. Although she may launch forth the thunderbolts of war, which may return and spend their fury upon her own head, never! no never! will we permit the weakness of human nature to triumph over our love of country.⁶¹³

Wells speech was typical of those given by Mormon leaders. They would not refrain from criticizing the past actions or inactions of the United States. Even in the interest of political expediency, there was little effort made by leading Mormons to censor their rhetoric. But Wells had also ended his berating speech with calls to American nationalism. Mormonism was alienated from the United States, but the cultural ties binding Mormons to the nation were never completely severed.

On top of Wells' nationalistic summation, the federal officers then in the territory had been seated upon the stand in positions of honor. Samuel W. Richards, the nephew of high-ranking apostle Willard Richards, directed a toast toward the recently arrived officers, which was well received. Judge Zerubbabel Snow had briefly responded to the sentiments expressed.⁶¹⁴ Still, in the midst of these fervent religionists, who obviously paid homage to their church ahead of any other institution, the 24th of July celebration was unnerving. The Mormons were certainly passionate. But the federal appointees feared that this passion could be, or already was, directed in ways that were dangerous to the nation and their own sense of power within the territory.

⁶¹³ *Deseret News*, August 19, 1851, sic.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*

With great portent to future events, Brigham Young also addressed the crowd. The actual content of Young's speech is difficult to fully discern as accounts differ widely. In any case, the accusation which Brocchus leveled (albeit with second-hand information as he was not present to hear it) was that Young had addressed Zachary Taylor's infidelity toward the Mormons and declared of the deceased executive, "Zachary Taylor is dead and in hell and I am glad of it." The unvarnished sentiments did not end there. The officials claimed that Young further declared that "any President of the United States who lifts his finger against this people will die an untimely death, and go to hell."⁶¹⁵ Such inflammatory rhetoric caused a sensation when the reports hit the Eastern presses. Young, however, denied that he had ever made such statements even years after the fact, though he admitted that he agreed with such sentiments.⁶¹⁶ Half a decade later Young reportedly did say something quite similar to the line for which the offended judges accused him, when recounting the machinations of President Polk while the Mormons were crossing the plains: "[Polk] is now weltering in hell with old Zachary Taylor, where the present administrators will soon be if they do not repent."⁶¹⁷ That his fellow apostles shared such beliefs is also evident as Heber C. Kimball declared in 1857, "God knew that Zachary Taylor would strike against us, and He sent him to hell."⁶¹⁸ In Kimball's view, God had brought about

⁶¹⁵ *HED* 25, 10.

⁶¹⁶ Brigham Young, "The Priesthood and Satan – The Constitution and Government of the United States – Rights and Policy of the Latter-Day Saints", February 18, 1855, *JD*, Vol. 2, 183.

⁶¹⁷ Brigham Young, September 13, 1857, *JD*, Vol. 5, 233.

⁶¹⁸ Heber C. Kimball, August 2, 1857, *JD*, Vol. 5, 133. It should be noted that the Mormon definition of "Hell" is quite different from the standard Protestant or Catholic representation. Mormon theology does not embrace an idea of a simple, dualistic state of Heaven for the saved and Hell for the damned. Instead, the spirits of all those who have not accepted and embraced what Mormons hold to be the restored gospel of Christ (through baptism into the LDS Church), go to a place often termed spirit prison where they temporarily suffer for their sins until the time of the resurrection. While in this state, the spirits of the righteous, who are in a state referred to as "Paradise", teach the gospel to those in spirit prison who are willing to hear it. Those spirits in prison can then choose to embrace the gospel, obtaining a baptism through the vicarious baptisms for the dead performed by living Mormons in their temples. In Mormon understanding, spirit prison will also contain many righteous and well meaning people who simply never embraced the gospel because they never had the opportunity in mortality to hear and accept it. Spirit prison is a place of suffering for those that are sinful, but a place of waiting to those righteous people who never had a chance to embrace the gospel in mortality. Eventually, all spirits will be resurrected and judged according to the

Taylor's untimely death because of the latter's opposition to the Mormons. While Young might not have actually spoken these exact words in deriding the deceased president, there is little doubt that he shared such sentiments about Taylor, making such an utterance all the more plausible.⁶¹⁹

Brocchus' Reaction to Inflammatory Mormon Statements

The statements of Wells and Young unleashed its own hell upon Mormons in the way of indignant American opinion. Upon his arrival into the territory, Brandebury and Harris recounted to Brocchus their ire at the feelings expressed toward the government. Brocchus decided that he would make it his patriotic duty to rectify the false notions that the Mormons held. As he explained later to Secretary of State Daniel Webster, "Astounded at the hostile and seditious form into which the public sentiment of the community was fast becoming moulded, under the false and unscrupulous teachings of a few designing, unprincipled and selfish men, I suggested to a number of my official associates the propriety of making an effort to correct the prevailing errors of opinion which were assuming a fearful reign over the minds of people –

knowledge they had available to them in mortality. These resurrected beings will almost universally be assigned to three separate states of glory, or heavens. Even those who were unrepentant and vile sinners (murderers, liars, and fornicators) while yet alive will eventually enter into one of the levels of heaven. The lowest of these heavens, the Telestial Kingdom, reserved for those most wicked in mortal life, is still a place of unspeakable glory. In this sense, the Mormon belief in Hell, as Young would have been using it, would be "the miserable, but temporary, state of disobedient spirits in the spirit world awaiting the resurrection", a term referencing "both a place, a part of the world of spirits where suffering and sorrow occur, and a state of mind associated with remorseful realization of one's own sins." See Daniel H. Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1992), 585. In Young's view, even Zachary Taylor would eventually be resurrected and achieve some level of glory in the lowest level of heaven at least.

⁶¹⁹ W. W. Phelps did not deny Young had said that Taylor was "in Hell" when he wrote Thomas Kane of the incident. Instead Phelps ridiculed the fact that a religious leader should not be able to pronounce such a damnation upon those they felt were sinners. Phelps used several examples of such religious condemnation coming from other Christian groups. W. W. Phelps to Thomas Kane, June 25, 1852, TLK Papers.

exciting them to feelings of enmity toward the General Government, and of intolerance towards us as its official representatives.”⁶²⁰

Broccus’ bravado apparently eclipsed his sense of judgment. Broccus sought the earliest opportunity to speak to the largest body of residents of the territory. In early September, the Mormons’ semi-annual religious conference convened in Salt Lake City. The conference was a religious meeting designed for Mormons to receive instructions from the apostles and their prophet Brigham Young. It was a four day event filled with hymns, preaching, testifying, and religious instruction. Of course, this event was well-attended as all active Mormons who could do so were expected to attend. Though his comments were purely secular and related to the government, Broccus sought Young’s permission to address the religious assembly. Ostensibly, the purpose he outlined for his remarks was to request that the people of Utah Territory supply a stone block for the Washington Monument then being constructed in Washington, D.C. All of the states and territories were asked to contribute a block so that the monument could be considered truly national.

Broccus took the stand of the Mormon religious convention and boldly delivered his intended address. By all accounts Broccus’ benign early remarks were filled with praise and gratitude toward the Mormons for his reception and the peaceful actions of the people, especially the care he had received when he was sick. He addressed rumors that he was angling to be elected as a delegate to represent the territory in Congress by saying that he held no such designs, but included the caveat that if he were elected to such an office he would be able to serve the

⁶²⁰ Perry Broccus to Daniel Webster, April 30, 1852 , *Letter of Judge Broccus, of Alabama, to the Public upon the Difficulties in the territory of Utah* (Washington: Lemuel Towers, 1852), 22, sic.

people very well in Washington.⁶²¹ Expanding upon his credentials for the office he explained that even though he was a Democrat, a Whig president had selected him for his position.⁶²² He argued that this proved “he was an honorable man, or he would not have been appointed to office in the Territory.”⁶²³ Given the Mormons’ experience with appointed federal officials, such evidence of self-vindication could hardly have carried less weight.

The rambling speech went on for two hours, slowly making its way to the entire point of the matter. In a spirit of nationalism, the Mormons had been asked to proffer a block of stone for the Washington Monument and Brocchus treated his hearers to a tedious recounting of Washington’s various exploits. This accomplished, the judge referenced Daniel H. Wells’ remarks on July 24 celebration and began to refute the statements Wells had made more than six weeks earlier. The government had no nefarious purposes behind the calling of the Mormon Battalion, as Wells had charged. Brocchus explained that President Polk had been outraged at the treatment the Mormons had received, though there are serious doubts as to how Brocchus came to this knowledge as a low level politico from Alabama that had not even held enough stature to gain even a minor appointment in Polk’s administration.

Brocchus continued along a route that was destined to raise the ire of his listeners. He explained, as many other federal officers had in years past, that the federal government had no power to interfere in the problems that the Mormons had encountered at the hands of mobs in Missouri and Illinois. Showing a profound lack of understanding for Mormon history and collective memory, though he had only moments ago claimed he was well-acquainted with it, Brocchus told the congregation that they should seek redress of their grievances from the states

⁶²¹ W. W. Phelps believed Brocchus’ failure to be elected as the territorial delegate was the primary motivation for his confrontation with the Mormon Church and Brigham Young. W. W. Phelps to Thomas Kane, June 25, 1852, TLK Papers.

⁶²² Woodruff, *Journal*, September 8, 1851, Vol. 4, 62.

⁶²³ MHC, September 7, 1851, Vol. 21, 63.

of Missouri and Illinois directly rather than charge the federal government with misconduct. Intimating that such anti-government sentiments reflected a treasonous attitude, Brocchus reportedly told the people that if they “could not offer a block in full fellowship with United States, it were better to leave it unquarried in the bosom of its native mountain.”⁶²⁴

Brocchus’ varying accounts of the incident were often contradictory. In explaining his actions to Secretary of State Daniel Webster he asserted that he had “attempted to vindicate the Government and the people of the United States from the unjust opinions and unfriendly sentiments which had been infused into their minds. This duty I endeavored to perform in a mild and inoffensive manner – having, through my whole speech, carefully refrained from any allusion whatever to their religion, or domestic customs.”⁶²⁵ Yet such claims to innocuous language that lacked reference to religion were belied by another version Brocchus gave which was designed for more public consumption. In this version, Brocchus declared that he had:

alluded boldly and feelingly to the sacrilegious remarks of Gov. Young towards the memory of the lamented Taylor. I defended, as well as my feeble powers would allow, the name and character of the departed hero from the unjust aspersions cast upon them, and remarked that, in the latter part of the assailant’s bitter exclamation that he “was glad Gen. Taylor was in hell” he did not exhibit a Christian spirit, and that if the author did not early repent of the cruel declaration, he would perform that task with keen remorse on his dying pillow.⁶²⁶

Brocchus had not only challenged the position of Brigham Young, he judged the Mormon leader for being unchristian and inferred that Young himself was the one destined for Hell’s inferno. The public reproof of Young, in a religious meeting Young was conducting no less, and the caustic assertions that the Mormons had wrongly blamed their problems on the federal

⁶²⁴ Ibid, 64.

⁶²⁵ Perry Brocchus to Daniel Webster, April 30, 1852, *Letter of Judge Brocchus, of Alabama, to the Public upon the Difficulties in the territory of Utah* (Washington: Lemuel Towers, 1852), 23.

⁶²⁶ “The Mormon Outrages in Salt Lake”, *New York Times*, November 21, 1851.

government would have been enough in and of themselves to make a debacle of Brocchus' speech. However, what Brocchus said next touched a nerve that was even more sensitive. He turned his attention to the Mormon women in the congregation, spoke to them directly, and "strongly recommended them to become virtuous." Wilford Woodruff recorded in a separate account in his diary that "In speaking to the Ladies said He hoped they would become a virtuous people."⁶²⁷ The obvious reason for his remark was to make a moral commentary on the polygamous marriages that Brocchus and the other federal officers had been shocked to find among the Mormons when each arrived in Utah Territory. Though Brocchus would later deny he had referenced the institution when discussing the virtue of Mormon women, one historian has explained that it was "a transparent reference to polygamy."⁶²⁸

Young's Response to the Brocchus Indictments

Although he patiently waited for Brocchus to conclude his diatribe before responding, Brigham Young took the stand immediately after the judge and, as one listener greatly understated, "replied warmly."⁶²⁹ Young's first expression was that Judge Brocchus was either "profoundly ignorant, or willfully wicked, one of the two." In the first place, Brocchus had made use of a religious meeting to make a political speech. The Mormons had graciously offered their pulpit to a "Gentile" because they believed Brocchus was going to make an announcement regarding the Washington Monument, not because they desired a lecture on their dearth of patriotism and immoral behaviors in a speech that had "a political bearing."⁶³⁰ Thus the insults

⁶²⁷ Woodruff, *Journal*, Vol. 4, 62.

⁶²⁸ Furniss, 25.

⁶²⁹ Hosea Stout Papers, September 8, 1851 Vol. 4, 300, LDS Church Archives.

⁶³⁰ MHC, September 7, 1851, Vol. 21, 64.

were even more galling. As far as Young was concerned, Brocchus had used false pretenses to gain the public platform and then used it in anything but a “mild and inoffensive manner.”

Young averred that it was “a matter of history, throughout the enlightened world, that the Government of the United States looked on the scenes of robbing, driving, and murdering of this people and said nothing about the matter, but by silence gave sanction to the lawless proceedings.” Young well knew that there were hundreds of men and women in the congregation who had watched family members die as a consequence of the forced march out of Illinois and into Iowa in the dead of winter and that many more died because of the often horrific conditions in Winter Quarters. To these Mormons, whether or not the federal government had supported them was not a matter of academic discussion. They had, like Wilford and Phoebe Woodruff, buried the tiny, lifeless bodies of small children and babies who had died from exposure and hardships incident to the removal of the Mormons. Whether the federal government could have constitutionally intervened was an abstract and legalistic debate, death was a cold, hard, and painful reality. Young declared that “hundreds of women and children have been laid in the tomb permanently in consequence” of the inaction of the government.⁶³¹

Young clarified the position of Mormons in relation to the United States as he expressed his personal feelings and mercilessly rebuked the impetuous Brocchus:

I love the government and constitution of the United States, but I do not love the damned rascals who administer the government. I know Zachary Taylor, he is dead and damned and I cannot help it. I am indignant at such corrupt fellows as Judge Brocchus coming here to lecture us on morality and virtue...It is an insult to this congregation to throw out such insinuations.⁶³²

Wilford Woodruff's record of Young's response mirrors the latter's account closely. Woodruff commented that Brocchus' remarks had been “Calculated to Stir the Blood of the

⁶³¹ Ibid, 65.

⁶³² Ibid.

people And offend them.” Young declared that if he had “supposed for a moment that He was going to throw out a Challenge upon the Stand in a religious Meeting & present such sentiments as He had He should not for a moment have given his consent to have had him spoken on that occasion.” Young claimed that the remarks of Brocchus had been so incendiary that there were those who “wished to take up the challenge given by the Judge But He would not permit of it for some might get their Hair pulled if not their throats cut And He would not Have it.” The reference to physical violence, and potential lynching of the judge by an angry mob, was galling and terrifying to Brocchus and his fellow officers. Young had asserted that it was only his good graces that prevented the enraged Mormons from physically taking issue with the judge’s accusations.⁶³³ Yet Brocchus may not have taken this comment as a serious threat against his person because he did not repeat it in his scathing denunciations of the events in his letter to Daniel Webster. In his account published by the *New York Times*, however, he related that at that particular moment Young could have “pointed his finger at me, and I should, in an instant, be a dead man.” He referenced the fear the officers had for their own safety when citing their reasons for leaving Utah and returning to the East. They had to flee from a “desperate and murderous set.”⁶³⁴

The effect of his public attack on Mormon patriotism and morality was to utterly alienate Perry Brocchus from the population of Utah Territory. Young attempted a reconciliation of sorts and wrote a letter to Brocchus later in the month inviting him to return to the public assembly on Sunday, September 21, and “explain, or apologize to the satisfaction of the ladies who heard his address, so the kindly feelings he professed could be reciprocated by them.” Young did not wish Brocchus to think that the meeting would be held simply to humiliate Brocchus. He added that if

⁶³³ Woodruff, *Journal*, Vol. 4, 62-63.

⁶³⁴ “The Mormon Outrages at Salt Lake”, *New York Daily Times*, November 11, 1851.

the judge would proffer an apology, Young would also in that public meeting “make every apology for my observation” during his rebuttal to Brocchus’ remarks. Further attempting to assuage the judge’s apprehension at such a meeting, Young promised that he would not allow anyone to respond to the judge’s apology.⁶³⁵ Apologies made all around for the intemperate comments made by each man, the leaders of the territory could heal their public rift and continue the business of governing.

This olive branch was entirely rejected by Brocchus. He responded to Young that he would not apologize because he not done or said anything wrong. All of the parts of his speech were chosen with “deliberation and care” in order to “vindicate the government.” In any case, Brocchus explained that he did not “design to insult or offer disrespect to anybody, particularly the ladies.” Thus, he believed no apology was needed and despite the way it was taken by the audience, it was a “speech undeserving of censure.”⁶³⁶

Further Problems and the Departure of the Federal Officials

By this time Harris, Brocchus, and Brandebury had already concluded to leave the territory. The youthful Harris was still sparring with Governor Young over the disbursement of the funds to pay the expenses of the legislature. Harris continued to aver that the legislature itself was an illegally constituted body because the proper census had not been performed under Harris’ direction and that Young had not certified his proclamation calling for elections with the official territorial seal and signature of Secretary Harris.⁶³⁷ Again, Harris remained unmoved by the fact that such signatures, seals, and oversights could not have been forthcoming because

⁶³⁵ MHC, September 19, 1851, Vol. 21, 68.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ HED 25, 25.

Harris was not then in the territory when these events took place, having arrived at his position months after he was expected. Each time a legislative act ordered him to begin disbursing the funds, he simply refused to recognize the legitimacy of the legislature. Harris apparently also told Young that he had been given private instructions from the Fillmore administration not to give out any funds unless he was personally satisfied with the legality of the process. He was not satisfied, and therefore paid no funds.⁶³⁸

Another factor was clearly at work on Harris as well. According to his wife, Sarah Harris, he had initially been quite hesitant to accept the position in distant Utah territory where rumors of polygamy swirled. Though treated to a grand ball and a sumptuous dinner honoring their arrival in the territory, Sarah had been revolted by the sight of Young's polygamous wives. Days later, when invited to tea at Heber C. Kimball's home, she was confronted with what was to her a horrifying scene, as she was introduced to several of Kimball's wives. She explained that when she returned home her "pent up feelings of disgust, found vent in a severe attack of hysterics, quite frightening to my young husband, who at once decided not to subject me to such a trying ordeal again." Sarah Harris no longer wanted to stay in Utah Territory.⁶³⁹ Her response to the culture shock of Mormon matrimonial practices overwhelmed the prestige of her husband's political appointment. In both of these disagreeable encounters with Mormon polygamy, there is no evidence of ill treatment or disrespect offered by her Mormon hosts. Her distress and horror was predicated upon her culturally conditioned reaction to marriage practices which seemed worse than prostitution in her mind. The coming decades would demonstrate that most Americans reacted similarly to polygamy.

⁶³⁸ *HED* 25, 30.

⁶³⁹ Harris, 36, 40.

For his part Lemuel Brandebury had never been enthusiastic about his appointment in the first place. Now amidst the conflict between Young and Harris and Brocchus and the community at large, he also concluded to return to his home in the East. W. W. Phelps also reported that Brandebury was disgusted with polygamy.⁶⁴⁰

Though Young tried to persuade them not to leave, and especially tried to prevent Harris from absconding with the \$24,000 of federal monies earmarked for the operation of the legislature, the three men left the territory September 28, 1851, never to return. In the short term, their departure left a gaping hole in the territorial administration. Judge Zerubbabel Snow was the lone remaining federal justice and Young filled the vacuum of the judicial vacancies by giving extensive power to local probate courts to settle criminal matters. On the national scale, however, the departure of the judges and the tales they related upon their return served to tilt the always precarious scales of public opinion even further against the Mormons.

The *New York Times* took notice of the reports Brocchus hurriedly circulated in newspapers and repeated the information it culled from *The St. Louis Republican* that “The Mormons are up to their old game – creating difficulties with those that try to be their friends and neighbors.” The federal officials exposed the “seditious sentiments” of Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders. Recounting Brocchus’ version of events the article declared, “all must begin to see that trouble springs from the Mormons, and not others.”⁶⁴¹

On the heels of these denunciations of Mormonism came the familiar rumors of Mormon rebellion. By March 1852, so many rumors had been published of Mormon secession from the nation that John Bernhisel was forced to formally print a denial and aver that “no such thing was ever thought of or contemplated as that described in the newspapers alluded to. It is either a

⁶⁴⁰ W. W. Phelps to Thomas Kane, June 25, 1852, TLK Papers.

⁶⁴¹ “Late from Utah Territory – Details of Governor Young’s Conduct – Escape of Harris with Government Money”, *New York Times*, November 14, 1851.

sheer fabrication or a misunderstanding growing out of the United States officers leaving the Territory last autumn.”⁶⁴²

Fillmore’s Measured Response

President Fillmore ordered a congressional investigation of the events, but in the end determined that it was the federal appointees that had failed in their duty notwithstanding the various claims they had made about Mormon disloyalty and recalcitrance. This decision was aided by the fact that Young immediately wrote to Fillmore and explained the situation to the President. Thomas Kane also remained a staunch supporter of the Mormons. The legislature of Utah Territory also wrote, exonerated Young, and declared that Utah was “desirous to dwell in peace and unfeigned loyalty to the constitution and general government of the United States.”⁶⁴³

Fillmore’s decision to allow the incident to pass without removing Young from the governorship represents the high point in the Americanization of Mormons. Instead of a reactionary response from the government, worried about possible sedition, Fillmore reacted by ordering a ponderous investigation of the allegations. He eventually ordered Secretary of State Daniel Webster to inform the delinquent officials that they could either return to their posts, or forfeit their positions and pay. Brocchus responded to this request by Webster with great incredulity.

Fillmore’s decision to allow the natural congressional process to investigate the dispute between Governor Young, and Judges Brocchus, Brandebury and Secretary Harris, placed

⁶⁴² “The Mormon Rebellion”, *The New York Times*, March 4, 1852. The paper carried an article one day earlier that reported the existence of the supposed Mormon rebellion, see “Utah and the ‘Saints’”, *The New York Times*, March 3, 1852.

⁶⁴³ *HED* 25.

Young on an even plain with these men. The Mormons in Utah, even with the seriousness of the accusations made by the runaway officials, were treated to the same due process as would have been employed in any other territory governed by the United States. Whether Fillmore did this to continue to curry political favor with the Mormons or because he recognized the practicality involved in supporting Young over the absconded appointees in a territory almost universally populated by Mormons, the end result was an absolute victory for Mormon claims of Americanism. Fillmore even acted upon Little's recommendation that apostle Orson Hyde be nominated to replace Brocchus as Associate Justice.

The Polygamy Controversy

However, at the same time that the Brocchus affair demonstrated the amalgamation of the Mormons in Utah to the United States government, it also produced the cultural backlash against Mormonism that would endure long after the Civil War. Mormon polygamy had been rumored and reported since the days of Joseph Smith. In 1842, John C. Bennett, an excommunicated Mormon that had once held high standing as a counselor to Smith and as the mayor of Nauvoo, had accused Smith of seducing "not only hundreds of single and married females, but more than the great Solomon." Bennett outlined Smith's practice of having "clandestine" wives in newspapers and speeches whose lurid tales captured the public's ready attention. These accusations of polygamy and Smith's acclaimed position as a living prophet brought the ready comparisons between Mormonism and Islam, as Smith was denigrated as the "Mormon

Mahomet.”⁶⁴⁴ Other accusations of “spiritual wifery”, most notably those made by other dissenters in the *Nauvoo Expositor*, also made their way rapidly into the mainstream news.

Still, despite these allegations, there seems to have been great ambivalence as to whether or not the Mormons actually practiced plural marriage. The claims, made as they were by embittered former members, had little staying power on the national level in the face of Mormon denials of the practice. The casual observer of Mormon history might erroneously think that polygamy was the controversy that drove all of the state and governmental persecutions of the sect. As explosive as the issue would eventually become, there is little evidence that this accusation affected either state policy in Illinois and Missouri or federal policy from 1844-1851. Instead, as has been demonstrated, concerns about Mormon loyalty and political disputes were the primary cause of Mormon alienation. Heretical Mormon doctrines made the process of scapegoating the sect easier, but polygamy was not one of the standard claims against the sect, even in the explosive Iowa political world. Susan Hollister Harris, Broughton’s wife, was typical in her shocked reaction that Mormons in Utah practiced polygamy, notwithstanding the sporadic news accounts from Mormon dissenters years earlier.

The fleeing officials specifically denounced and exposed the practice of polygamy in their report to the president of the United States, citing it as a reason why federal intervention against the Mormon Church was necessary:

We deem it our duty to state, in this official communication, that polygamy, or ‘plurality of wives, is openly avowed and practiced in the Territory, under the sanction and in obedience to the direct commands of the church.’ So universal is this practice, that very few if any leading men in that community can be found who have not more than one wife each. The prominent men in the church, whose example in all things it is the ambition of the more humble to imitate, have each many wives; some of them, we were credibly informed and believe, as many as

⁶⁴⁴ “Important from the Far West – Beautiful Explosion among the Mormons – Singular Disclosures all round – Rapid Progress of Joe Smith, the Mormon Mahomet”, *New York Herald*, July 21, 1842; “Anti-Mormon Lecture – The Secret Wive System at Nauvoo, as described by Gen. J. C. Bennett”, *New York Herald*, September 4, 1842.

twenty or thirty, and Brigham Young, the governor, even a greater number. Only a few days before we left the Territory, the governor was seen riding through the streets of the city in an omnibus, with a large company of his wives, more than two-thirds of whom had infants in their arms. It is not uncommon to find two or more sisters married to the same man; and in once instance, at least, a mother and her two daughters are among the wives of a leading member of the church. This practice, regarded and punished as a high and revolting crime in all well civilized countries, would, of course, never be made a statutory offence by a Mormon legislature; and if a crime at common law, the courts would be powerless to correct the evil with Mormon juries.⁶⁴⁵

Within months of the publication of the accusations made by the departed officials, public and political sentiment visibly shifted against the Mormons. Though Fillmore had stood by the Mormons, other Whigs sharply denounced the Mormons. In the House, John Bernhisel's election as Delegate came under intense scrutiny, with Congressman George Briggs of New York demanding an investigation of alleged fraud in the election. During the debate, an Ohio Democrat that would soon bolt to the Republican Party, David Kellogg Cartter, expressed his view that the real issue surrounding Bernhisel was the question of polygamy. He demanded to know "whether polygamy is not tolerated and justified in this Territory." More important than spurious accusations circulating that Bernhisel had bribed Young in order to get his appointment, was Cartter's greater fear "whether the delegate is not liable to the suspicion, current every where, that he is a polygamist." If he found that Bernhisel was engaged in plural marriage he vowed that he would "not consent to sit here with any man who openly defies the laws of his country." Cartter indignantly harangued his colleagues that "they could not close their eyes" to the polygamy accusation that had been made by the runaway Utah officials and should vote to deny Bernhisel his seat.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁵ "Report of Messrs. Brandebury, Brocchus, and Harris to the President of the United States", *HED* 25, 19.

⁶⁴⁶ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 22, 1852.

This discussion caught the eye of the editor of the *North American and United States Gazette*, who outlined the constitutional problems surrounding Mormon polygamy. Because the Constitution did not prohibit polygamy, what was to prevent states from making plural marriage legal? Utah was only a territory at present but eventually it would “be a State; and then, we may ask, what is there in the constitution, or authority of Congress, to prevent her legalizing polygamy, if she thinks fit, and persisting in it, the shame of the age and the country, the reproach of civilization and freedom.” The editor urged the United States to act swiftly to legislate against polygamy while Utah was still a territory. It certainly was the right of the United States to “check immorality and licentiousness wherever it can be done; and future evils, of untold magnitude, depend upon the present decision.” The writer opined that the great mistake was making Utah a territory in the first place. The best solution was to “stimulate the emigration of persons – multitudes of persons – not Mormons, until the latter are left, as they ought to be, a minority among the inhabitants of the future mountain state.”⁶⁴⁷ Thus began a series of legislative attempts to tie the various homesteading bills proffered in the Congress to the suppression of polygamy. If the Mormons could not be made to change their custom or respect American authority, they could be rendered a minority once again among a sea of true Christian Americans.

This writer also ably demonstrated that the issue with Mormonism was shifting away from a political/legal question which centered on loyalty to one that centered on morality. In fact, the two issues informed one another as an immoral American could not be a loyal American. Utah was an important location, central to the American expansion in the West, and therefore it needed to be Americanized, subjugated, and brought up to the proper standards of American morality. The author concluded his remarks: “Considering the reputed seditious

⁶⁴⁷ “The Constitution and the Moral Law”, *North American and United States Gazette*, January 24, 1852.

inclination of the Mormons, and the important geographical relations of their Territory, there is an obvious political necessity in the scheme; and this is prodigiously augmented by the moral and religious arguments with which the subject is beginning to be associated.” The Mormon issue had become multi-faceted with the announcement of polygamy. While their loyalty had already been called into question for years and their religion feared on the basis that it produced adherents opposed to republicanism, now Mormonism added to the mix a sexual practice that was deemed unacceptable by nearly all Americans.

That polygamy was anathema to Americanism was demonstrated by various petitions and articles. Senator William Crosby Dawson presented a petition in March 1852 from residents of his state of Georgia “remonstrating against the admission of Utah as a State into the Union, on the ground that the Mormon religion – particularly that feature recognizing polygamy – is anti-Republican.”⁶⁴⁸ The *National Era* decried the lack of action on the “allegations of rebellion and polygamy” in Utah Territory, linking the failure to act as part of the proof of the moral corruption of the “infernal Element of Evil, the Slave Power.”⁶⁴⁹ According to the reports of one traveler, Mormonism was quickly devolving and had moved from polygamy to legalizing incest as well. Such excesses were “crimes among Christian communities.”⁶⁵⁰

Even the stalwart supporter of the Mormons, Thomas Kane, was greatly troubled by the announcement of Mormon polygamy. He wrote Brigham Young that learning about the Mormon practice “gave me great pain.” Though not wanting to offend the Mormon leader, he explained that he felt duty bound to tell him “distinctly my opinion that you do err.”⁶⁵¹ Kane did

⁶⁴⁸ *The New York Times*, April 1, 1852.

⁶⁴⁹ *The National Era*, reprinted as “Scoundrelism in Our Territories”, *The Liberator*, March 19, 1852.

⁶⁵⁰ “Interesting Salt Lake Letter”, *North American and United States Gazette*, August 5, 1852.

⁶⁵¹ Thomas Kane to Brigham Young, October 17, 1852, TLK Papers.

not abandon the Mormons and continued to work toward the end of swaying public and political opinion, but the revelation of polygamy turned this already losing battle into a full-fledged rout.

The outrage over polygamy immediately began to impact the relations between the Mormons and the United States. President Fillmore had sided with the Mormons even with all of the controversy swirling in the press and the remonstrances and petitions circulating in Congress. Rather than punishing the alleged immorality and treason, Fillmore rewarded the Mormons by nominating Orson Hyde in May 1852 to fill Brocchus' place as an associate justice for Utah Territory. Unlike some of his initial appointments to the territory, Hyde was known to be solidly Whig, through his well-publicized involvement in the Iowa voting controversy. He was also the editor of the *Frontier Guardian* newspaper which regularly endorsed Whig candidates and policies. But while the Congress had acquiesced to Mormons being appointed to serve in Utah two years earlier, the combination of the accusations of disloyalty and the revelation of Mormon polygamy buckled the tenuous political support the Mormons had briefly enjoyed. Bernhisel reported to Young that as a result of the fallout from the judicial scandal "Utah did not stand so favorable in the eyes of the nation as before the explosion."⁶⁵²

By August 23, Congressional opposition had thwarted Hyde's confirmation. Bernhisel told Young that the Hyde was not confirmed because he lacked legal experience.⁶⁵³ But eastern papers probably carried the more accurate appraisal of his failed confirmation. More important than being a legal novice, it was "proved that the Elder preached and practiced polygamy" and therefore was rejected by the Congress. His nomination was withdrawn by Fillmore rather than

⁶⁵² MHC, July 9, 1852, Vol. 23, 62.

⁶⁵³ MHC, September 14, 1852, Vol. 22, 80.

having it go down to an embarrassing defeat.⁶⁵⁴ As one paper related Hyde's disqualification, it was because he was "a Mormon and a polygamist."⁶⁵⁵

Hyde's nomination encapsulated the shifting political paradigm which the Mormons now faced. For years they had struggled to gain support from the executive branch. Fillmore's rejection of the accusations of Brocchus and Brandebury and his willingness to appoint Hyde, despite the firestorm of controversy, represented the high point of Mormon/federal relations. But popular animus toward Mormonism affected legislators from both parties. By August, Fillmore's political power was plummeting. He had become the most crippled of lame ducks by failing to receive the nomination of his own party. Instead, Winfield Scott received the Whig nomination and Fillmore was abandoned by the party. The crushing electoral defeat suffered by Scott in the fall election demonstrated that the Whig Party could not long survive in American politics.

The Mormons naively believed that a simple explanation of the doctrine of polygamy would convince easterners of the validity of the practice. Apostle Orson Pratt was dispatched to Washington D.C. and tasked with persuading the American public that Mormon polygamy was not only not the unrestrained sexual license many portrayed, but in fact an orthodox Christian doctrine which had its roots in the Bible. The first issue of *The Seer* published Joseph Smith's 1843 revelation concerning plural marriage. Pratt attempted to reason with Americans that their aversion to polygamy was a culturally relative one. Citing the many other world cultures which engaged in and accepted the practice, he concluded that "it was practiced by the most powerful nations of Asia and Africa, and by numerous nations inhabiting the islands of the sea, and by the Aboriginal nations of the great Western hemisphere." In fact, the vast majority of world cultures

⁶⁵⁴ "Washington", *The New York Times*, August 26, 1852.

⁶⁵⁵ *The Boston Daily Atlas*, August 25, 1852.

accepted the practice as legitimate while “the one wife system is confined principally to a few small nations, inhabiting Europe and to those who are of European origin, inhabiting America.”⁶⁵⁶ Pratt’s attempt to cast the aversion to polygamy as a culturally relative one was doomed from the start. Citing the cultures of Africa and Asia as though Americans would find them legitimate, much less the culture of Native Americans, did not account for the ways in which Americans viewed these other cultures as barbaric and racially inferior. In fact, opponents of polygamy decried the practice precisely because it was an uncivilized indication of heathen depravity. The comparison to Native Americans was readily made, as one *New York Times* article referred to the Mormons as a new “tribe and sect” which was seeking to “plant their absurd faith and begin a new nation.”⁶⁵⁷

Pratt’s publication, *The Seer*, even included the entirety of a polygamous marriage ceremony to highlight the fact that the primary wife had to consent to the plural marriage arrangement in order for the marriage to take place. Such explanations did not convince newspapers editors like Democrat William Tappan Thompson of the Savannah *Daily Morning News* who wrote that “the manner in which this libidinous beastly practice is described and defended cannot fail to shock and disgust the reader.”⁶⁵⁸ He was not alone in his condemnation and the anger over polygamy bridged sectional boundaries. James Gordon Bennett, the editor of the New York Herald, excoriated Pratt’s publication and the Mormon practice of polygamy, linking Mormon degradations to the potential for civil war in the nation:

Such are the abominations of Mormonism, through the confessions of their delegated apostle to Washington. We trust that the government will not much longer tolerate these things. They are in open defiance of the laws and social institutions of the whole country – they are an outrage upon common decency – a monstrous outrage upon woman’s rights to a husband of her own – and ought to

⁶⁵⁶ *The Seer*, January 1, 1853.

⁶⁵⁷ “The Mormons”, *The New York Times*, March 10, 1853.

⁶⁵⁸ “Mormon Matrimony”, *Daily Morning News*, January 28, 1853.

be abolished before they lead to the disasters of civil war. We trust that General Pierce will not overlook the Mormons. They must conform to the laws. It is time they were taken in hand.⁶⁵⁹

The uproar over polygamy was such that even politicians who had supported Mormon statehood for Deseret found themselves backpedaling quickly. Lewis Cass, who had initially supported a state government over a territorial organization, castigated polygamy in the starkest terms. In a speech in Congress Cass accused the Mormons of “seeking to pervert the Scriptures to the purposes of their own libidinous passions by destroying that safeguards of religious and social order, the institution of marriage, and by leading lives of unrestricted intercourse they are making proselytes to a miserable imposture, unworthy of our nature, by the temptations of unbridled lust.”⁶⁶⁰

One Whig newspaper editor declared that anti-Mormon federal policy under the Taylor administration had been good policy. He told his readers that it was “one of the merits of General Taylor’s administration...that it foresaw the evils, political and moral, likely to grow out of the planting of a Mormon power in the heart of the Rocky Mountains.” Taylor allegedly had planned to reduce Utah to a dependency of the proposed state of New Mexico. The Mormon settlements in the Great Basin would function with no more power than counties which would have “baffled the designs of the professors of polygamy.” He opined that all of the present Mormon difficulties resulted from Congress laying aside Taylor’s plans upon his death in the interest of passing the compromise bills. Granting a territorial organization for the Mormons was for this deluded sect “such a stroke of fortune as they never could have dreamed of hoping

⁶⁵⁹ “The Polygamy of the Mormons”, *The Weekly Herald*, February 5, 1853.

⁶⁶⁰ “Mr. Cass and the Mormons”. *North American and United States Gazette*, January 5, 1853.

for.” But for the nation “such a stroke of policy as was never before committed by a government thoughtful of state necessities and the interests of religion and morals.”⁶⁶¹

The creation of Utah Territory had indeed forced the issue of the limits of Mormon American identity. The clashes between federal officers and Mormon ecclesiastical leaders heightened the alienation of Mormons from the American government, the political parties, and the population. Prior to the creation of the territory, Mormons had been able to trade influence for partisan support. The very creation of Utah Territory represented a success of the Mormons’ ambivalent attitude toward the parties in general and the slavery issue in particular.

Paradoxically, the larger compromise which led to the establishment of Utah Territory and incorporated Mormons directly into the American government, with Brigham Young as a federal governor of a conquered land, had the effect of estranging Mormons from other Americans more quickly and deeply than all of the preceding decade of tenuous Mormon relations.

Having finally secured some measure of self-government, the difficulties engendered by such a territorial construction proved to be detrimental to Mormon attempts to persuade the United States government and its citizens that Latter-day Saints were in fact loyal, committed citizens of the nation. The revelation of Mormon religious and political practices which came to light during the process of territorial organization served to forever isolate Mormons from the United States. Four decades later, politicians, moralists, average citizens, and presidents would still be attempting to deal with the “Mormon Problem”, long after James K. Polk’s calculated diplomacy with the Mormons set in motion US/Mormon relations, and long after Brigham Young’s alleged assignment of Zachary Taylor to Hell. American attempts to force the Mormons into conformity had their beginnings in the early days of the Mexican War.

⁶⁶¹ “Mr. Cass and the Mormons”. *North American and United States Gazette*, January 5, 1853.

Chapter 10: “The Twin Relics of Barbarism”: Conclusion

Mormons were never able to fully integrate themselves and their faith into the tapestry of American identity. At times they came close, especially when conniving politicians sought to use the Mormons to increase their personal political power or that of their party. The backdrop of sectional tensions over slavery nearly brought an early incorporation of Utah into the union of states. However, each of these opportunities for amalgamation were fleeting. The Mormons remained an alienated group, eyed with disgust and trepidation.

The primary reason for this alienation was the way in which Americans and their elected leaders viewed Mormons as a distinct and foreign group. Mormonisms’ unique religious practices and communitarian gathering, couched as it was in fiery millenary rhetoric which condemned others for their sinfulness, provided ready fodder for Americans. As early as 1834, some American newspapers were comparing the Mormon phenomenon to the rise of an equally foreign and theocratic religion, Islam.⁶⁶² By 1842, James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* had labeled Joseph Smith with the appellation “the Mormon Mahomet.”⁶⁶³ Following the revelation of the doctrine of plural marriage, such foreign allusions only gained greater strength. Just like the Islamic Prophet, Mormonism’s founder had been willing to “sacrifice the social happiness of the female sex...by tolerating polygamy.”⁶⁶⁴ Mormonism, like prevailing American views of Islam, seemed more foreign than domestic, more enigmatic than discernable, and more inscrutable and dangerous than understandable and benign.

⁶⁶²“Some Thoughts”, *Vermont Chronicle*, April 18, 1834.

⁶⁶³ “Important from the Far West – Beautiful Explosion among the Mormons – Singular Disclosures all round – Rapid Progress of Joe Smith, the Mormon Mahomet”, *New York Herald*, July 21, 1842.

⁶⁶⁴ “The Mormons – The Mahometans of the Nineteenth Century” *New York Herald*, reprinted in the *Deseret News*, November 27, 1852.

While many Americans had come to hold negative views of Mormonism during the 1830's and early 1840's, the United States did not immediately formulate a Mormon policy which regarded the sect as a foreign entity. Instead, it treated Mormonism and the resulting violence surrounding the sect as a domestic issue. The federal government's refusal to intervene in the seemingly endless conflicts between Mormons, their Christian neighbors, and state and local governments, played a role in the growing alienation of Mormons from the United States. Nevertheless, public animosity directed at Mormonism was not alone enough to motivate federal intervention, nor were Mormon pleas to the executive branch for intercession.

Joseph Smith not only considered himself a loyal citizen of the nation, but took positions which advocated and offered to advance the expansion of American imperial control in North America. His presidential candidacy highlighted grievances Mormons had with American politicians whom they considered corrupt and bigoted. But it also illustrated the level to which American culture was ingrained in Mormonism. The Mormons had long petitioned the federal government to intervene in their various state disputes. When these petitions failed they resorted to using their electoral clout in an attempt to curry favor with one party or another. When the threat of Mormon suffrage proved insufficient to secure promises of support, Smith declared his own candidacy. Even after the shock of Smith's death and the expulsion of Mormons from Nauvoo, Mormon leaders like Young pleaded with President James Polk to intervene and prevent their banishment to Mexico. The persistence of these efforts despite their obvious futility demonstrates that these Mormons had a deep-seated faith in the United States government. This faith very often turned to disappointment, anger, frustration, and condemnation. Mormons clung to a belief in the power of the federal government to intervene in civil affairs that was beyond the scope of the government of the time. Mormon leaders quoted

from the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and invoked the memory of Washington and Jefferson in their incredulity that the nation seemed unwilling to react to what they considered to be grievous violations of the spirit and letter of American liberty.

Paradoxically, Mormons spent two decades seeking the federal government's notice, only to spend a half century seeking to limit federal intrusion into their political and religious system in Utah.

Mormon/US relations had their inception during the unstable international climate which surrounded the Mexican War. The latent view of Mormon foreignness was amplified by demographic and political realities the Mormon migration presented at the outset of the war. President Polk only formulated a Mormon policy out of his fears over Mormon foreignness and their ability to intervene substantially in the Mexican War and perhaps curtail his ambitious plan for fulfilling the nation's Manifest Destiny. His reaction was based upon fear. His subsequent pattern was to promise the Mormons federal friendship to placate them, but not deliver on any such pledges. The Mormon Battalion was not called because Polk needed more men to invade California, but as a means of preventing a Mormon rebellion against United States authority, which might have induced British intervention.

Polk's successors followed a similar pattern, treating the Mormons as foreign elements rather than as reliable citizens. Only Zachary Taylor's fear of sectional civil war motivated his attempt to incorporate the Mormons into the United States on equal terms. And even this fear, in the face of other political difficulties, gave way to Taylor's animosity for the sect.

The public outrage over Mormon polygamy proved to be an insurmountable wall blocking the re-Americanization of Mormons. Ironically, at the very time in which the government leaders, like Millard Fillmore and Franklin Pierce, had for practical reasons adopted

a fairly benign policy toward the Mormons in Utah, the growing condemnation of the Mormon practice of polygamy destroyed any vestiges of goodwill remaining among most Americans, making pro Mormon policies politically toxic. The Mormons had at one time counted abolitionists and moralists among their staunch defenders. Liberty Party presidential candidate James G. Birney had criticized the federal government for its failure to act after the Mormons were “driven from their homes, despoiled of their property, hunted down like wild beasts, many of the men killed, more of them maimed and wounded, the women subjected to the most brutal violations, the remnant, forlorn and destitute, expelled from the State.”⁶⁶⁵ Reform-minded men and women had seen the Mormons as a persecuted minority group that was suffering because of the bigotry of the world in which they lived. Often religionists had taken up the cause for pity’s sake. Following the revelation and defense of polygamy, Mormons could no longer count on support from idealistic reformers. In fact, Mormons moved from being perceived as the persecuted group in need of aid to the immoral fanatics who were perverting standards of sexual and marital decency. No longer the examples of the violation of civil rights, Mormons were now perceived as themselves the violators.

All of this occurred at the same time that the Whig Party was rapidly heading to its precipitous extinction. Mormons had benefitted from their alliance with the Whigs, yet Brigham Young had always been aware that either party would be willing to turn on the Mormons at a moment’s notice in order to gain political leverage. Young was equally willing to dispense with his loyalty if it benefitted the Mormons. While the Whig Party contained many Christian moralists, in the main it was a national party based upon economic and legislative ideologies. This allowed many Whigs to view the Mormons from a pragmatic and political point of view,

⁶⁶⁵ “Mr. Birney’s Letter to the Committee of the National Convention”, *Emancipator and Free American*, February 4, 1842.

despite the peculiarities of the religion. As they had demonstrated in Iowa and with the California scheme, the Whig Party was willing to treat with the Mormons to gain political advantage. This cold political calculation had harmed the Mormons in Illinois, just as it had helped them in Iowa. Still, a pragmatic party was one with which the Mormons could negotiate. From the ashes of the Whig Party, however, arose a new sectional party whose ideals embodied much more evangelical furor. The Republican Party, from its inception, presented a view of an America that needed to be cleansed of its moral evils. Mormonism made men enemies of God and therefore enemies of the nation. Following 1852, Mormon/US relations devolved in a halting downward spiral that would span half of a century. The Mormons came very close to achieving acceptance inside of the American government, as key players in the vast empire that now extended from coast to coast. But polygamy combined with the existing cultural alienation of Mormons to produce a long-term animosity toward Mormonism that could not be overcome by simply occupying the middle ground between the parties. However, the Mormons would certainly try.

The demise of the Whig Party, and its replacement by the evangelically motivated and sectional Republican Party, eliminated what little leverage the Mormons had been able to employ. As long as Whigs and Democrats wrangled over political control of the territories, and anti-slavery northerners clashed with pro-slavery southerners, the Mormons' neutral political course had paid sporadic dividends. However, Republicans adopted the view that slavery was a moral evil, and polygamy was quickly placed in the same category by Republicans who both detested Mormon religious practices and saw the political advantages of linking the controversial institution of slavery with the universally despised practice of polygamy. Their party platform

included the specific resolution that it was “both the right and duty of Congress to prohibit in the Territories, those twin relics of barbarism, Polygamy and Slavery.”⁶⁶⁶

Throughout the remainder of the 1850’s the Mormons would continue to hope that they could skirt national anger toward Mormon religious practices long enough to obtain a state government. It was an interesting paradox. The Mormons were seeking greater inclusion inside of the United States through a state government for the purposes of achieving greater political independence. American politicians and citizens resisted Utah statehood for precisely the same reasons. They feared the result of removing federal oversight from Utah and allowing Mormonism to indulge in its religious excesses and questionable political practices. The conflict between the Mormons and the United States would escalate beyond petty disputes between territorial judges and Brigham Young. Eventually US troops would be dispatched to Utah to quell a supposed rebellion and remove Brigham Young from power. The military occupation of the territory continued for the remainder of the century, except for a brief time during the early days of the Civil War. Even Mormon willingness to serve in the Civil War was not considered proof of American loyalty.

Tensions between the United States and the Mormons followed a curious progression that reflected the fluctuating fears and goals of both groups. International fears had prompted federal interactions with the Mormons in the first place. President Polk adopted a Mormon policy that only considered the short-term problems that Mormon migration might pose for the invasion of Mexican territory and relations with Great Britain. The haphazard way in which the policy was employed led to great tensions between the two groups. For the Mormons part, they mistakenly believed that the formation of a territorial government in Utah would rapidly lead to Mormon acceptance inside the American empire. Instead, the creation of the territory highlighted and

⁶⁶⁶ “The Three Platforms”, *The Boston Daily Atlas*, August 8, 1856.

publicized the differences between Mormons and American nation. Even the desperate attempts by the two parties to gain political advantage gave way to the national disgust which could not tolerate Mormon polygamy. If the Mormons believed that simple explanations of the practice could allay the public outcry, they were terribly mistaken.

As the United States expanded its power and territory in North America, various groups would be forced to acquiesce to American demands. For the Mormons, they would find themselves in the contradictory position of having long advocated American expansion, having sent troops to take part in that conquest, and having quickly petitioned for legal recognition, only to have the expansion of American power to California become the greatest hindrance to their desired religious practices. Likewise, many in the United States government found the nation had too readily allied with the Mormons for their short term political goals. Politicians agreed to the formation of Utah Territory not because they had accepted Mormon Americanism, but in an attempt to reduce growing tensions over slavery. The long term result of this territorial organization was a realization by politicians and average Americans alike that they were not comfortable with the Mormon brand of Americanism.

Mormonism tested the limits of American identity. It departed from the easily discernable construction of Americanism in which most native-born whites were automatically included. In the process of coming to terms with the “foreign” aspect of Mormonism, the limits to American citizenship and religious freedoms were also more readily defined. Mormon eccentricity had stretched the bands of American freedom; Mormon polygamy severed them. Polk’s belief that war with Mexico would lead to the easy incorporation of the sparsely populated Mexican territories foundered on many accounts. He had failed to comprehend the

depth of the slavery controversy. Likewise, he did not realize the long term impact of the Mormon policy which he initiated.

The failure to examine American imperialism in the aspects of its continental expansion during the nineteenth century has skewed current critiques of American empire. Because the focus of critiques has been with American acquisitions of overseas territories, historians have been left to explain, as did William Appleman Williams, the sudden “turn to imperialism” which seemed to occur around the turn of the twentieth century. In fact, as historian Richard Immerman has recently argued, “it was precisely during the earlier years – the century preceding America’s annexation of Hawaii and the Philippines, that the United States was most ruthless in creating its empire and least respectful of non-Americans’...liberty. Those who criticize America’s current empire-builders for violating U.S. history have it wrong.”⁶⁶⁷ As this dissertation has demonstrated, Mormons were included in the group often categorized as “non-American.”

The impact of early Mormon/US relations and the failure of Mormons to fully integrate into American society is clear even in the 21st century. A 2006 Los Angeles Times poll revealed that anti-Mormon sentiment in the political arena greatly outpaced antagonism toward other religious groups. While only 10% of Americans said that they would not vote for a Catholic candidate, and 15% refused to vote for any candidate that was Jewish, 37% of Americans said they would not vote for a Mormon candidate, regardless of his or her political views. Only a Muslim or an atheist candidate fared worse. A 2010 Gallup poll revealed that only 24% of Americans had a positive view of Mormons, again only Muslims and atheists fared worse. While the social conservatism of many American Mormons can explain some of the

⁶⁶⁷ Richard Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 6.

unfavorability ratings, evangelical and fundamentalist Christians scored much higher positive ratings, with even more stark social conservatism. While there are many causes for the way in which Americans view Mormons at present, the nation's views are colored by the legacy of Mormon/US relations and the conflicts and policies which resulted from these early decades of interaction.

The Mormons presented a special problem for the United States government. The Mormons had an American cultural heritage and were composed primarily of white Americans who had been raised in established states of the union. Unlike other "problematic" groups occupying the West, many Mormons were in fact American citizens, even if the nation at large and the government at times disregarded that fact. They were a group that was both foreign and domestic, one that appeared willing to unite with the United States through statehood, but unwilling to renounce religious practices deemed utterly unacceptable by American culture.

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