

# FORGING THE MORMON CHARACTER

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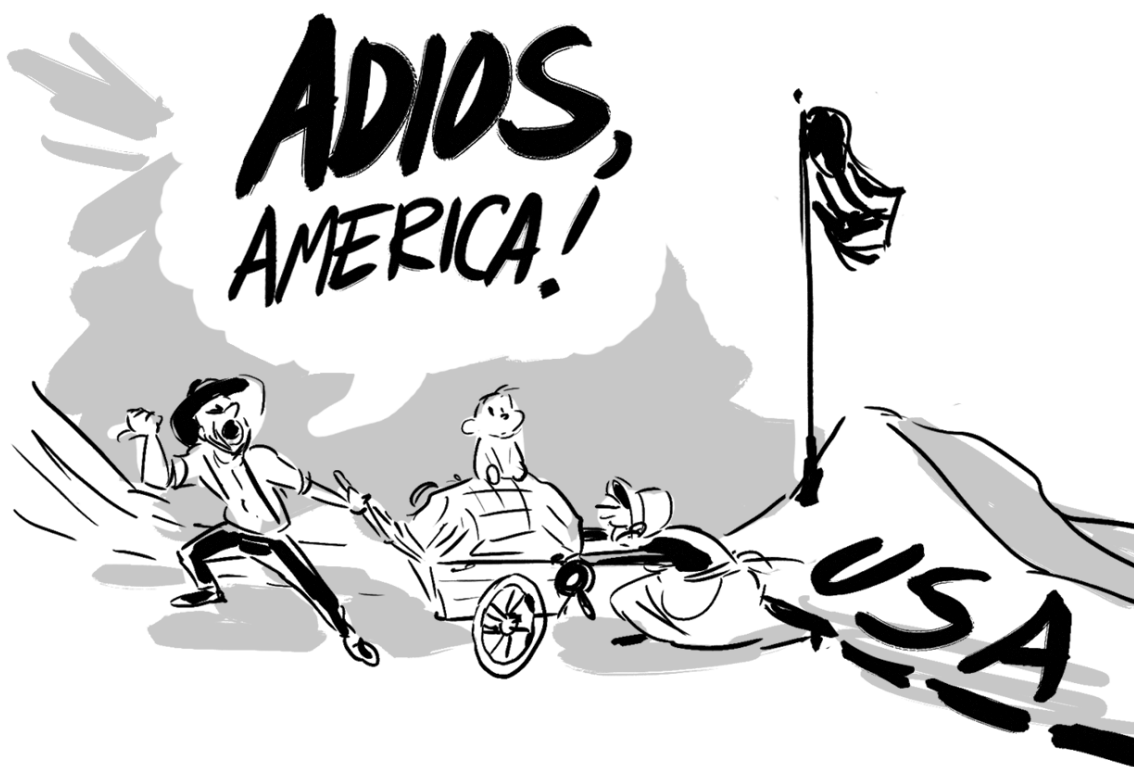
**I**f the Mormon mythos was created while Joseph Smith was alive, the Mormon character was forged during Brigham Young's presidency.

After the death of Joseph and Hyrum, no one was sure who should take up the Church's leadership. A few people stepped forward to make a claim, including Sidney Rigdon, one of Smith's former counselors. Some wanted the prophet's son, Joseph Smith III, to take over. But at a mass meeting of the faithful, Brigham Young, then in his mid-forties, won the most hearts by reminding those in attendance of Smith's revelation that the Quorum of Twelve Apostles—a governing body he had organized—"was equal in authority and power" to the presidency. As head of the Quorum of Twelve, Young was ordained to fill Smith's shoes in December 1847.

He served in a completely different style. While Smith ran the church mostly through sheer force of charisma and personal magnetism, Brigham Young was an organizational powerhouse. He had proven himself many times through the years, leading the twelve apostles on a stunningly successful mission to Great Britain and keeping the Mormons together during their expulsion from Missouri.

The death of Joseph Smith allayed much of the animosity that had built up against the Mormons, providing a measure of respite for the next two years. But resentment began to be felt once again, and

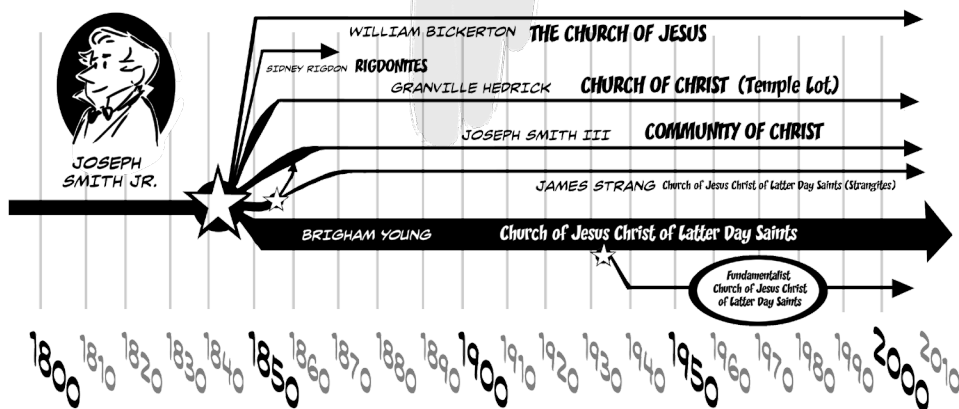
Church members knew they would need to leave Nauvoo soon. And this time they weren't going to piddle around. Instead of traveling to the next state over, they decided to break clear of the United States entirely and settle in a place where they could run their own affairs, religious and governmental.



# OTHER GROUPS

**N**ot all of the Mormon faithful followed Brigham Young, however. A few short-lived groups sprang up almost immediately. David Whitmer, an original “witness” of the Book of Mormon, started a church of his own. Sidney Rigdon led a small group for a little while, out of which William Bickerton established a rival organization—called The Church of Jesus Christ—that still exists today; it claims about 20,000 members worldwide. (Rock star Alice Cooper was active in the Bickertonite Church as a boy.)

## MAIN BRANCHES OF THE LATTER DAY SAINT MOVEMENT



James Strang, who had led a large group of Mormons to colonize Michigan before Joseph Smith’s death, founded another offshoot church, claiming to have been visited by angels at the moment of the prophet’s passing. The Strangites were the largest Mormon faction aside from the Brighamites (those who followed Brigham Young

and the twelve apostles), but it diminished quickly after Strang was killed in 1856 and the community forcibly broken up by irate neighbors. Adherents to Strang still number in the hundreds today.

Joseph Smith III, the eldest son of the Mormon founder, launched the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1850



(RLDS, renamed the Community of Christ in 2001). For a long time, the RLDS Church denied that Joseph Smith had started plural marriage and insisted that he never practiced it. Today, with an estimated membership of about a quarter million, the Community of Christ has a more pro-

gressive bent than the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ordaining women to the priesthood in 1984 and allowing same-sex marriage in 2012–2013. The church's headquarters are located at a temple in Independence, Missouri, and it also owns the historic (1836) Kirtland Temple.

In 1863, Granville Hedrick gathered together a disparate group of Mormons and started a church that became known as the Temple Lot group because, for more than 150 years, it has owned the site in Independence, Missouri, that Joseph Smith dedicated for the temple. Today the Hendrickite denomination claims more than 7,000 members worldwide.

# CROSSING THE AMERICAN PLAINS

**T**hose who followed Brigham Young began to prepare for migration, but Mormon plans never seemed to work out perfectly. Most Latter-day Saints found themselves driven from Nauvoo by increased mob violence during the winter of 1845–46. The epic journey that followed has left an indelible mark on the Mormon consciousness.

The task of transplanting the community of Mormons across the American plains in the bitter cold, the scorching sun, and all the difficulties of frontier life, is truly mind blowing. This wasn't a simple wagon train, and it wasn't a single crossing. Rather, it was a meticulously prepared, relentlessly organized, several-year migration that eventually brought tens of thousands of Mormons to Salt Lake Valley. But it had a very inauspicious beginning.

At first, Church leaders were hoping to get an advance party settled in the Great Basin by the end of the summer so it could get some crops planted. But the weather did not cooperate. Although a deep freeze allowed most of the Mormons to exit Nauvoo

on an iced-over Mississippi River, it also made camping miserable and sometimes fatal. A group of about 1,000 faithful huddled just a few miles outside Nauvoo for nearly a month before travel

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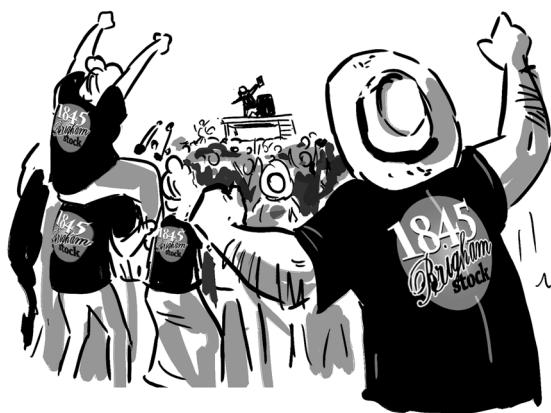


possible again. Then came an uncharacteristically wet spring, which mired their wagons in mud. By the time four months had passed, the advance party had covered only 300 miles in Iowa; it still had at least 1,000 miles to go. The Saints weren't going to make it in 1846, and Brigham Young knew it. So he set to work doing what he did best: organizing.

Parties of Mormons with varying degrees of discipline were straggled out across 100 miles or so. Young and other leaders traveled back through all of them, regimenting the pioneers into groups of 100, 50, or even 10, each with an assigned leader that reported to the next leader up. Then they started building way stations along the route where companies of Saints could stop to resupply or wait out a winter. At one time or another, these stopping points had populations numbering in the thousands. Young instructed the advance parties to plant crops along the route so that food would be available to those who came after. The Mormons even established a section of their own westward trail along the north side of the Platte River (rather than on the south side, where the Oregon Trail ran) so as not to compete with other migrants for resources.

While the migration was getting underway, some Mormons stayed behind in Nauvoo to finish the temple. In April 1846, a few Church leaders stole back into town and dedicated the building before getting back to their wagon trains.

The Saints were so desperate for money, having received little to nothing for their Nauvoo properties, that they actually tried to lease the temple to the Catholic Church and then sell it outright, but no one was buying.



When the last of the Mormon faithful were finally forced out of Nauvoo that summer (at cannon point), the temple was gutted by arsonists.

Unexpected financial help came along when representatives of the U.S. army showed up and asked for 500 men to enlist to fight in the Mexican–American War. At first the Saints refused outright. They had received nothing but neglect from the federal government and weren't feeling particularly for-

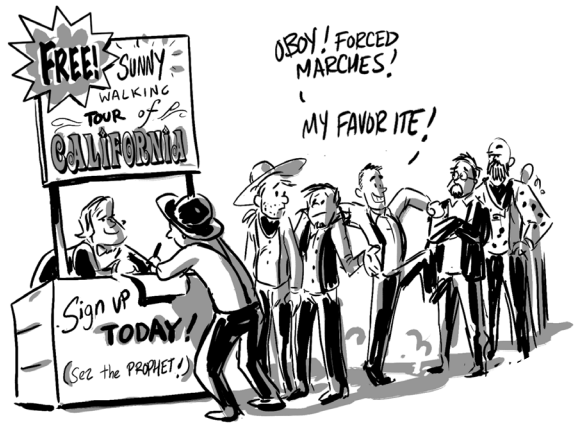
giving. But Brigham Young

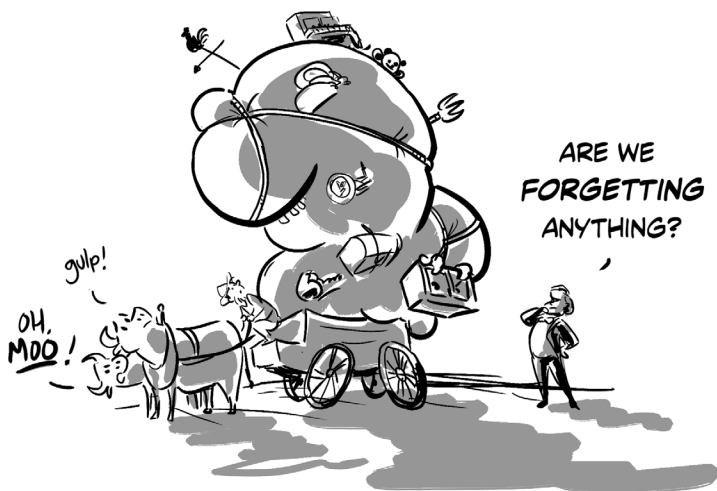
knew that the enlisted men would come back with both pay and experience. He managed to round up all the required men and launched them on what was probably the longest infantry march in American history: nearly

2,000 miles from Council Bluffs, Iowa, to San Diego, California.

On April 16, 1847, the advance frontier party, called the Pioneer Company, complete with 143 men, three women, two children, at least three black slaves, a slew of wagons, supplies, livestock, and even a boat, started toward Salt Lake Valley. But it wasn't just a journey; it was a preparation for the many Mormons that would follow them. The group brought along barometers, thermometers, and other instruments, even building a primitive odometer on the trail—all so they could bring back a detailed report of what succeeding parties could expect.

The company made good time, crossing through Nebraska and then Wyoming. Things slowed down a little when Brigham Young became deathly ill with “Rocky Mountain fever,” but the party arrived





intact in Salt Lake Valley between July 21 and 24, 1847. Looking out across the land, Young declared, “It is enough. This is the right place.” Then, as some wry historians put it, “they dedicated the land to the Lord, prayed for rain, and built a dam for irrigation in case the rain failed to come.” (Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton in *The Mormon Experience*) The Mormon mindset in a nutshell.

The advance party spent about a month laying out plans for the city and planting crops. Then they took a well-deserved rest by heading straight back to Iowa. On the way, they met the next party of 1,500 Mormons heading west.

The preparations along the trail made crossing the plains much easier for the tens of thousands of Saints who made that journey over the next decades. But getting to Salt Lake Valley was still no walk in the park. Thousands of Mormons died en route, whether from exposure, disease, malnutrition, wildlife attack, or—most commonly—accident. It was a rare family that could make the long journey without losing one or more of its loved ones along the way. Many modern-day Mormons who have pioneer ancestry tell and retell the stories of family hardship, remembering those who were lost and celebrating the ones who survived.

A song by early Church leader William Clayton quickly became an



anthem to the unremitting sacrifice that attended the Mormon experience during this period.

*Come, come, ye Saints, no toil or labor fear;  
But with joy wend your way.  
Though hard to you this journey may appear,  
Grace shall be as your day. . .*

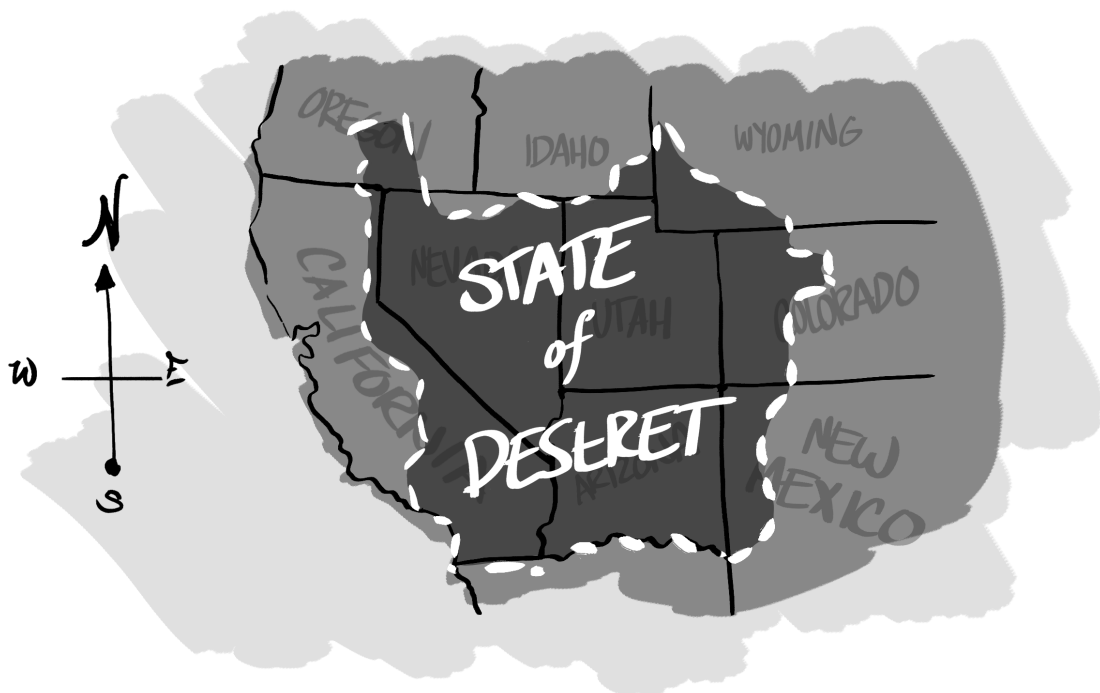
*And should we die before our journey's through,  
Happy day! All is well!  
We then are free from toil and sorry too;  
With the just we shall dwell!*

*But if our lives are spared again  
To see the Saints their rest obtain,  
O how we'll make this chorus swell—  
All is well! All is well!*

Being in a Mormon wagon train meant adhering to strict rules. The chain of command was well established, and obedience was at a premium. Prayers were to be attended, everyone was to be in bed by nine, “and hogs & dogs to be tied up or shot” at night.

Things were no less organized in Salt Lake Valley. Unlike most towns springing up in the American West, Mormon communities were planned to the hilt: street grids already laid out, rules already in place for who would inhabit which property, how the government would





operate, and how natural resources would be used. If you had come to Salt Lake to be your own person, you had come to the wrong place.

But most of those who arrived in Salt Lake Valley were not destined to stay there anyway. Brigham Young had an expansive view of the Mormon kingdom. He proposed the state of Deseret as the Saints' inheritance—an area encompassing all of current-day Utah, most of Nevada and Arizona, Southern California, sizable chunks of Colorado, Wyoming, and New Mexico, and a few slivers of Idaho and Oregon. Often a new batch of Mormon immigrants would just have time to cool their heels before being called to start a new settlement. More than 100 Mormon settlements were founded during the decade following 1847.

# COMMUNALISM

**O**ne of the main elements that made Mormon settlements so successful was an organized spirit of cooperation. Brigham Young took up Joseph Smith's idea of the United Order and applied it to frontier life, often requiring new settlers to deed their property to the Church and receive an "inheritance" over which they would have "stewardship." Young also established Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Incorporated, which united Mormon merchants so that they could buy and produce goods at a lower cost. Young's goal was to make the Mormons entirely self-sufficient so that they would never be at the mercy of antagonistic neighbors again.

Most instances of the United Order only lasted a few years, but they often provided a boost to new settlements. Probably the most famous and successful of these experiments was called Orderville, established by a clutch of impoverished Mormons who had just failed spectacularly at establishing a settlement in the promisingly named Muddy River, Nevada. The group built a compound with a large-scale dining hall and became almost entirely self-sufficient, producing their own food, clothing, and shelter. None of it was pretty to look at, but it

compared very well to the destitution from which they had arisen.

Eventually, silver was discovered in the area and what once had been a

WE NEED  
TO RETHINK  
COMMUNAL  
COPYEDITING!



sanctuary from abject poverty started to look backward and poor to its neighbors. Ten years after its founding, the Edmunds-Tucker Act jailed many of Orderville's polygamous leaders and the collective soon fell apart.

Nevertheless, vestiges of communalism still run strong in the LDS Church. One of the main attractions in Salt Lake City today is Welfare Square, the centerpiece of the Church's welfare system. That system cares for people in need while helping them to find ways to support themselves. Every month, Mormons fast from two meals and give the money they would have used on the food to the Church to be used to help the needy. The drive for self-sufficiency also remains a strong part of the Mormon worldview. LDS leaders often counsel Church members to maintain a healthy savings account and to gather food storage in case of emergencies. So make sure you have some Mormon friends before the zombie apocalypse strikes.



# SEEKING STATEHOOD

**W**ith the end of the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the United States gained a vast expanse of territory, covering present-day Utah, Arizona, Nevada, and California. As a result, despite their long trek, the Mormons found themselves right back on American soil. Although they had established a government run completely by Church leaders, they decided to see if they could benefit from statehood. When Church leaders arrived in Washington with their petition (a 22-foot-long document), however, Congress was too preoccupied with slavery issues to address the matter.

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The Compromise of 1850, a series of legislative measures that reduced the conflict between slave and free states over the status of slavery in lands acquired in the Mexican-American War, granted territorial status to the area named “Utah” (after the native Ute tribe).

The Utah Territory was not as large as the proposed Mormon state of Deseret, but still sizable. President Millard Fillmore appointed a slate of both Mormons and non-Mormons to lead the new territory, with Brigham Young serving as governor.

Tensions sprang up almost immediately. Officials from outside Utah were alarmed by how closely church and state had merged in the territory; Mormons, for their part, felt that the outsiders were destroying the utopia they had built. Conflicts arose between Church members and lay officials and judges, who returned from the territory carrying tales of a “Mormon rebellion.” Those accounts, combined with strong anti-polygamy sentiment among Democrats and Republicans (yes, they *did* agree on something once!), finally led to the outbreak of the so-called Utah War.

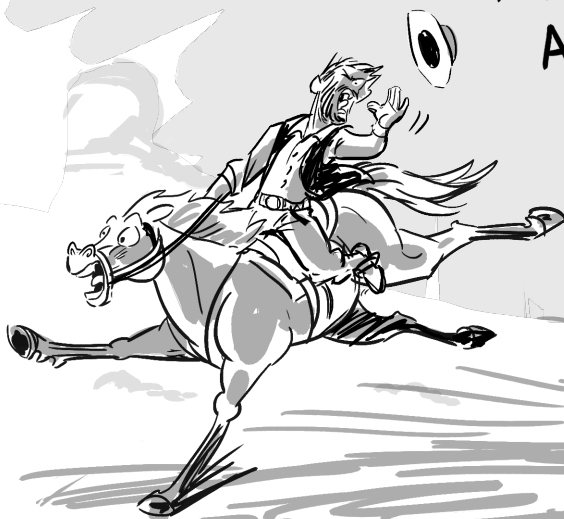


THE AMERICANS  
ARE COMING!

## THE UTAH WAR

THE AMERICANS  
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**B**elieving the direst of the reports, President James Buchanan appointed Alfred Cumming, a non-Mormon from Georgia, to be Utah's new governor and sent him west with 2,500 soldiers in April 1858 to reassert the federal government's authority. Some members of the Church got wind of the march and hurried back to Salt Lake to warn the leadership.

You might say that the Mormons overreacted to the news. But when you consider that most of them could remember first-hand being driven by mobs and armies from state to state, and when you consider how far they had traveled to practice their religion in peace and what sacrifices they'd made along the way, you can see their point.

Essentially, the Mormons prepared for outright war. Brigham Young declared martial law and sent out marauding parties to slow the advancing troops. The skirmishing lasted only a few months and

resulted in few casualties. Young told Church members to hoard their food and supplies, not selling them to outsiders. Then, following Young's instructions, some 35,000 Mormons abandoned their homes in northern Utah, leaving behind a skeleton crew to burn down everything if U.S. troops so much as entered the valley. Church records were hidden; the foundation of the Salt Lake Temple was buried and plowed up so that it would look like a farmer's field. The Saints were going to leave nothing behind for the invaders.

Through some diplomacy on the part of a long-time friend of the Mormons named Thomas L. Kane, a meeting was set up between Church leaders and Cumming, whom Kane persuaded to attend without the army. At the meeting, Brigham Young surrendered control of the territory to Kane and convinced him that the Mormons were good U.S. citizens.



# MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE

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**T**he hysteria that overtook the Mormons during the Utah War had tragic consequences. A migrant group from Arkansas, called the Baker–Fancher Party, was traveling through Utah at the time, on its way to California. Rumors that the party had poisoned a spring of water and that the train was harboring people who had killed a Mormon apostle in Arkansas cast deep suspicion on the travelers.

When the party passed Cedar City in southern Utah, a group of Mormon leaders—under the influence of Brigham’s declaration of martial law and teachings from high Church leaders that the wicked needed to be cleansed from the earth to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus—decided that the wagon train should be destroyed. They set up an attack in conjunction with local Paiute Indians and then disguised local members of the Utah Territory’s Nauvoo Legion militia as Native Americans.

The attackers descended upon the wagon train at a place called Mountain Meadows on September 7, 1857, but the travelers managed to hold them off in a five-day siege. Mormon leaders, worried that some in the party had recognized white faces among their attackers and had realized who they were, put together a plan.

On September 11, Mormon militiamen led by Church official John D. Lee approached the embattled Baker–Fancher Party with a white flag and said that they had cut a deal with the Paiutes. If the party

would give them their livestock, Lee told the pioneers, the Paiutes would allow them to leave. The migrants agreed and were escorted toward Cedar City by the militia; the men were in one party with a military escort, the women and children in another.

On signal, the militia turned and shot the men, while other militia members attacked the women and children. A total of 120 people were killed that day, all of them buried in shallow graves. Their remains, mauled by wildlife and battered by weather, were found by investigators years later.





# POLYGAMY REVISITED

**W**hen the Mormons settled in Utah, polygamy became one of their most important theological and cultural identifiers. Declared Apostle George A. Smith, “they are a poor, narrow minded, pinch-backed race of man, who chain themselves to the law of monogamy.” (*Deseret News*, April 16, 1856) Church leaders taught unequivocally that one must be part of a polygamous marriage in order to reach the highest level of the Celestial Kingdom. Yet the earthly success of these marriages was mixed. Some older women would advise new plural wives that the best way to have a successful marriage was to give up on romance or tenderness with one’s husband, as it would breed only jealousy and disappointment. Often a plural wife’s most fulfilling relationships were with her sister wives.

When the Mormons settled in Salt Lake Valley, they thought they had established themselves outside the purview of the United States and its laws. But the U.S. government annexed the area and began working to eradicate Mormon polygamy, which it considered to be—according to the Republican Party platform of 1856—one of the “twin relics of barbarism” (the other being slavery). “It is a scarlet whore,” thundered Illinois



congressman John McClernand. “It is a reproach to the Christian civilization, and deserves to be blotted out.”

But the Mormons were stubborn. They had established plural marriage through great sacrifice; it had become an essential ordinance for salvation, and they weren’t about to relinquish it. This was the hill they were willing to die on. And they almost did.

The Civil War distracted the federal government from the issue for a while, giving the Mormons a reprieve. But it wasn’t long before a series of laws, culminating in the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887, made male polygamists subject to criminal prosecution. Violators could be stripped of the ability to hold public office, serve on a jury, or even vote; any who would not foreswear the practice could be sent to prison. For Mormon men, being incarcerated for plural marriage became a badge of honor (even if it was a crippling burden to the women and children left at home). The government also threatened to confiscate the Church’s assets if it continued to condone plural marriage. John Taylor, the third president of the LDS Church (1880–1887) and husband to nine wives, died in hiding.



WOULD YOU **POLYGAMOUS**  
**MARRY ON THE LAM?**  
GETTING CAUGHT PUTS  
YOU IN THE **CAN!**



It was the Church's fourth president, Wilford Woodruff (1889–1898), who in 1890 issued what is often called the Woodruff Manifesto, rescinding Mormon polygamy 38 years after it had been publicly announced. Sort of. The fact was, polygamous marriages continued; they were just much quieter, often conducted outside Utah or U.S. borders—on a steamship, or in Mexico or Canada. Taking advantage of loopholes in the manifesto's language, more than 200 polygamous marriages were solemnized by high Church officials between 1890 and 1903.

When LDS apostle Reed Smoot was elected as a U.S. senator in 1903, an intense spotlight was turned on Mormonism in an attempt to deny him his seat. Smoot himself wasn't a polygamist, but most of his fellow apostles were—and some of them were still performing polygamous marriages. The president of the Church at the time, Joseph F. Smith (1901–1918), had fathered eleven children with his multiple wives since the manifesto. Under the intense outside scrutiny, Smith announced the Second Manifesto: thenceforth, anyone



who married polygamously, or who officiated in such a marriage, would be excommunicated.

The two manifestos shook the Church to its core. Many of its staunchest members had placed all their eggs in the plural marriage basket.

Splinter groups soon formed to continue the practice, some of which persist in one form or another to this day. Meanwhile, the LDS Church got on board with the U.S. government and proactively assisted in hunting down and prosecuting polygamists.

Currently, the LDS Church will excommunicate anyone who enters into a polygamous marriage. Nevertheless, the revelation on plural marriage is still a part of the Doctrine and Covenants, and vestiges of the practice still remain in place: a man can be “sealed” to more than one woman in the temple (as in the case of remarriage after a wife’s death), but a woman

can-

not be sealed to more than one man. And many mainstream Mormons believe that they will have to enter a polygamous relationship in the next life in order to attain the top level of salvation, a belief

that has never been officially repudiated.



# ASSIMILATION

**A**fter polygamy was finally dropped, Mormon history consists mainly of how the LDS Church found its way into the mainstream of American culture and how it organized itself into the gigantic, complex, prosperous institution it is today.

For the first half-century of its existence, the Mormon Church was deeply in debt, but through a long and focused process of organization, financial investment, and legal work, it has become wealthy and powerful. Just south of Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, stands a \$2-billion megamall with a retractable roof, a river, and high-end shops that the Church had a major hand in developing. It owns an estimated 1 million acres of land in the United States (and plenty more worldwide), as well as insurance companies, real estate companies, publishing companies, radio stations, digital content developers, and universities—the largest and best known of which is Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah; it has also been a major stock holder in such franchise giants as Burger King and Domino's Pizza.

From some perspectives, such deep investment in “the world” would seem to be anathema to a church, but Latter-day Saints often think of prosperity as the





inevitable result of righteousness. It's also worth remembering that the early history of Mormonism is rife with trauma—the kind the Church never wants to go through again. And the best way to avoid that is to have power.

Latter-day Saints like to speak of themselves as a peculiar people, and certainly there are many things that set them apart from the rest of the U.S. population. But the fact is that, in many ways, Mormons have become model Americans. The Church took its first step toward gaining mainstream respectability in 1893, when it sent the Mormon Tabernacle Choir to perform at the World's Fair in Chicago; it took second place. In 1948, President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed Mormon apostle Ezra Taft Benson as U.S. secretary of agriculture, and he held the post for eight years. In the tumultuous 1960s, Mormons at large refused to participate in the countercultural movement, establishing a clean-cut, straight-arrow, law-abiding image. In contrast to



its early politically radical roots, Mormonism took a decidedly conservative stance.

Which brings us to the present ... where Mormons are over-represented in the CIA and the FBI; where Mormons hold high political office as a matter of course; where some of the wealthiest people in the United States are Latter-day Saints; and, where, if Mormons move in next door, you can expect property values to go up. That's the journey Mormonism has made: from radical, persecuted church to all-American religion.

The LDS Church has also expanded to become a worldwide movement. During its early years, missionaries found great success in Great Britain and then in Scandinavia. Since then, Central and South America have become homes to major Mormon populations. In fact, the majority of Church membership is now located outside North America. How the Church will evolve to accommodate membership in such diverse areas, cultures, and circumstances is likely to be the biggest challenge it will face in the coming decades.

