

THE MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE:
A CRIME AND A MYSTERY

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Introduction

You don't forget the horror of having your father gasp for breath and grow limp, while you have your arms around his neck, screaming with terror. You don't forget the blood-curdling war whoops and the banging of guns all around you. You don't forget the screaming of the other children and the agonized shrieks of women being hacked to death with tomahawks. And you wouldn't forget it, either, if you saw your own mother topple over in the wagon beside you, with a big red splotch getting bigger on the front of her calico dress.¹

So goes the account of Sallie Baker, a survivor of one of the most brutal crimes in the history of the United States. The Mountain Meadows Massacre offers a reminder of the uncertainty in historical records; the facts of the massacre have been so clouded by the array of conflicting accounts, so manipulated by all concerned, that no historian will ever know the true story. Not only the details of the crime but also the conditions surrounding it remain disputed.

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In September of 1857, on the plains of southern Utah, Mormons and Native Americans together slaughtered a large company of California-bound emigrants, leaving only seventeen small children alive. Afterward, nobody admitted responsibility. The Indians said that the Mormons had led them to the sordid deed, while many Mormons who were probably involved refused to admit, even to family members, that the Mormons had even participated.

The Mormons steadfastly defended themselves, and the incident sparked the rage of anti-Mormon zealots nationwide. Presses churned out biased accounts, writers invented details, and the truth was lost forever in the minds of men who had too much at stake to share their knowledge. An extreme case of shrouded evidence, the Mountain Meadows Massacre remains among the most mysterious crimes on record.

The Basic Story

In September of 1857, a large wagon train making its way through Utah Territory camped at the Mountain Meadows, near Cedar City, to graze the livestock they brought and prepare for the difficult desert trek that lay before them. The emigrants, whose origins are disputed, chose a campsite that commanded a prospect of fields and ridges. Though near a bubbling spring, they could not arrange their wagons around the water source because it had dampened the surrounding earth, making it almost marshy.²

Just before sunrise, a few days after the company's arrival, the trouble began. A large group of Indians, according to many accounts led by some Mormons, attacked the emigrants. They hastily drew their wagons into a defensive ring, made ditches and embankments, and began shooting back at the natives. The emigrants, killing at least a couple of Indians, managed to stave off the attack. During the next few days, the Indians maintained their siege from the ridge tops, effectively cutting the travelers off from the water source.

At the end of the week, about 120 emigrant men, women and children lay dead along the road to Cedar City, having somehow been compelled to leave their makeshift fort. Only seventeen small children were spared. Local Mormon families assumed the care of those surviving children.

The Mormons publicly blamed the Indians for the massacre and denied taking any part in it.³ Gradually, though, evidence of Mormon involvement emerged. On March 23, 1877, twenty years after the killings, Mormon Bishop John Doyle Lee was executed by a firing squad at the Mountain Meadows for his part in the massacre.⁴

Dispute Over Specifics

On every detail of the massacre there is some disagreement. Reports so conflict with each other that to describe every point of contention would be impossible here. Every account depicts the ravaged wagon train differently. The inscription on the monument says there were about 140 people in the party killed.⁵ Author Wallace Stegner believes the company consisted of 128 emigrants.⁶ Historians Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton report that the train consisted of 120 people.⁷ Brevet Major J. H. Carleton also says there were 120 emigrants but disagrees with most other sources on the identity of the victims.⁸ Some historians make no attempt to identify the murdered company. Historian Hoffman Birney says there were several hundred horses and cows,⁹ but other descriptions of the train's livestock and provisions vary. Writers on the subject agree only on general points: the train consisted of over 100 people, and they brought some livestock, which they grazed at the Mountain Meadows.

Even the date of the massacre is debated. The memorial at the site of the massacre places the date at September 7.¹⁰ Historian Juanita Brooks believes the massacre occurred on September 11.¹¹ Writing in 1858, John D. Lee claimed the massacre occurred on September 25, after he had left for Salt Lake City, but in his 1882

book, Lee says the massacre occurred the previous week. Early reports of the massacre in California newspapers placed it on September 10 or 12. Witnesses at both of Lee's trials remembered only that the massacre had occurred on the Friday following the Sunday council meeting in which the fate of the emigrants was discussed.¹² Historian Anna Jean Backus records the date as Monday, September 7, but agrees that the main slaughter occurred on that Friday, the 11th.¹³

The most basic disagreement occurs over whom to blame for the massacre. Some early accounts by Mormons place all the blame on the Paiute Indians. However, it was soon generally conceded that Mormons participated. A few Mormons, including John D. Lee, eventually admitted to being at the scene of the crime. Still, nobody in the Mormon ranks admitted responsibility. Determining who performed the deed is only half of the problem; the hottest debate surrounds the question of who issued the order, or who compelled the murderers to act.

Context

To assign blame for the tragedy, one must first understand the conditions that surrounded it, including the historical backgrounds of both the Mormons and the Paiute. Studying the context of the crime reveals possible motives for both accused groups. Because events leading up to it serve as circumstantial evidence, they have been manipulated almost as much as the details of the massacre itself. A myriad of controversies surround the Mormon church and arguments flourish over rumors that circulated at the time of the massacre. Still, examining the historical context of the event yields insight into the relations between all involved.

A History of the Mormon Church's Origins and its Relations with the United States

Writes historian Leonard Arrington, "Mormonism began in a cauldron of religious excitement."¹⁴ During the religious revival¹⁵ that swept western New York in 1820, fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith had his First Vision. As he prayed, in confusion over which sect to join and how to gain salvation, a pillar of light appeared above him and descended to him. Smith claims that God appeared before him and said, "Joseph my son, Thy sins are forgiven thee. Go thy way, walk in my Statutes, and keep my commandments. Behold, I am the Lord of Glory; I was crucified for the world, that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life. Behold, none doeth good, no not one. They have turned aside the Gospel and keep not my commandments. They draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me, and mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth."¹⁶

Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on April 6, 1830, when he published the Book of Mormon. Smith claimed that God had told him the sacred history was inscribed on gold tablets buried in a hill near Manchester, New York, and that he had dug up the tablets in 1827 and spent three years translating them. This translation, said Smith, was the Book of Mormon.¹⁷

By the end of 1830, several hundred people had adopted Mormonism. In pursuit of New Jerusalem, Smith led the converts to Ohio. When local residents, resentful of Smith and his faith, attacked the Mormons, they moved on to Missouri. However, the residents there proved even more hostile.

Many qualities of Mormonism fueled the hostility. Unbelievers deemed Smith's claim to Divine revelation bogus, declared that the Book of Mormon was mostly plagiarism from the Old Testament, and despised those who believed Smith. Religious leaders of other sects proclaimed that the Latter-day Saints, by praying in a language they referred to as "unknown tongues" and

believing Smith to be God's prophet, acted in disrespect and defiance to God's will.¹⁸ Besides disliking Mormonism, other ministers feared losing members to the increasingly popular new sect.¹⁹ Ward explains, "Missouri clergymen denounced [the Mormon] faith. Missouri settlers feared their growing numbers. Rumors spread that they were stealing, stirring up the Indians, planning to free the slaves, printing counterfeit money. 'The Mormons,' one Presbyterian minister told his flock, 'are the common enemies of mankind and ought to be destroyed.'"²⁰

Mormon historian Leonard Arrington, in his 1979 book *The Mormon Experience*, acknowledges that some individual Mormons committed crimes, but says they did so no more than in the average societal group. Theft and counterfeiting did occur in the Mormon ranks, but no evidence exists that church officials sanctioned such behavior. Arrington reports that "the Mormons did regard the Indians as a people destined to rise again and assume their rightful heritage in the promised land."²¹ The gathering of the Indians to hear Mormon missionaries preach alarmed the Missourians. Though the Mormons were not active abolitionists, they did oppose slavery. They accepted free blacks into their sect. Writes Arrington, "charges of Mormon agitation among the Negroes seem unfounded, but the important thing is that such rumors were being circulated and believed."²²

Generally, Mormons had a low economic and social status. Smith himself came from a poor family and had little education. One Missourian described the Mormons as "the very dregs of that society from which they came, lazy, idol, and vicious."²³ Despite their poverty as individuals, though, the Mormons exerted considerable economic influence by combining their resources. They traded within the church, almost solely through Mormon Sidney Gilbert's store. This practice, suggests Arrington, seemed like "operating in restraint of trade" and created resentment among competitors. Economically, the Mormons functioned essentially as one very wealthy individual. Their influence drove land prices higher wherever they settled, angering the residents.²⁴

The Mormons also exerted political influence by voting as a bloc. They often tried to bargain with candidates for protection of the Mormon church in exchange for Mormon votes. "It was natural for them to do so," reasons Arrington, "for them to vote for known enemies or to fail to take advantage of the highly American institution of the ballot box to improve their situation would have shown a lack of good sense."²⁵ However, political opponents of the Mormons grew incensed.

Residents expressed their prejudice and rage through mob violence. In Independence, Missouri, on July 20, 1833, when Bishop Edward Partridge refused to close his Mormon printing press and store, a mob of over three hundred people tarred and feathered him and Mormon Charles Allen, drove all the local Mormon families from their homes, and "reduced to rubble" the house of W. W. Phelps, which held Partridge's printing press. The attack devastated the local Mormon population.²⁶

Five years later, in response to anti-Mormon violence, a group called the Daughters of Zion, or Danites, emerged. Arrington feels they "went beyond the bounds of legality and propriety in defending the Saints and retaliating against those who had committed crimes against them."²⁷ This group, though not representative of the church as a whole, increased the American public's determination to eradicate Mormonism.

The same year that the Danites formed, the Mormons suffered another huge blow. In the late afternoon on October 30, 1838, a two-hundred-forty-man militia entered a camp of Mormon families near Far West, Missouri, and abruptly began shooting. These Mormons, camping in wagons outside a Mormon-owned mill, had recently made a treaty with the militia and were taken completely by surprise. They offered no resistance, and when their shouts of surrender failed to subdue the attackers, the Mormons scattered and tried to hide. "The main slaughter occur[ed] when a number of Mormon men [took] refuge in an old blacksmith shop that ha[d] such large crevices in the walls that volley after volley fired through them turn[ed] it into a death trap."²⁸ The militia killed seventeen people and wounded twelve, some of

whom later died of their injuries. Arrington describes one of the murders: "An old man, lying wounded, is shot through the heart and his body hacked at and mangled with a corn knife."²⁹ The unusual brutality of the attack prompted many Mormons to flee the area.

Geoffrey C. Ward, in *The West: An Illustrated History* (1996), relates the circumstances of the Saints' exodus from Missouri:

Smith himself was beaten, tarred, jailed. There were shootings and fires and calls for vengeance by both sides. Finally, the governor of Missouri himself ordered the Mormons to leave his state or be 'exterminated.'

Smith next led his followers back across the Mississippi, to the tiny town of Commerce, Illinois. He renamed it Nauvoo and within five years had transformed it into the second largest city in the state. By 1844, Joseph Smith had 35,000 disciples and more were on their way, converts gathered by Mormon missionaries dispatched to continental Europe and Great Britain. An armed legion of 4,000 men marched to his orders, and he pronounced himself ready to run for president.³⁰

Thus, the Mormons became an even greater political threat and, suddenly, a military presence. Also, it was in Nauvoo that reports of Mormon polygamy began to spread.³¹

Dr. John Cooke Bennet, mayor of Nauvoo and major-general of the Nauvoo Legion, exposed Mormon polygamy to the public during a "quarrel" with Joseph Smith. He claimed to the women of Nauvoo that Smith had instructed him to teach polygamy, while Smith declared that by even suggesting that Mormons practiced plural marriage Dr. Bennet "perpetrated *a foul and infamous slander upon an innocent people*, and need but to be known to be hated and despised."³² Mormon Oliver Cowdery wrote an article for the *Times and Seasons* asserting the Mormon belief that "one man should have *one* wife, and one woman *but one* husband."³³

Historian T.B.H. Stenhouse believes that the article was "written purposely for the deception of the public" and that many prominent Mormon men, including Cowdery and Smith, did have more than one wife.³⁴ Evidence emerged later verifying the ru-

mors of polygamy. A revelation recorded by Smith in 1843 and entitled “Celestial Marriage” was revealed to the public in 1852, after Smith’s death, at a conference in Salt Lake City.³⁵ The revelation announced a “new and an everlasting covenant,” that men should, according to God, take many wives, but a woman unfaithful to her one husband should be “destroyed,” and declared “if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned.”³⁶

The release of this revelation, nine years after the original controversy, confirmed the practice that some residents of Nauvoo had feared. Rumors of polygamy inspired newfound hate in the hearts of many non-Mormons, and even some of the Mormons turned on their Prophet, calling him dictatorial.³⁷ Meanwhile, Smith continued vigorously to deny the charges. He reported numerous revelations that demanded monogamy, and excommunicated Mormon elders who taught plural marriage.³⁸ Amidst the controversy over polygamy, local residents grew violent. Charged with inciting a riot, Smith was jailed along with his brother Hyrum in the spring of 1845 in Carthage, Illinois. On June 27, an angry mob broke into the jail and fatally shot the Smith brothers.³⁹

Wild with rage, the Mormons demanded that the government assume dictatorial power and kill, without a trial, fifty or a hundred of Smith’s enemies as revenge for the murder of the great Mormon prophet. Anti-Mormons called for the Governor to exile the Mormons. In the fall of 1844, anti-Mormon militia amounting to several thousand men from Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri gathered in Hancock County, Illinois, to prepare for a rampage. Notes Stenhouse, “the Whig press in every part of the United States came to [the mob’s] assistance,” recounting the worst stories of Mormon outrages, but the Democratic newspapers and Democratic leaders, who had benefited from Mormon votes, failed to support the Mormons “even when law, and justice, and the Constitution were on their side”⁴⁰ The public, hearing only the biased views of the anti-Mormon publications, rallied against the Saints. Mobs burned whole Mormon towns. Anti-Mormons fled their homes when several hundred armed Mormons took control of Carthage.⁴¹

Throughout the fighting, most Mormons maintained their faith despite the divisive issue of polygamy. Brigham Young, chosen as Joseph Smith's successor, suddenly enjoyed the reverence and obedience of the Mormon people. An old hymn illustrates the Mormons' faith in their second prophet:

Brigham Young is the Lion of the Lord;
He's the Prophet and Revealer of His Word;
He's the mouthpiece of God unto all mankind,
And he rules by the power of the Word!⁴²

Historian Hoffman Birney explains, "He was all of that and more. He was for more than thirty years a prophet, revelator, and seer who was regarded by half a million people as the vicegerent and mouthpiece of Almighty God; he was a dynast whose influence is still mighty in the land; and he was the absolute monarch, wielding a power as great as Caesar's, over a territory far larger than all of New England. No figure in American history more successfully defies one to ignore it."⁴³ Young took the first steps toward building that empire when, because peace seemed unattainable, he agreed at a conference in Jacksonville to move the Mormons out of Illinois in the spring of 1846.⁴⁴

Before the exodus, Young insisted on completing the great Mormon temple at Nauvoo. The temple, estimated to have cost about \$600,000, was a great source of pride for the Mormons; in a time of violent persecution and for most, abject poverty, they had built their grand temple with their guns at their sides and watchmen always alert, just as Nehemiah and the Jews had built the walls of Jerusalem in the Scripture story.⁴⁵ Not long after the Saints moved West, a mob demolished the Nauvoo Temple.⁴⁶ Even by leaving, the Mormons could not escape the destructive actions of their Illinois persecutors.

Young sought, first and foremost, a safe haven for his people. He chose the valley of the Great Salt Lake, because only Indians lived there at the time and it seemed unlikely that non-

Mormons would settle the area. Young and his followers began the trek to Utah in 1846.⁴⁷ The transcontinental journey in wagons and handcarts left many dead and all impoverished, but the Mormons believed they had found their Zion—their haven from persecution. The Saints believed their emigration to be “‘the Lord’ gathering Israel home to the ‘chambers of the mountains’ preparatory to the great day of wrath that was to come upon the Gentile world.”⁴⁸ Not only safety but also revenge occupied their minds.

When the Mormons arrived at the Great Salt Lake in July of 1847, the area still belonged to Mexico. The Saints believed that the Mexican government would allow them to establish a theocracy in their New Zion. However, the Mormons’ optimism faded in 1848, when, after the Mexican War, the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo awarded to the United States the land that would become California and the territories of Utah and New Mexico.⁴⁹ The Mormons found themselves once again under the jurisdiction of the government they despised.

Many Americans felt that the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo justified Manifest Destiny, the idea that the United States was destined to control all of North America. That concept, along with the discovery of gold in California in 1848, sent Americans streaming westward, through Mormon territory.⁵⁰ The influx of emigrants from the east seemed to promise more persecution for the Mormons. However, the Gold Rush did prove economically profitable for the Saints.

The emigrants, in their frenzy to reach the gold, often made trades that favored the Mormons. “Stories are related of the frantic haste with which many of the emigrants would part with wagons, cattle, and goods, for a horse or mule outfit to carry them to California.”⁵¹ The Mormons enjoyed a sudden prosperity; emigrants constantly brought much-needed supplies and traded them for little value, and the land of Utah proved exceedingly fertile. The Saints should have finally been able to wallow in their good fortune, but clashes with the emigrants grew increasingly frequent.

Each group complained of the other's behavior. The Mormons said the "gentiles were rowdy, dishonest, vicious, and worse; that they tried to corrupt Mormon women, created disturbances, accepted hospitality and later bit the hand that fed them,"⁵² while the emigrants claimed the "Mormons discriminated against strangers, threatened them, impounded their stock and charged them a fee to get it out again, even sometimes murdered them for their wagons and goods."⁵³ Stegner tells of rumors that the Mormons committed "holy murders" and reports the "mysterious disappearances of apostates and offensive Gentiles."⁵⁴ These clashes were probably the result of the well-established animosity between Mormons and non-Mormons, especially the United States government.

Young believed that God would strike down the United States government for its disenfranchisement of the Mormons. "I am prophet enough to prophesy the downfall of the government that has driven us out," Young declared. "Woe to the United States! I see them greedy after death and destruction."⁵⁵ Despite this sentiment, the Mormons organized the State of Deseret, an enormous tract of western land, elected Young as Governor in 1849, and sent delegate Almon W. Babbitt to Washington to petition Congress for statehood.⁵⁶ Wary of the Mormon theocracy, Congress reduced Deseret to one third its original size, renamed it Utah, and made it a territory. President Fillmore named Young the "Territorial Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs" for Utah Territory.⁵⁷

Soon clashes arose between the Mormons and non-Mormon officials, who arrived in Utah in July of 1851. That September, as an honored guest at a large Church meeting, Associate Justice Brocchus made a speech in which he attacked many Mormon practices and beliefs, especially polygamy. The assembly arose in outrage at Brocchus's clear anti-Mormonism. Young prevented violence, but he and his councilors made clear their faith in all Mormon practices and their willingness to defend their sect. Frightened by the indignant Mormons, Brocchus and the other non-Mormon officials left for Washington. A volley of venomous

letters and publications ensued as Young condemned the officials' behavior and the officials spread fear about Mormon polygamy.⁵⁸

Anti-Mormonism in the government increased with reports of a speech by Brigham Young entitled "Old Zachary is in hell, and I am glad of it,"⁵⁹ a condemnation of Whig President Zachary Taylor, who died in office in July of 1850 and was replaced by Vice President Fillmore.⁶⁰ Young denied having made the speech, but animosity towards the government flourished. The Mormons felt unjustly accused, while the government grew convinced that the Mormons schemed against the United States.

The government's concern over the "Mormon problem" increased in 1852, when Young publicly declared polygamy an essential Mormon tenet. In fact, only about one out of five Mormon men claimed more than one wife, but Young's announcement sent reformers into a new offensive. They linked polygamy with slavery, declaring that both practices should be immediately abolished. The Republican platform in the election of 1856 called polygamy and slavery "the twin relics of barbarism."⁶¹ Thus, anti-Mormonism took on an active role in politics.

Meanwhile, conflicts grew steadily worse. In 1855, surveyors in Utah met with resistance from the Mormons, who feared losing their land, which they held "only by right of occupation, not by any explicit declaration or approval of Congress."⁶² The same year, federally appointed Utah judge W. W. Drummond made the claim, later proven false, that the Mormons had destroyed court records. Drummond's anti-Mormon agitation proved influential in stirring up the nation against the Saints.⁶³

Shortly after President James Buchanan's inauguration in 1857, Drummond and other angry government officials from Utah came to Washington and convinced Buchanan that the Mormons were in open rebellion. Newspapers and pamphlets told of numerous boycotts, threats, and murders by Mormons. When Mormon Apostle Parley Parker Pratt was shot to death in May of 1857 by Arkansas native Hector H. McLean, who boasted widely of the murder, the killer never even faced charges, and newspapers reported the incident almost with joy. Anti-immigrationists pro-

tested the thousands of European Mormons heading into Utah.⁶⁴ Southern leader John Tyler, the former president's son, encouraged Buchanan to attack the Mormons in hopes of diverting the nation's attention from the divisive issue of slavery:

The popular idea is rapidly maturing that Mormonism should be put down and utterly extirpated. I believe that we can supercede the Negro-Mania with the almost universal excitement of an Anti-Mormon Crusade. Should you seize this question with a strong, fearless and resolute hand, the Country I am sure will rally to you with an earnest enthusiasm and the pipings of Abolitionism will hardly be heard amidst the thunders of the storm we shall raise.⁶⁵

Faced with pressure from all sides,⁶⁶ Buchanan decided to replace Young with a new governor and send to Utah an army of 2,500 soldiers, under Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston, to "put down insurrection."⁶⁷ The Mormons first learned of this expedition on June 24, 1857, during the ten-year anniversary party of the day the Mormons settled in Utah—the day when Brigham Young had proclaimed "Give me ten years and I shall ask no odds of the United States."⁶⁸

What could have motivated the Mormons?

As with any crime, one must look for a motive. Many possibilities have been proposed as to what drove the Mormons to carry out the massacre, if they were in fact the perpetrators.

News of the approaching U.S. army made the Mormons fearful. They resolved to defend themselves at all costs. Elder Charles W. Penrose said, "a plan had been prepared, if [the army] should come into the Territory, to burn down our houses, to destroy our property and leave the Territory a desert, a barren waste; for the people to flee to the mountains and leave nothing as a prey to their enemies."⁶⁹ One source, most likely a Mormon, but cryptically identified in Lyford's account as A.M.P.O., says, "the United States was considered as an enemy, and its subjects were treated as foes."⁷⁰

Soon after hearing of Johnston's army, Young declared martial law. In that declaration, he forbade "all armed forces of every description" from entering Utah Territory, commanded the Mormon forces to make ready "to repel any and all such invasion," and issued a pass policy which said "no person shall be allowed to pass or repass into, or through, or from this territory without a permit from the proper officer."⁷¹ Young's proclamation bears the date September 15, 1857—probably after the massacre—but since the dates of the massacre and the proclamation are disputed, the latter is worthy of note. Even if Young did issue the policy after the massacre occurred, the proclamation illustrates the climate that had prevailed in Utah since news arrived of the approaching United States forces.

Though Young himself denies it in an 1875 affidavit, the overwhelming majority of sources agree that Young forbade the Mormon people to sell food and supplies to emigrants. In his affidavit, Young says he counseled the Mormons not to sell grain for emigrants' livestock, because crops had been poor for several years.⁷² However, A.M.P.O. contests the claim that grain was scarce at that time, saying the harvest that year had been particularly plentiful, and says that George A. Smith rode through the south of Utah ahead of the emigrant train, giving "strict orders to sell no food or grain to emigrants, under pain of excommunication."⁷³ John D. Lee confirms the reason for Smith's mission, saying Smith told him that Young had given orders forbidding "the brethren of the different settlements to sell any of their grain to our enemies."⁷⁴

Buchanan may have underestimated the Mormons' determination to defend themselves. A movement called the Mormon Reformation was sweeping through Utah and increasing the Mormons' loyalty to their sect. Initiated by Young in the fall of 1856, the Reformation was a time of renewed religious fervor—"a vigorous call to repentance among the people."⁷⁵ Missionaries questioned each Mormon individually on morality and loyalty to the church, and after confessing his sins or answering satisfactorily, each person was re-baptized for a "renewal of covenants."

Mormon historian Juanita Brooks believes that the Reformation fostered fanaticism among those who hoped to avenge the Mormon blood shed in earlier persecutions and that “in awakening the Saints to their duties, the Reformation also seemed to set them more directly against the government officials who, they felt, were ruling without consent of the governed.”⁷⁶ Described by the anti-Mormon historian Josiah F. Gibbs as “the intensification of indescribable fanaticism, frenzy, and violence,”⁷⁷ the Reformation increased animosity between the Mormons and the rest of American society.

Amidst this religious renewal emerged the blood atonement doctrine, “saving the souls of sinners by shedding their blood.”⁷⁸ Young began preaching the doctrine in 1856. On September 21 of that year, he preached, “There are sins that men commit for which they cannot receive forgiveness in this world, or in that which is to come,” unless the sinners “have their blood spilt upon the ground, that the smoke thereof might ascent to heaven as an offering for their sins; and the smoking incense would atone for their sins, whereas, if such is not the case, they will stick to them and remain upon them in the spirit world.”⁷⁹ Young assured his people that anyone who knew this truth would be glad to have his blood spilled to save his soul; the killing of sinners “is to save them, not to destroy them.”⁸⁰

Sins worthy of blood atonement included ‘covenant breaking,’ apostasy, profaning ‘the name of the lord,’ murder, adultery, interracial sex or marriage, stealing, counterfeiting, and telling lies. Sinners were decapitated or slashed across the throat.⁸¹ In their 1997 article “Mormon Blood Atonement; Fact or Fantasy?” historians Jerald and Sandra Tanner offer numerous stories of blood atonement killings by church authorities. In his confession, John Doyle Lee reports many blood atonement murders. In one instance, Bishop William H. Dame of Parowan ordered a group called the Destroying Angels to kill Mormon William Laney for the grievous sin of feeding and housing a young man named Aden, who traveled with the Train that met its end at the Meadows. Knowing that Young had forbidden the selling of supplies to

travelers, Laney had assisted Aden anyway, because the young man's father had earlier saved Laney's life.⁸²

Some Mormons deny that blood atonement was ever practiced. Some assert that actions resulting from the preaching of that doctrine affected only Mormons—nobody outside the church. Explained history professor Gustive O. Larson in 1958, the effects of the blood atonement doctrine “would have been in relation to Mormon disciplinary action among its own members.”⁸³ However, Jerald and Sandra Tanner and John D. Lee believe that non-Mormons also suffered from the practice. In fact, Lee says, the ideas behind blood atonement had existed in Joseph Smith's regime. In Nauvoo, “it was then the rule that all enemies of Joseph Smith should be killed, and I know of many a man who was quietly put out of the way by the orders of Joseph and his Apostles.”⁸⁴

Lee asserts that the practice was continued in Utah:

It has always been a well understood doctrine of the Church that it was right and praiseworthy to kill every person who spoke evil of the Prophet. This doctrine had been strictly lived up to in Utah, until the Gentiles arrived in such great numbers that it became unsafe to follow the practice, but the doctrine is still believed, and no year passes without one or more of those who have spoken evil of Brigham Young being killed, in a secret manner.⁸⁵

Young's preachings on the subject, then, simply exposed to the public a doctrine that had long been practiced by the church leaders. Encouraging the practice among all Mormons undoubtedly increased the incidence of blood atonement murders. Young taught his people that the practice was not a necessary evil, but rather an act of benevolence. On February 8, 1857, in a sermon on the necessity of blood atonement, Young declared that the slaughtering of sinners “is the way to love mankind.”⁸⁶

Blood atonement, combined with many qualities attributed to the massacred emigrant company, could have prompted Mormon aggression. Special correspondent A.M.P.O. asserts that “certain disaffected Mormons joined the train to go to California,” and under blood atonement, sheltering apostates is a grievous

crime indeed.⁸⁷ A.M.P.O. also acknowledges other possible motives, noting that the decimated train was the richest company ever to cross Utah by the Southern route. “Their wagons, teams, and loose stock, alone, amounted to over \$300,000, and they had the costliest apparel and jewelry.”⁸⁸ Carleton, too, believes the train was wealthy and suggests that the Mormons’ greed contributed to their complex motive for attacking.⁸⁹

Members of the ill-fated wagon train may have behaved so aggressively that many Mormons would have felt justified in killing them under the blood atonement doctrine. The identity and condition of the massacred train are disputed, but most sources agree that the train was known as the Fancher party, a group traveling from Arkansas to California, and included a rude and rowdy group called the Missouri Wildcats, who had probably joined the Fancher Train for that leg of the journey. Leonard Arrington, Hoffman Birney, and Juanita Brooks are among many historians who confirm that the unruly Wildcats accompanied the wagon train in question.⁹⁰

Only J. H. Carleton, author of the U.S. government’s official report of the massacre, asserts that the train was not in fact the Fancher party, but rather the Perkins’ Train, named for its conductor. Carleton bases his claim on the reports of a United States army doctor by the name of Brewer, who stated three reasons for believing that the train in question was the Perkins’ Train: he considered both the time he last saw the Perkins’ Train and the train’s rate of travel and concluded that they would have reached Mountain Meadows just before the time of the massacre; a few times, Brewer had visited a group of unmarried ladies who had traveled with the Perkins’ Train in a strangely built carriage, which had “blazoned stag’s head upon the panels,” and which Brewer claimed the Mormons later possessed; Dr. Brewer later heard that the Perkins’s train had been demolished.⁹¹

Dr. Brewer’s impressions of the Perkins’ Train imply that they would never have behaved badly toward the Utah residents. “The train seemed to consist of respectable people, well-to-do in the world,” writes Carleton, relating Brewer’s report. “They were

well-dressed, were quiet, orderly, genteel; had fine stock; had three carriages along, and other evidences which went to show that this was one of the finest trains that ever had been seen to cross the plains."⁹²

It is remotely possible that the Perkins' Train joined another party and were among those killed, but it is unlikely that the whole Perkins' Train was there at all; the overwhelming majority of sources, written by both Mormons and non-Mormons, call the wagon train the Fancher Train and agree that the Missouri Wildcats were among them. Numerous sources report incendiary behavior by that rough bunch. Complained one Mormon, "They were the worst set that ever crossed the plains. They swore and boasted openly that they helped to shoot the guts out of Joe Smith, and that Buchanan's whole army was coming right behind them, and would kill every God Damn Mormon in Utah. They had two bulls which they called one 'Heber' and the other 'Brigham' and whipped 'em through every town, yelling and singing, blackguarding and blaspheming oaths that would have made your hair stand on end."⁹³

Brooks reports that the Wildcats also stole from the Mormons and showed off a pistol they said had delivered the fatal bullet to Joseph Smith.⁹⁴ Charles Penrose says stories circulated that the emigrants "would rob hen-roosts, and passing through the streets would flip off the heads of chickens with their whiptongs,"⁹⁵ but Penrose concedes that the rumors can be proven neither true nor false. While logically it would have been unwise for the emigrants to behave provocatively, so many sources confirm the rude behavior and so many people had persecuted the Mormons in the past that these reports are not impossible to believe.

Not only the emigrants' behavior, but also the train's origins might have prompted Mormon hostility; the Missouri Wildcats hailed from the state where the terrible Independence and Haun's Mill Massacres had occurred. Most sources say that the rest of the train came from Arkansas, the scene of Apostle Pratt's murder only four months earlier. That incident undoubtedly remained fresh in the minds of the Mormons at Cedar City.

Because of their history of oppression, many Mormons thirsted for revenge. Writes Arrington, the persecution that they endured “only confirmed the Mormons’ conviction that they were the heirs of the early Christian saints.”⁹⁶ Throughout the horrible persecutions in Ohio, Missouri and Illinois, the Mormons maintained their faith but grew steadily angrier at the residents of those states. The assassination of Joseph Smith promoted a vengeful fury throughout the church. A statement by Joseph Allen Stout illustrates the Mormons’ passion about the martyred Smith brothers: “I hope to avenge their blood, but if I do not I will teach my children and children’s children to the fourth generation [to seek vengeance] as long as there is one descendent of the murderers on the earth.”⁹⁷ Knowledge of the wagon train’s place of origin could have prompted the Mormons to attack in hope of revenge.

In this climate of impending war, of anti-Mormon aggressions and Mormon fervor and thirst for blood, occurred the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Many factors could have combined to drive the Mormons to murder. That they had a motive does not mean that the Mormons committed the despicable deed, but the climate in the Mormon church at the time of the crime could easily have prompted an attack on a provocative company of emigrants.

Based on circumstantial evidence, the Mormons seem likely culprits. Still, it is crucial also to study the other accused group, the local Indians. No historian disputes that the Indians participated in the crime, but the extent of their role in the planning and perpetration of the deed remains debated.

A History of the Paiute Indians

To assess the likelihood of the Indians attacking on their own initiative, one must first understand the conditions of their culture in the context of westward expansion, and to examine the possibility that the Mormons prompted the Indians to act, one must study the development of the Mormon-Indian relationship up to the time of the massacre.

The Indians in question, the Paiute tribe or branches of it sometimes referred to as the Pah Ute and Pah Vent, were probably not even a warlike tribe. Historians William Wise and Hoffman Birney portray the Paiute as peaceful, neither skilled at nor interested in fighting. They were poorly armed and disliked attacking those who might fight back, says Wise.⁹⁸ Birney writes, “The Paiute is not a fighter. He is a dedicated pacifist.”⁹⁹ The oft-repeated tale that the Indians failed to defeat the emigrants for many days testifies to the Indians’ lack of skill in combat.

Archeologists find that the Paiute had lived on the vast lands that are now Utah, Nevada, and northern Arizona since about A.D. 1,000. Without the influence of other cultures, the Paiute developed a society that involved farming, hunting, and gathering. They irrigated their fields and grew corn, pumpkins, squashes, watermelons, tepary beans, muskmelons, sunflowers, and a variety of herbs. In the varied terrain of the west, the Paiute took advantage of every natural resource, including an array of berries and fruits, piñon pine and mesquite trees, large game such as deer and antelope, and small game such as rabbits and squirrels. At the time of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the United States government had not uprooted this tribe from their homeland.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the Paiute had no real cause to dislike the government.

The Mormons, however, sought to teach the Paiute of the government’s evil. In a letter to Jacob Hamblin on August 4, 1857, Young wrote, “Continue the conciliatory policy toward the Indians—for they must learn that they have either got to help us or the United States will kill us both.”¹⁰¹ Young’s instructions to make peace with the Paiute were prompted not by respect for the Indians and their property—the Mormons took over much of the Paiute’s best land—but rather by the knowledge that the Mormons needed the alliance with the Indians against the pressures of the United States government.

In their book on the Paiute, Robert J. Franklin and Pamela A. Bunte report that the Mormons and the Paiute had fairly peaceful relations from the start. The Paiute actually helped the Mormons to set up settlements and “the Mormons acted as a

buffer between the Paiute and the steadily increasing numbers of wagon trains that passed through their territory.¹⁰² The forty-niners, who traveled across Utah seeking California's gold, "shot at and sometimes killed Paiute whenever they believed that the Indians threatened their livestock."¹⁰³ The Mormons cultivated the Paiute's resulting distrust of emigrants and shaped it into suspicion of non-Mormon Americans in general.

There may have been a few glitches in the Mormons' plan for an Indian alliance. T.B.H. Stenhouse reports early conflicts between the two groups. During the winter of 1849-1850, the Indians south of Salt Lake City "became very troublesome, stealing cattle, and finally firing upon the settlers."¹⁰⁴ Young summoned the militia, about one hundred men strong, and General Daniel H. Wells led them to drive the Indians onto the frozen lake, killing thirty of them and taking sixty prisoners, whom, it is said, the Mormons later killed.¹⁰⁵ This show of force frightened the Indians into peaceful behavior.¹⁰⁶ These hostile Indians could have been some group other than the Paiute, but it seems plausible that the Paiute tried to retaliate against the Mormons who drove them from their homes and irrigated fields.

With time, the Mormon-Indian relationship grew only more complicated. Historian Hoffman Birney explains that the Indians "were awakening to the fact that their hunting grounds were gone, the game killed, and that the cattle of the Mormons were grazing on the grasses the seeds of which were one of the Paiutes' principal food sources."¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, missionaries sent by Young into the Indian lands were gaining some converts to Mormonism. "Spiritual salvation for the Indians was the fundamental reason for the sending of those [missionaries]," writes Birney, "but coupled with the thought of religious regeneration was the far more mundane idea entertained by Brigham and his associates that those same Indians, converted to Mormonism and thoroughly loyal to the teachings of the church, might make excellent recruits for the military forces of Zion" in defense of Utah Territory against the United States government.¹⁰⁸

Through missionaries, the Mormons greatly influenced the Paiute's mindset. John D. Lee says that among the Indians, George A. Smith kindled hatred for the United States. He told them the government would kill all the Mormons and Indians unless the Indians prepared to join forces with the Mormons and fight Johnston's army. Smith said the Indians had to do as the Mormons told them and then "the Mormons would always keep them from want and sickness and give them guns and ammunition to hunt and kill game with, and would also help the Indians against their enemies when they went to war."¹⁰⁹ Smith's direct requests for help against Johnston's army mark the apex of the Mormons' long campaign for the Indians' sympathy. Even if the Mormons did not instruct the Paiute to murder, they did foster animosity toward all Americans except for Mormons.

What could have motivated the Indians?

Historians have found only a few possible motives for the Indians to initiate the assault on the emigrants. If the wagon train was indeed as wealthy as some reports claim, the plunder might have lured the Indians to attack. All other proposed motives for the killing are based on revenge. Some sources suggest that the Paiute intended only to rob the train but grew enraged and bloodthirsty when the emigrants shot down a few of their men.¹¹⁰ A few Mormon writers describe isolated incidents of offenses by this emigrant company against the Indians.

Mormon Thomas Waters Cropper, telling later in life a story of when he was fifteen years old, relates an incident he witnessed in which an emigrant man "insisted on examining an Indian's bow and arrows but the Indian refused and jabbed an arrow into the man's breast. The man whipped out a revolver and shot the Indian dead."¹¹¹ When considering this as motivation for the Indians to attack the emigrants, one must remember that this story comes from a Mormon, who might have wanted to promote the notion that the Indians alone initiated the massacre; the story might not be true.

John D. Lee reports that Colonel Isaac C. Haight told him the emigrant company had given the Indians at Corn Creek poisoned meat, “which had killed several of them, and their Chief, Konosh, was on the trail of the emigrants, and would soon attack them.”¹¹² Penrose says the emigrants “poisoned beef and gave it to the Indians” and later “caught an Indian, tied him up to a wagon wheel and whipped him severely.”¹¹³ However, it seems unlikely that a group of travelers, vulnerable in their migrant condition, would exhibit such destructive wickedness.

Most sources mention reports of a poisoned spring. Cropper says the emigrant train poisoned the Big Spring at Corn Creek “and a number of cattle died around the spring. The Indians ate some of the meat and several Indians died from the effects.”¹¹⁴ Mormon Jacob Hamblin also relates the story of the poisoned Corn Creek spring.¹¹⁵ Mormon historian Leonard Arrington says the emigrants had poisoned some of the Indians’ wells.¹¹⁶ However, Brooks points out that the poisoning could easily have resulted from loco weed or some other poisonous plant.¹¹⁷

Deputy United States Marshall Rogers thoroughly examined the spring and reports, “It sends out a stream as large as a man’s body, and a barrel of arsenic would not poison it.”¹¹⁸ It seems unlikely that the emigrants intentionally poisoned the spring, but the death of cattle, whatever the cause, could easily have prompted the rumor that the immigrants maliciously contaminated the water. That the Indians grew angry at the immigrants for the deaths of the men who ate that cattle seems plausible, whether the emigrants truly deserve the blame or not.

Reverend C. P. Lyford believes that the Indians at Corn Creek befriended the emigrant company and gave them thirty bushels of corn, the only food the travelers were able to obtain in the Mormons’ territory.¹¹⁹ Lyford therefore finds that all stories of the Indians being poisoned are false.

The story of the poisoning is a possible truth at best. The other motives suggested seem only remotely plausible. All of these stories could have been fabricated by the Mormons in order to

make it seem that the Indians had a reason for attacking the emigrants.

Conflicting Accounts

Paiute Blamed; Mormon Involvement Denied

The Mormons initially planned to blame the massacre on the Indians and deny taking part in it.¹²⁰ Therefore, after the crime, most initial reports described it as an Indian massacre. These accounts have basically been proven false, but they help to illustrate the astounding array of stories that were told about the same event.

One Mormon bishop asserts that because the emigrants had poisoned some Indians, “Indian runners were sent all over Southern Utah to arouse the tribes to vengeance.”¹²¹ Many Mormons told stories of this kind in order to vindicate their brethren.

Jacob Hamblin’s Account: Carleton visited Mormon leader and Indian agent Jacob Hamblin, who owns a ranch at the Mountain Meadows. Hamblin was among the missionaries sent out to convert the Indians of Utah. He spoke the Paiute language well and had great influence over them. Birney describes him as “towering above all as an apostle, scout, pioneer, and adventurer.”¹²² Carleton recorded word for word Hamblin’s account of the massacre and included it in his *Special Report*. Hamblin says that before the massacre he camped with the wagon train at Corn Creek, eight miles south of Fillmore City.

He describes the emigrants as “ordinary frontier ‘home-spun’ people”¹²³ but says a group of rough, rude outsiders who “calculated to get the ill will of the inhabitants”¹²⁴ traveled with the train. The emigrants, mostly from Arkansas, had with them a few mules, twenty-five horses, between four and five hundred cattle, and about thirty wagons. Answering the emigrants’ questions about the land they would be traveling, Hamblin advised them to

camp at the Meadows before crossing the desert and keep about half of their men on the lookout for Indians who might steal livestock. As he proceeded to Great Salt Lake City, Hamblin heard rumors that the emigrants had poisoned a spring at Corn Creek.¹²⁵

Hamblin was in Salt Lake City at the time of the massacre but had returned to his ranch on September 18 when he learned that the Indians had killed off the emigrants at the Meadows. Mormon Dudley Leavett told him that “‘all hell’ could not stop [the Indians] from killing or from at least robbing”¹²⁶ another approaching train. At his ranch on September 18, Hamblin found his wife in charge of three little girls, one of whom—a one-year-old—“had been shot through one of her arms below the elbow by a large ball, breaking both bones and cutting the arm half off.”¹²⁷ Carleton quotes Hamblin as saying the Indians admitted full responsibility:

The Indians have often told me that they made an attack on the emigrants between daylight and sunrise as the men were standing around the camp fires, killing and wounding 15 at the first discharge, which was delivered from the ravine near the spring close to the wagons and from a hill to the west. That the emigrants immediately corralled their wagons and threw up an intrenchment to shelter themselves from the balls. When I first saw the ditch it was about four feet deep and the bank about two feet high. The Indians say they then run off the stock but kept parties at the spring to prevent the emigrants from getting to the water, the emigrants firing upon them every time they showed themselves, and they returning the fire. This was kept up for six or seven days. The Indians say that they lost but one man killed and three or four wounded.

At the end of six or seven days, they say, a man among them who could talk English called to the emigrants and told them if they would go back to the settlements and leave all their property, especially their arms, they would spare their lives, but if they did not do so they would kill the whole of them. The emigrants agreed to this and started back on the road toward my ranch. About a mile from the spring there are some scrub-oak bushes and tall sage growing on each side of the road and close to it. Here a large body of Indians lay in ambush, who, when the emigrants approached, fell upon them in their defenseless condition and with bows and arrows and stones and guns and knives murdered all, without regard to sex or age, except a few infant children, seventeen of which have since been recovered.¹²⁸

In Hamblin's autobiography ("as taken down by James A. Little") published in 1881, he devotes only one paragraph to the massacre. He relates, as he also told Carleton, hearing that the Indians had killed the entire train of emigrants. However, Hamblin also reports that "John D. Lee told [him] that the Indians attacked the company and that he and some other white men joined in the perpetration of the deed."¹²⁹ There is a marked discrepancy between this report and the one he gave Carleton; in the earlier story, Hamblin did not admit to the participation of any of the Mormons. Not only does this discrepancy call Hamblin's account into question, but also his repeated use of "The Indians have often told me" or "the Indians say" sounds suspect.

Mrs. Hamblin's Account: Hamblin's eldest wife, who was at the ranch during the massacre, gives her account in terms of the people who visited and passed by her house. She says the wagon train was large—about fifty wagons—and it passed the Hamblin house on about September first. The next morning, a man came asking to buy some butter and cheese, neither of which Mrs. Hamblin had. Quite amiable, the emigrant told her that the wagon train would remain at the Meadows "a while to recruit their stock."¹³⁰ Unlike her husband, Mrs. Hamblin gives no report of rude behavior by any members of the train.

All remained quiet until a few days later, when she heard a long volley of gunshots and afterwards occasional firing. She reports,

Some white men came to our house and said the Indians had attacked the train because the emigrants had poisoned a spring near Fillmore. The white men said they had been here at the spring and tried to stop the fighting, but that the Indians had become enraged and were determined to kill the emigrants; that they were gathering for this purpose from all quarters. The Indians were frequently passing and repassing our house. They said I need not be afraid; they were friendly to me and would not hurt me, but that they would kill the emigrants.¹³¹

After about a week of small bouts of gunfire, Mrs. Hamblin heard "a fire greater than before and more distinct."¹³² Shortly afterward, a nephew of John D. Lee drove up to the Hamblin

house in a wagon full of seventeen crying children, their clothes wet with blood. She took three of the children, sisters, into her home.¹³³

Carleton notes that during Mrs. Hamblin's narration, "her husband took good care to be present, and also took very good care to give her occasional promptings, although it has been perceived he was at Salt Lake City when the facts she related occurred."¹³⁴ Also, it seems unlikely that the Indians would have told Mrs. Hamblin they planned to kill the emigrants. Her story, like her husband's, leaves room for doubt.

Albert Hamblin's Account: Carleton also relates the story of the massacre as told by Albert Hamblin, a Snake Indian boy about seventeen or eighteen years old, whom Jacob Hamblin had bought in 1850 and converted to Mormonism. When the wagon train passed the ranch near sunset, Albert was herding the Hamblins' sheep. He and another converted Indian boy named John then went to cut wood on a hilltop, and they saw the emigrants set up camp at the Meadows. The morning of the fourth day since the arrival of the wagon train, Albert awakened to the sound of gun shots. That day, as he and John herded sheep near the Meadows, they saw the Indians drive off the emigrants' stock and "shoot some of the cattle."¹³⁵ They also saw the emigrants and the Indians shooting at each other. This fighting continued for about a week.¹³⁶

Albert says, "I asked an Indian what he was killing those people for. He was mad, and told me unless I kept 'my mouth shut' he would kill me."¹³⁷ Albert also gives a peculiar description of the Mormons' behavior during the massacre: "Three men came down from Cedar City to our house while the fighting was going on. They said they came after cattle. Other men passed to and fro from Santa Clara to our house during the nights. The three men from Cedar City stayed about the house a while 'pitching horseshoe quoits' while the fighting was on, when they afterwards went back to Cedar City."¹³⁸

Albert witnessed the final massacre:

One afternoon, near night, after they had fought nearly a week, John and I saw the women and children and some men leave the wagons and go up the road toward our house. There were no Indians with them.

John and I could see where the Indians were hid in the oak bushes and sage right by the side of the road a mile or more on their route; and I said to John, I would like to know what the emigrants left their wagons for, as they were going into 'a worse fix than ever they saw.' The women were on ahead with the children. The men were behind. Altogether 'twas a big crowd. Soon as they got to the place where the Indians were hid in the bushes each side of the road the Indians pitched right out onto them and commenced shooting them with guns and bows and arrows, and cut some of the men's throats with knives. The men run in every direction, the Indians after them, and yelling and whooping. Soon as the women and children saw the Indians spring out of the bushes they all cried out so loud John and I heard them.

The women scattered and tried to hide in the bushes, but the Indians shot them down; two girls ran up the slope toward the east about a quarter of a mile; John and I ran down and tried to save them; the girls hid in some bushes. A man, who is an Indian doctor, also told the Indians not to kill them. The girls then came out and hung around him for protection, he trying to keep the Indians away. The girls were crying out loud. The Indians came up and seized the girls by their hands and their dresses and pulled and pushed them away from the doctor and then shot them. By this time it was dark, and the other Indians down by the road had got nearly through killing all the others. They were about half an hour killing the people from the time they first sprang out upon them from the bushes.¹³⁹

Albert says that the surviving children were brought to the ranch not by Mormons but by the Indians and that the small child with the shattered arm was a boy. Also, Albert reports that the Indians got all of the wagon train's flour and almost all of the livestock, which they killed for food.¹⁴⁰ Obviously, Albert's loyalty was with the Mormons, not the Paiute; he was not even from that tribe. Albert's story is important, because he claims to have witnessed the massacre. However, it seems very unlikely that men would idly pitch horseshoes within earshot of an armed conflict, and because it is basically accepted as fact that some Mormons

were present at the massacre, Albert's story of seeing no Mormons at the scene seems a lie.

Had Mormons not participated in the crime, there would have been no reason for rumors to that effect to start. Most likely, the Mormons realized they needed to conceal their participation in the horrible deed, so they invented a story that laid complete responsibility on the Paiute. Killings by Indians were common enough at the time for such a story to seem plausible.

However, most accounts say that Mormons helped with the crime. Sallie Baker, one of the emigrant children spared in the massacre, remembers the horrible scene. Writing in 1940, she recalls, "The Mormons made the men wait until the women and children were a good ways ahead before starting the men out single file, about ten feet apart."¹⁴¹ Sallie and her wounded parents rode in the first wagon. She was sitting in her father's lap when the bullet that killed him grazed her ear and scarred it permanently. The killers deemed her too young to tell the tale, but the incredible brutality of the slaughter imprinted the scene permanently on her memory; she saw her own parents murdered beside her.

Baker's account consists mostly of descriptions of the horrors she witnessed. That she would remember the horrible scene despite her youth at the time is easy to believe. Also, she has no obvious reason to fabricate the story of Mormon involvement in the massacre. Her account seems trustworthy.

Local Mormons Blamed; High Leaders Vindicated

Simply establishing that Mormons participated helps only slightly to assign responsibility. It is difficult to discern whether local Mormons or high Mormon leaders deserve the blame. A large number of sources blame the local Mormons and exonerate Brigham Young from any wrongdoing.

Wallace Stegner's Account: In his 1942 book, *Mormon Country*, Wallace Stegner attributes the Mormon aggression not to orders but to "unbridled zeal among the Mormon people."¹⁴² Stegner

believes that the Mormons provoked the Indians to feel anger toward the Fancher Train. The Indians attacked first, he says, and met with great difficulty, so Southern Mormon priests John D. Lee, Isaac Haight, Philip Klingon Smith and others came to the Indians' aid. Those local Mormon leaders posed as a rescue team, then killed, while carrying a truce flag, all of the emigrants but a few children.

Stegner downplays the importance of the massacre, declaring "the trouble that a group of fanatic brethren from Cedar City had brought upon the church was less important than the trouble that the whole church was in with the government."¹⁴³ Stegner does not remotely prove Brigham Young's innocence. That the Mormon people were zealous does not preclude the involvement of higher church leaders. Also, it was Young who fomented the fervor that according to Stegner led to the crime.

Leonard Arrington's and Davis Bitton's Account: In their 335-page book, *The Mormon Experience*, (1979) Mormons Arrington and Bitton spend less than one page on the Mountain Meadows Massacre. They call the massacre "obviously out of line with Brigham Young's instructions to avoid bloodshed" and "historically understandable if not pardonable when viewed as the result of a combination of Mormon hysteria during the early stages of the Utah War, the rumors that this company was a reconnoitering party in advance of the main federal army, and the misbehavior of some members of the Fancher Train."¹⁴⁴ Arrington and Bitton declare that the Indians also had "determined to attack the train because its members had poisoned some of their wells."¹⁴⁵

Arrington and Bitton give only a few details of the planning and perpetration of the massacre: the combined forces of Mormons and Indians killed 120 people; some Mormon leaders of Southern Utah had sent a message to Brigham Young inquiring what to do, but Young's instructions to let the Fancher party pass arrived "just hours too late;" afterward, Young was at first told that the Indians alone had done the killing, and only later did he learn that Mormons had participated, at which point he dismissed and excommunicated some local leaders.¹⁴⁶

This account seems deliberately to vindicate the Mormons as much as possible. Arrington and Bitton are careful to absolve Young of any responsibility. They misinterpret, as many pro-Mormon historians do, Young's instructions to avoid bloodshed; the sentences preceding that order reveal that it referred not to the killing of enemies but to the Mormons' plan to flee to the hills so that no *Mormon* blood would be shed. This excerpt from Young's letter to Colonel Dame on September 14, 1857, clearly shows that Young advocated guerilla warfare tactics, intending for the Mormon forces to attack the approaching army "from ambush." Therefore, Young did not oppose shedding the blood of Buchanan's soldiers:

In case the U.S. government should send out an overpowering force, we intend to desolate the Territory and conceal our families, Stock and all of our effects in the fastnesses of the mountains where they will be safe while the men way lay our enemies, *attack them from ambush*, stampede their animals, take the supply trains, cut off detachments, and parties sent to Kanyons for wood or on other service. To lay waste everything that will burn, houses, fences, trees, fields, grass that they cannot find a particle of anything that will be of use to them, not even sticks to make a fire for to cook their suppers. To wast away our enemies and *lose none, that will be our mode of warfare.*

What we said in regard to saving the grain and provisions we say again let there be no waste save life always when it is possible, we do not wish to shed a drop of blood if it can be avoided.¹⁴⁷ (Italics supplied.)

Arrington and Bitton even excuse Young's failure to act immediately after the massacre by explaining that for a long time he did not know that Mormons had been involved. However, it is ridiculous to assert that Young would believe, after receiving a letter specifically suggesting killing the emigrants, that the Indians were solely responsible for the crime.

Arrington and Bitton also say nothing about the identity of the organizers and leaders of the massacre. The explanation that the Mormons and Indians, each for their separate reasons, joined in "an explosion of passion"¹⁴⁸ implies that both groups decided separately and simultaneously to rise up against the emigrants. More likely, the Mormons organized and led the forces, and these

Mormon historians avoided that detail, which condemns their brethren. It is possible that the authors could have done this even without consciously trying to obscure the truth. However, they certainly go too far in deeming the ruthless slaughtering of defenseless men, women, and children “pardonable.”

Hoffman Birney’s Account: Writing in 1931 and forming his account of the massacre based on records from the Mormon church, War Department archives, and the transcript of Lee’s trial, historian Hoffman Birney declares, “The massacre took place, that is unquestionable, but Brigham and the church heads did not order it, had no advance knowledge of it, and the most gross distortion of the evidence cannot implicate them as accessories before the fact.”¹⁴⁹ Birney even asserts that Young gave explicit orders to allow the Fancher Train to pass through safely.¹⁵⁰

Acting on the orders of Isaac C. Haight, John D. Lee and several others provoked the local Indians to attack the emigrants. The Mormons assured the Indians of Divine Protection—that they could make the attack in absolute safety. At dawn, early in September, the Indians made the first attack, killing seven emigrants and wounding sixteen. The rest of the Fancher party hastily arranged their wagons in a defensive position and dug rifle pits. Their return fire killed or wounded several Indians. With the realization that they could neither make the attack in safety nor defeat the emigrants with one volley, “the redskins promptly lost interest.”¹⁵¹ They withdrew and sent a message to Lee notifying him of their failure and requesting help.

That night, three of the emigrant men approached a Mormon camp. The Mormons killed one and wounded another, who returned with the unharmed man to the circle of wagons. The next day, as more Mormons gathered at the meadows, the Indians made another ineffective, long-range attack. Some of the Indians then left, and the rest refused to make a charge. “Force had failed, but treachery was to prove triumphant.”¹⁵² Through Major John M. Higbee, Lee received orders from Haight to “kill all old enough to tell tales.”¹⁵³ Following a plan that had been formulated in advance—Birney does not specify by whom—Lee entered the

circle of wagons under a truce flag. Soon afterward, other Mormons joined Lee. They told the emigrants that the Indians, though still furious, had agreed to spare the emigrants if they left their arms and ammunition and followed the Mormons back to their settlement. The emigrants complied, probably because they had exhausted their supply of ammunition.

Into the first wagon were loaded the seventeen young children who were spared, into the second, some of the women and the wounded. A group of women followed, and the men, single file, brought up the rear, accompanied by the Mormon militia. Major John M. Higbee, facing the rows of militia, issued the fatal order, "Do your duty to God!"¹⁵⁴ The killing of those one hundred and twenty emigrants was completed in less than three minutes. Some Indians who had lain in hiding behind the ridge joined the militia "in completing the gory task, in killing the wounded, in stripping the bodies, in looting the wagons, and in rounding up the several hundred head of cattle and horses."¹⁵⁵

Birney's story of the killing matches many other accounts in most details and therefore seems true. However, in his assertion of Brigham Young's innocence, he ignores some crucial points. Young may have ordered the brethren to allow the train to pass in peace, but if he did so, his orders definitely arrived too late; it is ridiculous to suggest that his subordinates would ever disobey his orders. Also, his issuing such an order would show that he knew of the Cedar City brethren's murderous intent and was therefore an accessory after the fact in his denial of their involvement in the crime.

Young Held Responsible

In holding Young responsible for the atrocity, a few historians say he ordered the massacre, while others believe he created a climate that made the massacre inevitable. His preaching certainly provides some incriminating evidence. In one blood atonement sermon, Young preached, "If any miserable scoundrels

come here, cut their throats.”¹⁵⁶ Rachel Lee, wife of John D. Lee, relayed to her husband Young’s decree that as soon as any of Buchanan’s men attack any Mormon people or property, “their blood shall flow to atone for it.”¹⁵⁷

Young’s handling of the two trials of John D. Lee implicates him as an accessory after the fact. It is widely agreed upon now that Lee was simply a scapegoat and not solely responsible for the massacre. Pressure mounted over the years, even among the Mormon people, for justice to be done for the crime. Young excommunicated Lee in 1870 and two years later sent him to live concealed in the wilderness. In order to shield Lee from arrest, church officials always sent him word if non-Mormon officers came near. During this time, Lee devoutly defended Young, though it was widely told that he knew some incriminating information about the church leader. When Congress established a new law giving federal courts jurisdiction over Utah criminal cases, federal prosecutors arrested Lee and offered him leniency and money if he would incriminate Young and other church officials, but Lee refused.¹⁵⁸

Before Lee’s first trial, Young forbade any Mormon to testify against him. The four non-Mormon jury members voted for a conviction, but all eight Mormons favored acquittal. Before the second trial, however, Young ordered the Mormons to place all of the blame for the massacre on Lee. “Witnesses now testified that the killing had been Lee’s idea and Lee’s alone.”¹⁵⁹ The all-Mormon jury unanimously voted guilty. Young sacrificed his loyal friend in order to exonerate himself and his church. His first orders not to testify against Lee clearly obstructed justice. His second orders prompted witnesses to lie. Furthermore, that Young willingly sent Lee to death shows he initially covered up the crime not to protect his Cedar City brethren, but to protect himself. He is clearly guilty of some wrongdoing, but debate still rages over the extent of his involvement.

Reverend C. P. Lyford’s Account: Reverend C.P. Lyford, in his 1886 book *The Mormon Problem*, includes what he calls “probably the most complete and truthful account of this dreadful event ever

published.”¹⁶⁰ First published in the “Chicago Tribune” in 1875, the account is signed A.M.P.O., whom Lyford calls a special correspondent. This correspondent asserts that an influential church leader, probably Young, planned early on to cause this emigrant company’s demise. His first step was forbidding the people to sell provisions. Though rumors had previously circulated of the Mormons’ kindness to travelers, says A.M.P.O., this emigrant company “found, to their great surprise, that nothing could be procured of the Mormons for love or money” and would therefore have died of starvation had they not been slaughtered.¹⁶¹

A.M.P.O. finds conclusive evidence that Brigadier-General George A. Smith, Colonel William H. Dame, Lieutenant-Colonel Isaac C. Haight and Major John D. Lee held a war council in Parowan and planned every detail of the killing. The correspondent concedes that no evidence exists that proves Young an accessory before the fact but points out that “he was commander-in-chief of the Utah militia, and it hardly seems possible to suppose that the militia would be detailed to do such sanguinary work without some sanction from Salt Lake City.”¹⁶²

The correspondent’s reasoning that “plunder, lust, and personal animosity would never have prompted men to commit such a cruel, merciless slaughter, had not the teachings of a fanatical religious belief sanctioned the crime”¹⁶³ is very persuasive. That A.M.P.O. expresses an opinion but still acknowledges the lack of definitive evidence in some areas makes this account worthy of consideration. The author finds Young responsible but does not attempt to conclude for sure whether or not he specifically ordered the massacre.

James Henry Carleton’s Account: Brevet Major James Henry Carleton, who compiled his *Special Report of the Mountain Meadow Massacre* in 1859, believes that “Brigham Young sent letters south, authorizing, if not commanding, that the train should be destroyed.”¹⁶⁴ This report is confirmed by Paiute chiefs Jackson and Touche. Both men said letters were brought to them containing Young’s orders to kill the emigrants. Carleton also believes Judge Cradlebaugh’s account that Young had preached a sermon, just

after the rich train entered Utah territory, saying “that up to that moment he had protected emigrants who had passed through, but now he would turn the Indians loose upon them. A sermon good,” writes Carleton, “coming from [Young], as a letter of marque to these land pirates who listened to him as an oracle.”¹⁶⁵

In addition to the strong anti-American sentiment preached by the Mormon leaders and the knowledge that the United States army was approaching Utah, Carleton emphasizes the train’s Arkansas origins and obvious wealth as motives for the crime. He believes the company killed at the meadows was the Perkins’ Train—not the ordinary “homespun” group spoken of by Jacob Hamblin, but the refined, “genteel” group that Doctor Brewer describes.

Carleton’s version of the story is that John D. Lee, Isaac C. Haight, and John M. Higby brought together fifty or sixty Mormons, all painted and disguised as Indians, and a large group of Indians from Cedar City, Harmony, and Washington City. First, they had the Indians drive the cattle away from the wagons. Then, they began shooting. The gentiles fired back, killing at least one Indian. After days of fighting unsuccessfully, the Mormons adopted a new strategy. They decided to “send some few down and pretend to be friends.”¹⁶⁶ Lee, Haight, Higbee, and one other man removed their disguises and went down in their wagons, as if doing their normal business of the day. The emigrants sent out a little girl dressed in white with a white kerchief, which she waved as a surrender flag. The Mormons then waved a white flag in return and approached the camp. Some emigrants emerged from the camp, and soon the doomed procession headed toward the scrub oak bushes, where the Indians hid. Carleton says it was Lee who gave the command to fire.¹⁶⁷

After the massacre, “the clothing stripped from the corpses, bloody and with bits of flesh in it, shredded by the bullets from the persons of the poor creatures who wore it, was placed in the cellar of the tithing office (an official building), where it lay about three weeks. It is said the cellar still smells of it even to this day,”¹⁶⁸ and Klingon Smith went immediately to Salt Lake City to see Young,

who told them that Lee should distribute the carriages, wagons, and rifles among the Mormons, some of the cattle to the Indians, and the rest of the livestock to the poor. Carleton claims that at the time of his report, in 1859, Lee had one of the wagons and the Indians had only a couple of rifles.

Carleton's obvious contempt for the Mormon faith detracts from his credibility. He includes grotesque anti-Mormon propaganda in his book, calling the Mormons "latter-day Devils"¹⁶⁹ and declaring,

Evil must always exist as long as the Mormons themselves may exist...

The expenses of the Army in Utah, past and to come, the massacre at the Mountain Meadows, the unnumbered other crimes which have been and will yet be committed by this community, are but preliminary gusts of the whirlwind our government has reaped and is yet to reap for the wind it has sowed in permitting the Mormons ever to gain foothold within our borders.

They are an ulcer upon the body politic. An ulcer which it needs more than cautery to cure. It must have excision, complete and thorough extirpation, before we can ever hope for safety or tranquility. This is no rhetorical phrase made by a flourish of the pen, but is really what will prove to be an earnest and stubborn fact. This brotherhood may be contemplated from any point of view, and but one conclusion can be arrived at concerning it. The Thugs of India were an inoffensive, moral, law-abiding people in comparison.¹⁷⁰

The line "they are an ulcer upon the body politic" resembles too closely for coincidence a line from the influential Senator Stephen Douglas's Springfield Speech in Illinois in 1856. He called Mormonism "the loathsome ulcer of the body politic."¹⁷¹ Carleton has plagiarized from Douglas's address.

Carleton also does not say where his story comes from. That it appears in smaller text makes it seem to be a quotation, but he does not say from whom. He does say that a dentist from Camp Floyd, named Whitelock, would confirm the story; Whitelock had talked to a Mormon, who apparently gave him a similar account.¹⁷² Still, Carleton's sources, unidentified, seem questionable.

He refers to "the obscure minds of miserable savages,"¹⁷³ illustrating his scorn for the Indians, but ultimately, he seems to

hate the Indians less than he hates the Mormons. On Young's alleged letter authorizing the massacre, Chief Touche said an interpreter named Huntingdon brought that letter.¹⁷⁴ Huntingdon could easily have tricked the Indians, because they could not read the letter themselves. Therefore, the Indians had no way of knowing what the letter actually said. Carleton never questions their testimony. He is obviously bent on proving the Mormons worthy of extermination, so his account should not be trusted.¹⁷⁵

Josiah F. Gibbs's Account: Josiah F. Gibbs, in his obviously anti-Mormon publication of 1910, does not claim that Young sent a letter specifically ordering the massacre, but says that the preachings of Mormon Prophets and proclamations issued by Young led directly to the massacre. He believes the wagon train was doomed as soon as it entered Mormon territory.

Gibbs charges that Young had actually proclaimed martial law in the Territory before the massacre, then attempted to cover up his complicity in the crime by changing the date of his proclamation to September 15, "for the purpose of destroying the plain evidence that the massacre of the emigrants was authorized by the proclamation, inasmuch as the emigrants had no 'permit' to pass through the territory."¹⁷⁶ On September 14, Young sent a letter to Dame saying, "In regard to letting the people pass and repass, or travel through the territory, this applies to all strangers and suspected persons. Yourself and Brother Isaac C. Haight, in your districts, are authorized to give such permits."¹⁷⁷ The wording of this excerpt, the first mention of the pass policy in that letter, sounds as if Young assumed that Dame had already heard of the pass policy.

Gibbs also cites a conversation between Lee and Haight on September 3, about twelve days before the date of the proclamation. Haight said that "all in authority" wished the emigrants dead, because they had no right to traverse the Territory without a written pass. Gibbs also points out that "President Young received word on the 24th of July, 1857, that Johnston's army was en route to Utah, and it is unbelievable that the astute Brigham would have waited until September 15" to declare martial law.¹⁷⁸

Gibbs blames Isaac C. Haight for ordering the killing of the emigrants. He writes that Haight summoned John D. Lee to Cedar City and met with him all night “in an unused ironworks building”¹⁷⁹ to formulate a plan for disposing of the Fancher party. The emigrants deserved punishment, because they had “boasted of having aided in driving the ‘Lord’s chosen people’ from Missouri, boasted of helping to murder the Lord’s greatest prophet, Joseph Smith, and threatened to raise an army in California and aid in exterminating the Mormons.”¹⁸⁰ Haight planned to stir up the local Indians by telling them that the “Gentiles were at war with the Mormons and Indians, and that the emigrants were going to California with the avowed purpose of returning with an army to exterminate the Mormons and Indians.”¹⁸¹ By having the Indians make the attack, Haight intended to obscure Mormon responsibility for the killing.¹⁸²

Knowing he had Bishop Klingon Smith’s support, Haight then proposed his plan at a meeting of the priesthood three or four days later. After lengthy discussion, “a few of the elders opposed it, while others warmly approved of the measure that was so in harmony with the teachings of the ‘prophets’ and with the ‘spirit of the reformation.’”¹⁸³ But for the intervention of Mormon official Laban Morril, the Saints would have carried out the plan immediately. Morril, who apparently possessed great power and influence in the Mormon church, demanded that all action be suspended until a messenger could travel to Salt Lake City and return with Brigham Young’s orders on the matter. Gibbs gives no details, but implies that the first attack was made before the message reached its destination.¹⁸⁴

He reports that the Indians made the initial attack with no Mormon leaders present and summoned Lee only when they did not achieve the easy victory the Mormons had promised. Gibbs relays Lee’s claim that he found the Indians in a frenzy over the deaths of three men who had died in the emigrants’ crossfire and sent a message to Haight pleading, “For my sake, for the people’s sake, for God’s sake, send me some help to protect and save these emigrants.”¹⁸⁵

However, Lee had not the power to enforce his wish for peace. On the fourteenth, a group of about forty local Mormon men, including high priest William C. Stewart, Major John M. Higbee, Bishop Klingon Smith, and Samuel McMurdy, made camp at a Leachy Spring, about seventeen miles from the Mountain Meadows. The previous night, William A. Aden (earlier housed by Mormon William Laney) and two other emigrants had left their improvised fort in search of help. When they reached the Mormon camp and explained their wishes, Stewart and another Mormon man fired at the emigrants, killing Aden. The other two men escaped and returned safely to the emigrant camp, bringing the tragic news that not only the Indians, but also the Mormons, were plotting against them.¹⁸⁶

On the morning of the sixteenth, the Mormons held an invocation to ask God's blessing for the atrocious acts they planned. "Under the blue vault of heaven, from which the angels must have looked down with infinite sorrow on the hellish scene, those wretched victims of unquestioning obedience, of superstition and fanaticism, knelt with heads bowed in abject servility to an alien God."¹⁸⁷ Around two o'clock that afternoon, William Bateman, wielding a white flag, and John D. Lee approached the emigrant camp, negotiated briefly with a man named Hamilton, and led the segregated procession of emigrants down the road.¹⁸⁸ Fifty militiamen and two hundred Indians participated in the killing. "According to [Indian interpreter] Nephi Johnson less than three minutes were consumed in the work of death."¹⁸⁹

Gibbs's overt anti-Mormonism, like Carleton's, makes his claims seem questionable. On the back page of the book, an advertisement for *Lights and Shadows of Mormonism* reads,

With its bogus claim to Divine Origin, and to the Divine Right of its "Prophets" to rule the world politically as well as spiritually; with its enormous wealth and political solidarity by which it compels the influence of Manufacturers, Merchants, Railroad Magnates, United States Representatives, Senators, even Presidents, in the protection and perpetuity of POLYGAMY.

Mormonism is an EVER-INCREASING MENACE to Individual Effort, and to Personal Liberty as enunciated in the Constitution and embodied in National and State laws of this Republic.

The recently published volume of 535 pages (illustrated) entitled *Lights and Shadows of Mormonism*, by Josiah F. Gibbs, will guide you by sure and easy paths to the “inner temple” of the Mormon Anarchism that is sleeplessly working to overthrow the American Republic.

Gibbs’ logic on the changed date of the pass policy is persuasive, though not entirely conclusive. His description of the slaughter seems sound. Still, his account must be carefully examined and supplemented with other evidence, because of his obvious anti-Mormon prejudice.

John D. Lee’s Account: Lee asserts that Brigham Young condoned the massacre and the Mormons who participated do not deserve the blame, because they acted on the orders of their superiors. “There was a reign of terror in Utah,” Lee declares, “and many a man had been put out of the way for disobedience, and I had made some narrow escapes,”¹⁹⁰ so even though he and some other Mormons wished to spare the emigrant company, they dared not question their leaders’ command.

The orders Lee received through Major John M. Higbee came from Colonel Isaac C. Haight, who was President of that Stake (sic) of Zion—subordinate only to William H. Dame in all of southern Utah both in the Mormon priesthood and in command of the Iron Military District. “The word and command of Isaac C. Haight were the law in Cedar City, and to disobey his orders was certain death, be they right or wrong.”¹⁹¹ However, Lee does not blame Haight for the massacre, because he believes that Haight’s orders came from higher authorities. A visit from Apostle George Albert Smith convinced Lee of Brigham Young’s complicity in the gruesome crime.

About ten days before the arrival of the doomed emigrant company, George A. Smith visited Lee at his Washington City home asking for Lee’s assistance to travel through the south of Utah. He told Lee that Young had sent him to instruct the Mormons not to sell any grain to travelers. Lee says, “I have always

believed, since that day, that General George A. Smith was then visiting Southern Utah to prepare the people for the work of exterminating Captain Fancher's train of emigrants, and I now believe that he was sent for that purpose by the direct command of Brigham Young."¹⁹²

As evidence of Smith's purpose in his visit, Lee cites a few of Smith's remarks: Smith made many hypothetical references to a wagon train that abused the Mormons and said he hoped the men of Cedar City would "make it lively" for the emigrants if such a train came through; Smith said he had talked earlier with Haight, who "assured him that emigrants who came along without a pass from Governor Young could not escape from the Territory;"¹⁹³ when Lee assured him that the brethren would willingly obey orders to "do the will of God" unto the emigrants, Smith responded, "I am glad to hear so good an account of our people. God will bless them for all that they do to build up His Kingdom."¹⁹⁴ Smith spread the word that the Californians—"a class of reckless miners who are strangers to God and his righteousness"—were scheming to attack Utah Territory from the south.¹⁹⁵

Lee believes that Young not only caused the massacre to happen but also celebrated it afterwards. He begins his story, "Brigham Young honored me in many ways after the affair at Mountain Meadows was fully reported to him by me."¹⁹⁶ Thus, Lee's testimony implicates Young as accessory before and after the fact.

Lee resided in Harmony at the time of the massacre, and on September 7, he went to Cedar City on Isaac Haight's orders. Haight took Lee to the old Iron Works building for an all-night private meeting and told him that the emigrant company had mercilessly abused all the Mormons they passed, had "burned fences and destroyed growing crops, poisoned the water, publicly proclaimed that they had the very pistol with which the Prophet, Joseph Smith, was murdered, and had threatened to kill Brigham Young and all of the apostles."¹⁹⁷ Haight instructed Lee to arm the Indians and send them to attack the emigrants, saying "it is the will of all in authority. The emigrants have no pass—the country is at

war now. No man has a right to go through this country without a written pass."¹⁹⁸ The plan was to employ only Indians for the killing.

After Lee and some others stirred up the Indians, they attacked on Tuesday morning, earlier than Lee had commanded. The Indians sent word to Lee about their first unsuccessful assault, and Lee says, "when I reached the camp I found the Indians in a frenzy of excitement. They threatened to kill me unless I agreed to lead them against the emigrants, and help them kill them."¹⁹⁹ Lee says he wished, at that point, to save the emigrants from death but could think of no way to do so.

Claiming he went south to retrieve more Indians for the attack, Lee escaped the raging Paiute and, to his surprise, met with a group of Mormon men who were camping near the Meadows and already knew about the attack on the emigrants. Knowing the original plan had been to have the Indians do all the killing but realizing that the Indians alone could not conquer the emigrants, the group of Mormons sent a message to Haight for instructions. Meanwhile and with great difficulty, Lee and Indian interpreter Oscar Hamblin convinced the Indians to hold their forces in check until Haight's reply arrived. The Indians, however, did not keep their word and attacked the emigrants again on Thursday morning.²⁰⁰

Lee relates the story of some Mormons killing young Aden and wounding his companion, both of whom had left the wagons to appeal for help. Unlike some other accounts, Lee says there were only two men and the wounded one returned to the emigrant camp safely, bearing the news of the Mormons' alliance with their attackers. Lee says that after that episode, the Mormons knew that the news of their involvement in the attack would reach California if the emigrants were spared and, as Higbee said, "they would raise the war cloud in the West, and bring certain destruction upon all the settlements in Utah."²⁰¹ The idea was to conceal the Mormons' involvement by murdering every "gentile" who knew of it.²⁰²

Lee asserts that he did not conceive of the treacherous plan to lure the emigrants from their wagons under the guise of

protection. The order he received from Higbee on Thursday specifically instructed, “decoy the emigrants from their position, and kill all of them that could talk.”²⁰³ Higbee informed the brethren at a Cedar City council meeting that the orders had come from Haight, who received them from Dame. Not Lee himself but others at the meeting decided on the details of the deception. Major Higbee ordered that William Bateman carry the truce flag and Lee make the “treaty” with the emigrants.²⁰⁴

Lee asserts that the poignant stories of little girls dressed in white being sent out to him are false; the emigrants did nothing of the kind.²⁰⁵ Some men emerged, and they all went into the circle of wagons to talk. Lee declares, “If the emigrants had had a good supply of ammunition they never would have surrendered,” but believes that they had less than “twenty loads left in their whole camp.”²⁰⁶ Lee’s story of the emigrants’ death march differs from others in that he says the men at first followed right behind the women, all marching in single file, and were held back only later by the Mormon troops who waited farther up the road.²⁰⁷

Lee explains that even though the Mormons ended up participating in the slaughter, they still intended to pass the incident off as an Indian massacre. Lee recalls, “Before and after the massacre orders were given to keep everything secret, and if any man told the secret to any human being, he was to be killed,” and he asserts that the Destroying Angels would have made sure that the threat was carried out.²⁰⁸ According to this statement, the Hamblin family lied about the massacre not of their own volition but because they were ordered to do so.

Because Lee witnessed much of the planning and participated in the crime, his account is valuable. As a bishop, he was high enough in the Mormon hierarchy to understand the chain of command yet low enough in the church to be at the scene of the massacre. However, Lee’s close connection with the crime also means he was personally entangled with the deed. Writes Hoffman Birney, “It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader that Lee’s confession abounds with zealous but futile efforts to clear his badly-stained skirts.”²⁰⁹

One could argue that, because Lee had already been sentenced to death at the time he wrote his confession, he would have had little to gain from lying. However, one could also charge that Brigham Young's decision to sacrifice Lee in order to vindicate the church might lead Lee to accuse Young falsely. Because of his established relations with the Paiute Indians, his position in the priesthood, his former friendship with Brigham Young, his involvement in the killing, and his conviction of murder, Lee's personal interests were so deeply intertwined with every aspect of the sordid affair that his account cannot be taken as the truth. Still, he offers persuasive testimony that has influenced the views of many historians.

Juanita Brooks's Account: Mormon Juanita Brooks wrote in 1962 what is probably the most widely accepted account, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*. Although she believes that Young did not sanction the crime, she holds him and George A. Smith responsible, because they fostered the fanaticism that led to it.

"The fervor generated by the eloquence of George A. Smith, the rehearsals of past sufferings and indignities, the imagined threat of being again driven from their homes, the repeated vows to avenge the blood of their martyred prophet had set the fires smoldering even in the calmest heart. It would take little to fan them into a flame."²¹⁰ That little provocation came with the Fancher party. When the Mormons, following Young's instructions not to provide supplies to travelers, refused to trade with the emigrants, some men from the wagon train stole, verbally abused the Mormons, and boasted they'd helped to kill the Smiths. Says Brooks, "Some felt that the travelers should not be allowed to get away with such defiance."²¹¹

After the Fancher Train passed, Brooks finds, the Mormons in Cedar City held a council meeting with Isaac C. Haight in charge. They resolved to deal with the problem promptly in order to be free to withstand the approaching army. Someone suggested arresting the emigrants, but that would have required guards and food for the prisoners. Many of the Mormons present wanted to kill the entire company; "the saints had been taught that they

should never cease to importune the Lord to avenge the blood of the prophets.”²¹² This proposal sparked a heated debate, and finally a message was sent to Brigham Young for his orders, with the agreement to wait for the reply before acting. At this time, a message also went out to John D. Lee asking him to come “manage the Indians.”²¹³

In an all-night meeting in the Old Iron Works building, Lee and Haight planned to incite the Indians to rob the travelers but did not decide to kill them. Brooks believes Lee’s assertion that Haight did not tell him that an express had been sent to Young; if Lee had known, he would not have looked to Haight for instruction.²¹⁴ Soon after the conference, runners went out to assemble the local Indians. Haight, Higbee, and Klingon Smith met with the Indians, instructing them to kill all of the emigrants and steal their property and assuring the Indians of Divine Protection.²¹⁵

Either Tuesday or Wednesday morning before sunrise, the Indians made their first attack. The emigrants successfully defended themselves, several Indians were killed or injured, and the rest grew outraged. Divine Protection had failed. They threatened to turn against the Mormons if they could not kill the company of emigrants for revenge. Throughout that week, the Indians maintained their siege on the emigrants, shooting occasionally at anyone who emerged from the makeshift fort. William Aden was killed by Mormons on Wednesday night. Brooks says Aden had two companions and both were injured by the Mormons’ fire and escaped down the California road only to be killed by Indians. The Mormons grew frenzied in their desire to conceal Aden’s murder.²¹⁶

Through a network of express messages between Lee, Haight, and Dame, it was decided that all of the emigrants old enough to tell the story should be killed. Major John Higbee arrived at the Meadows with his Mormon militia. Lee received orders to decoy the Fancher party from their fort and have each militia-man kill one emigrant man and the Indians kill the women and children. Soon, Lee and Bateman approached the circle of wagons, where a white flag already flew. The two Mormons told the

emigrants that if they left their weapons, provisions, and livestock at the Meadows and followed the Mormons down the thirty-five-mile road to town, the Indians would content themselves with those possessions and the Mormons would protect the Fancher party “if those against whom they had complaints would come back and stand trial.”²¹⁷

The emigrants, in desperation, accepted the ridiculous offer after a messenger arrived insisting that they hurry, because it would soon grow dark. Two wagons carried the youngest children, one woman, and a couple of wounded men ahead. “A short distance behind, in an unorganized and irregular group, walked the women and the older children. After these had proceeded nearly a quarter of a mile, the men came, single file, each unarmed emigrant beside an armed Mormon ‘guard.’”²¹⁸ When the women reached the scrub oak, someone gave the command, “Halt! Do your duty!” and the frenzied slaughtering ensued. The militia shot the men, and Indians sprang from the bushes with knives and hatchets to murder the women, older children, and some of the men. The men with the wagons shot the wounded and unloaded the bodies away from the road.²¹⁹

Brooks asserts that though many previous writers have suggested the date of the massacre was altered to clear Brigham Young of blame, the massacre did indeed occur on September 11. Excellent evidence comes from the diary of Rachel Lee, who writes on September sixth that John D. Lee “went on a expedition south”²²⁰ and on the thirteenth, that “a great number of Indians returned from an expedition Southwest. Also Bro. J. D. Lee.”²²¹ This information, combined with the certainty of witnesses at Lee’s trial that the massacre occurred on the Friday following the Sunday council meeting, reveals that the massacre must have occurred on Friday, September 11. Therefore, since the express from Brigham Young arrived at Cedar City on the thirteenth, the killing was done without his specific orders.²²²

Throughout her book, Brooks emphasizes the Mormons’ obligation to obey their superiors at all costs. Many of the Mormons, she says, were forced to participate against their will. They

went to Cedar City, because their superiors ordered them to go, for the most part under the false pretense of needing help to bury the dead.²²³ Once at the scene, the deceived Mormons were forced to carry out the gruesome plan. Brooks points out the one small provision for the reluctant militia-men: “Those of the Mormon men who protested the killing were to shoot into the air, and then sit down and remain quiet while the Indians killed their men.”²²⁴

Also, Brooks cites reports from a couple of dissenters at the meeting on how to punish the Fancher party. Though most favored killing the company, Perry Liston of Cedar City and Laban Morrill disagreed. Liston reported that “[his] life was at stake for refusing” to take part in the killing.²²⁵ Morrill’s daughter reported that after that meeting, Morrill took a circuitous route home and later learned that two men, whom he had seen leave the meeting early, “had been sent to waylay him.”²²⁶

Concludes Brooks:

In summary, it seems that these are reasonable conclusions to be arrived at from the evidence at hand:

1. While Brigham Young and George A. Smith, the church authorities chiefly responsible, did not specifically order the massacre, they did preach sermons and set up social conditions which made it possible.
2. That this particular company met disaster was due to a most unhappy combination of circumstances: they were the first to pass when the war frenzy was at its height; their own attitude was such as to fan that frenzy and provoke added violence. Had they been of the temperament of the group immediately following, they would likely have escaped unharmed, although short of provisions and robbed of their cattle. But the reckless boasts and acts on the part of those who called themselves “Missouri Wildcats” culminated in disaster for the whole train.
3. While he did not order the massacre, and would have prevented it if he could, Brigham Young was accessory after the fact, in that he knew it had happened, and how and why it happened. Evidence of this is abundant and unmistakable, and from the most impeccable Mormon sources.
4. The church leaders decided to sacrifice Lee only when they could see that it would be impossible to acquit him without assuming a part of the responsibility themselves. To air the whole story would have

done injury to the church, both among its own members and in the eyes of the world, and this token of sacrifice had to be made. Hence the farce which was the second trial of Lee.²²⁷

Brooks attempts not to excuse the atrocity, but rather to provide some insight into how it could have occurred. “Any study of mob psychology,” she writes “will reveal the same pattern—men catching fire from each other, uniting under strong emotional stress, carrying out lynchings or burnings or mass murder, which in times of sanity everyone would condemn individually.”²²⁸ Her account seems the most trustworthy, but one must not deem it the truth; nobody will ever know the truth.

Analysis

Attempting to determine culpability leads to two provocative questions. What constitutes an order? Does the Constitution protect religions that violate the law? These questions will always confront American society.

That the Mormons were forced, sometimes at the threat of death, to follow orders at all costs renders the question of who ordered the massacre crucial to the assignment of blame. Stenhouse writes on the Mormon’s blind obedience to Brigham Young, “To doubt his proposition is to doubt heaven, and to leave themselves without a head to lead them.”²²⁹ None would have questioned his command.

If Young had ordered the killing, directly or indirectly, his subordinates would feel not only bound to obedience but also absolved of responsibility for their actions. “If you do things according to council and they are wrong,” taught Heber C. Kimball, counselor to Brigham Young,²³⁰ “the consequences will fall on the heads of those who counceled you, so don’t be troubled.”²³¹ Despite Kimball’s teaching, a few Mormons attempted to follow *personal* moral standards. However, Juanita Brooks’s reports of dissenters whose lives were threatened confirms that the Mormon society did not accept dissension.

Still, culpability is an elusive notion, and often the line between an order and a wish is hard to detect. Does Young's preaching, "If any miserable scoundrels come here, cut their throats,"²³² constitute an order to slaughter an entire emigrant company? Do George A. Smith's obvious hints at his desire for the local Mormons to do away with an approaching wagon train constitute orders? Does church doctrine?

Some would say that the Mormon Reformation, the blood atonement doctrine, and Young's zealous determination to defend his empire against the approaching army created a climate in which no Mormon could have acted differently from the brethren at Cedar City. Some stubbornly deny the existence of the blood atonement doctrine and insist that Brigham Young had nothing to do with the crime.²³³ The former view seems too extreme and the latter a falsehood, but somewhere between them lies the truth. However, even if historians were to learn the source of the orders, the question would still remain: Should a man choose to die rather than commit such an atrocity? This question repeats itself throughout modern history.

Another heated debate surrounds the questions of whether the sending of troops to Utah was a constitutional measure and whether the United States Constitution protects the practice of Mormonism. In a country that so prides itself on religious tolerance, this sect has suffered terrible persecution. The Mormons accused the government of violating its own Constitution, which they viewed "as the work of inspired men"²³⁴ but the government believed the Mormons were breaking the law.

In his "Proclamation by the Governor," Young stated that he would not need to declare martial law if the government had treated his people fairly: "If the Constitutional rights which pertain unto us as American citizens were extended to Utah according to the spirit and meaning thereof, and fairly and impartially administered, it is all that we could ask—all that we ever asked."²³⁵ Pro-Mormon historian Birney writes, "Hatred of the 'mobocracy' that had slain Joseph and Hyrum Smith was preached from every pulpit and taught in every school house. The Puritan Pilgrims,

sailing from Holland in the frail *Mayflower* for the unknown and terrible New World, were not more determined to possess freedom for the practice of their austere faith than were the stern-faced, long-whiskered Latter-Day Saints who settled the valleys of the Great Basin.²³⁶

On the other hand, many of the Mormons' practices seemed to outsiders less like religion than crime. The Mormons' early persecutors believed they were ridding the nation of criminals, not attacking an innocent spiritual group. Many Mormons have testified to illegal behavior by church members. One Mormon declares, "since the settlement of Utah in 1847, about 1,500 murders have been committed, and nearly all, directly or indirectly, in the interest of the Mormon Church."²³⁷ The same writer asserts,

Mormonism is not a religion. It is a crime, and therefore cannot be entitled to protection and tolerance under the laws and Constitution of the United States as a matter of conscience. It is not a religious superstition, but a system of masked sensuality, and hence subversive of every principle of morality, and abhorrent to every feeling of virtue. It is not even a spiritual delusion, and therefore cannot be condoned on the ground that it is a hallucination or innocent mistake in prophesy. It is a preconcerted infernal scheme, partly mercenary, partly political, and chiefly licentious.²³⁸

Lyford believes that the Constitution of the United States does not protect Mormonism, because "the Mormon question is not a religious question."²³⁹ He feels the Mormon church is a system of civil government in direct opposition to the United States government and even goes so far as to call Mormonism organized crime.²⁴⁰ While their organization was always based on religion, the Mormons did vote as a bloc, trade chiefly through one Mormon merchant, and raise their own army. These actions could easily appear to threaten democracy.

In fact, the Mormons did not want to be governed by the United States. Stegner proclaims, "the real issue was that the territory of Utah did not wish to be part of the United States and everybody knew it."²⁴¹ Whether this sentiment arose before or after the persecution started cannot be definitely determined, but it

seems likely that the persecution came first. It seems that the persecution started almost immediately and was religiously based; Joseph Smith's claims of Divine Revelation threatened established religions whose practitioners immediately condemned the new faith. The religion that the United States failed to protect early on grew into a questionable organization that seemed to threaten the country.

Therefore, to question the constitutionality of either group's actions is to extend the debate over how to interpret that document. The founding fathers made no provision for religions whose tenets came in conflict with the law. Should the law ever override religious freedom? Did the Mormon preaching of blood atonement mean the entire religion should be eradicated?

The law should address only crimes and not the belief systems that lead to them. However, with the Mountain Meadows Massacre, separating the teaching of creed from criminal planning is impossible. Young advocated blood atonement murders in the name of the Lord. That a people could reach such an extreme of contradictory fanaticism attests to the desperation they felt. Relentless persecution can drive people to commit atrocities.

Conclusion

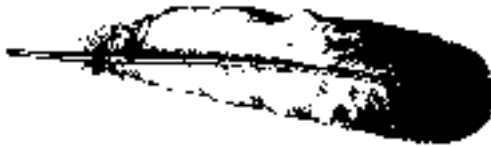
The brutality of the massacre and the complex passions that surrounded it caused the lack of agreement in the sources that describe it. All of the events and circumstances are disputed. Though it occurred over one hundred years ago, the crime continues to inspire virulent attacks and counter-attacks and has prompted an ongoing, heated debate on the Internet. The one man punished for the deed has been deemed a scapegoat, so historians cast about desperately for someone else to blame.

The answer will always evade its pursuers. The problem is too complicated to solve, the unknowns too numerous to count. Patriotism, religious fervor and righteousness clashed in a storm that has yet to subside, obscuring the truth of this bloodbath.

Historians' viewpoints on the subject cannot be neatly categorized as "traditional" or "revisionist" but rather follow the haphazard rules of personal bias. Times change, but passions thrive, and people still manipulate the evidence.

That all groups involved felt threatened—the Mormons by the United States government, the Indians by the encroachment of whites on their homeland, and America at large by this growing religious group that acted almost in rebellion of the government—contributed to the massacre itself, the cover-ups that followed, and the continued distortion of the facts. In a time of fear, all concerned acted out of a distorted sense of what was needed for self-preservation. Though it does not excuse the crime or the lies that followed, this aspect of human nature may help explain them.

In examining this terrible deed, finding a culprit is less important than learning from the array of opposing accounts that one must always question historical records and one must always search for the best point of view. Perhaps nobody will ever know what truly happened, but the Mountain Meadows Massacre, according to T.B.H. Stenhouse "the darkest crime on record in American history,"²⁴² provides a valuable lesson in the flaws of humankind.



- ¹ A.J. Backus, Mountain Meadows Witness (Spokane, Washington: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1995) pp. 136-137
- ² J. Brooks, The Mountain Meadows Massacre (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962) p. 70
- ³ H. Birney, Zealots of Zion (Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company, 1931) p. 136
- ⁴ W. Stegner, Mormon Country (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Fearce, 1942) p. 157
- ⁵ Brooks, p. 221
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 224
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 167
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 10
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 178
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 221
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 66
- ¹² Ibid., p. 62
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 111
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 3
- ¹⁵ The Second Great Awakening, or the Age of Reform
- ¹⁶ L. Arrington & D. Bitton, The Mormon Experience (New York: Knopf, distributed by Random House) p. 7
- ¹⁷ G.C. Ward, The West: An Illustrated History (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1997) p. 101
- ¹⁸ Arrington, pp. 46-47
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 53
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 101
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 48
- ²² Ibid., p. 49
- ²³ Ibid., p. 47
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 49
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 50
- ²⁶ Ibid., pp. 44-45
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 54
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 45
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 45
- ³⁰ Ibid., pp. 101-103
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 55
- ³² T.B.H. Stenhouse, The Rocky Mountain Saints (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873) pp. 183-190
- ³³ Ibid., p. 192
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 193
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 183
- ³⁶ Ibid., pp. 176-181

³⁷ Ward, p. 103

³⁸ Stenhouse, pp. 198-199

³⁹ Ward, p. 103

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 214

⁴¹ Stenhouse, p. 216

⁴² Birney, p. 17

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 17-18

⁴⁴ Stenhouse, p. 217

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 217

⁴⁶ Ward, p. 103

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 103

⁴⁸ Stenhouse, pp. 266-267

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 269

⁵⁰ J.A. Garraty, A Short History of the American Nation
(New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1991)
pp. 211-212

⁵¹ Stenhouse, p. 273

⁵² Stegner, p. 85

⁵³ Ibid., p. 85

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 96

⁵⁵ Ward, p. 158

⁵⁶ Stenhouse, pp. 269-270

⁵⁷ Ward, p. 158

⁵⁸ Stenhouse, pp. 276-277

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 280

⁶⁰ Garraty, p. 215

⁶¹ Arrington, p. 164

⁶² Ibid., p. 164

⁶³ Ibid., p. 165

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 165-166

⁶⁵ Ward, p. 176

⁶⁶ Stenhouse points out that Secretary of War John B. Floyd, who advised Buchanan to send the army west, was a Southern sympathizer and had complex motives for his advice. Says Stenhouse, “placing the ‘flower of the American army’ so far away from rail and water, with such a huge mass of munitions of war—which were wholly lost to the nation—was not inharmonious with the general plan of Mr. Buchanan’s Secretary of War preparatory to the declaration of secession.” (Stenhouse, p. 346)

⁶⁷ Stegner, pp. 86-87

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 87

⁶⁹ Elder C.W. Penrose, The Mountain Meadows Massacre: Who Were Guilty of the Crime? (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884) pp. 9-10

⁷⁰ Reverend C. P. Lyford, The Mormon Problem: An Appeal to the American People (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1886) p. 276

⁷¹ Backus, p. 256

⁷² Ibid., p. 243

⁷³ Lyford, p. 281

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 221-222

⁷⁵ Brooks, pp. 11-12

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 13

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 8

⁷⁸ Stegner, p. 96

⁷⁹ J. Tanner & S. Tanner, "Mormon Blood Atonement: Fact or Fantasy?" Salt Lake City Messenger Issue No. 92 (April, 1997) p. 1

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 1

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 8

⁸² J.D. Lee, Mormonsim Unveiled: The Life and Confessions of John D. Lee (St Louis: Sun Publishing Company, 1882) p. 280

⁸³ Tanner, p. 2

⁸⁴ Lee, p. 284

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 284

⁸⁶ Tanner, p. 2

⁸⁷ Lyford, p. 278

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 278

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 3

⁹⁰ Arrington, p. 167; Birney, p. 169; Brooks, p. 53

⁹¹ J.H. Carleton, Special Report of the Mountain Meadows Massacre (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902) pp. 1-2

⁹² Ibid., p. 1

⁹³ Ward, p. 177

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 52-53

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 8

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 21

⁹⁷ Brooks, p. 55

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 217

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 174

¹⁰⁰ R.J. Franklin & P. A. Bunte, The Paiute (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990) pp. 24-31

¹⁰¹ Brooks, p. 34

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 48

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 46

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 272

¹⁰⁵ It is troubling to note that this massacre, of probably ninety Indians, has received hardly any attention and is spoken of without passion, with no mention of atrocity or brutal bloodshed. This lack of care illustrates the prejudice still rampant in our country; if those killed had been white, like the party at the Mountain Meadows, the American people would have been outraged.

¹⁰⁶ Stenhouse, pp. 272-273

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 125

¹⁰⁸ Birney, p. 95

¹⁰⁹ Lee, p. 223

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 227

¹¹¹ Brooks, p. 47

¹¹² Lee, p. 219

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 8

¹¹⁴ Brooks, p. 47

¹¹⁵ Carleton, p. 3

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 167

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 47

¹¹⁸ Lyford, p. 284

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 282

¹²⁰ Lee, p. 219

¹²¹ Lyford, p. 277

¹²² Ibid., p. 95

¹²³ Ibid., p. 3

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 3

¹²⁵ Carleton, pp. 2-3

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 3

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 3

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 4

¹²⁹ Birney, p. 183

¹³⁰ Carleton, p. 5

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 5

¹³² Ibid., p. 5

¹³³ Ibid., p. 5

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 4-5

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 6

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 6

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 6

- ¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 6
- ¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 6
- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 6-7
- ¹⁴¹ Backus, p. 135
- ¹⁴² Ibid., p. 96
- ¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 87
- ¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 167
- ¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 167
- ¹⁴⁶ Arrington, pp. 167-168
- ¹⁴⁷ Backus, p. 152
- ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 167
- ¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 138
- ¹⁵⁰ Birney, p. 171
- ¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 174
- ¹⁵² Ibid., pp. 176-177
- ¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 176
- ¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 178
- ¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 178
- ¹⁵⁶ J.F. Gibbs, The Mountain Meadows Massacre (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Tribune Publishing Company, 1910) p. 7
Recorded in the Mormon Journal of Discourses, Volume II, page 311. Gibbs does not give the date.
- ¹⁵⁷ Backus, p. 184
- ¹⁵⁸ Ward, pp. 306-307
- ¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 306
- ¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 271
- ¹⁶¹ Lyford, pp. 279-280
- ¹⁶² Ibid., p. 286
- ¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 272
- ¹⁶⁴ Carleton, p. 9
- ¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 9
- ¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 10
- ¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 10
- ¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 11
- ¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 16
- ¹⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 16-17
- ¹⁷¹ Stenhouse, p. 347
- ¹⁷² Carleton, p. 11
- ¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 12
- ¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 9
- ¹⁷⁵ It must be noted that Carleton wrote his account on May 25, 1859, though it was not officially published by Congress until 1902, when 5,000 copies were printed as a House document.

- ¹⁷⁶ Carleton, p. 11
¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 10
¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 10-11
¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 23
¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 22
¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 23
¹⁸² Gibbs, pp. 22-23
¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 22
¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 22-23
¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 26
¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 28
¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 29
¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 32
¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 36
¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 234
¹⁹¹ Lee, p. 218
¹⁹² Ibid., p. 225
¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 224
¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 225
¹⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 222-225
¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 217
¹⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 218-219
¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 219
¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 227
²⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 227-229
²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 233
²⁰² Ibid., p. 235
²⁰³ Ibid., p. 233
²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 236
²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 231
²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 240
²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 240
²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 249
²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 174
²¹⁰ Brooks, p. 60
²¹¹ Ibid., pp. 52-53
²¹² Ibid., p. 53
²¹³ Ibid., pp. 53-54
²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 77-79
²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 78
²¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 70-72
²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 73
²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 74

- ²¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 74-75
- ²²⁰ Ibid., p. 66
- ²²¹ Ibid., p. 66 Brooks quotes from the “Parowan Ward Record Book.”
- ²²² Ibid., pp. 62, 67
- ²²³ Ibid., pp. 87, 90
- ²²⁴ Ibid., p. 74
- ²²⁵ Ibid., p. 55
- ²²⁶ Ibid., p. 54
- ²²⁷ Ibid., pp. 219-220
- ²²⁸ Ibid., p. 61
- ²²⁹ Ibid., p. 319
- ²³⁰ Arrington, p. 162
- ²³¹ Brooks, p. 40
- ²³² Gibbs, p. 7
- ²³³ Penrose, p. 1
- ²³⁴ J. Buchanan & A. Cumming, Cessation of Difficulties in Utah (35th Congress, 1st session, House of Representatives. Ex. Doc. 138, 1858) p. 5
- ²³⁵ Stenhouse, p. 358
- ²³⁶ Ibid., pp. 95-96
- ²³⁷ A Mormon of 1831, A Book of Horrors! The Crimes of the Latter Day Saints in Utah (San Francisco: A.J. Leary, Printer and Publisher, 1884) p. 170
- ²³⁸ Ibid., p. 238 From “Committee on Mormon Polygamy,” Cincinnati Methodist Conference in October. A. Lowry, Chairman and Secretary.
- ²³⁹ Ibid., p. 12
- ²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 12
- ²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 87
- ²⁴² Stenhouse, p. 357

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New York: Knopf, distributed by Random House, 1979

Background information; detailed accounts of persecutions endured by the Mormons prior to their emigration to Utah. Also an account of the Massacre from a pro-Mormon view.

Backus, A. J., Mountain Meadows Witness Spokane, Washington: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1995

Written by the granddaughter of Philip Klingensmith, a Mormon involved in the Massacre. Though not itself a primary source, this book contains both excerpts from countless primary documents and an extensive appendix of primary sources. Backus' interpretations of the documents were of little use, but the primary sources themselves proved valuable.

Birney, H., Zealots of Zion Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company, 1931

Detailed account of the Massacre critical of the local Mormon leaders involved but complimentary to Brigham Young. Also a lengthy description of the Saints' migration to Utah and discussion of the causes leading up to the massacre.

Brooks, J., The Mountain Meadows Massacre Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962

Account written by a Mormon who honestly tries to be objective. Provides insight into how people could commit such an act. Probably the most widely accepted account of the crime. Brooks is thorough and, it seems, fair.

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Anti-Mormon analysis by a U.S. Army Major of the Massacre; collection and evaluation of different accounts. Striking example of anti-Mormonism.

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Description of the Paiute Indians' lifestyle and dealings with the Mormons and other emigrants. Contains nothing about the Massacre.

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Lyford, Reverend C.P., The Mormon Problem; An Appeal to the American People New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1886

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Penrose, Elder C.W., The Mountain Meadows Massacre: Who Were Guilty of the Crime? Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884

Claim that Brigham Young and the church are entirely innocent of any wrongdoing. Penrose's logic is so remarkably twisted that it's almost comical.

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Primary Sources

Lee, J.D., Mormonism Unveiled: The Life and Confessions of John D. Lee St Louis: Sun Publishing Company, 1882

Account of the massacre by a witness of the planning and participant in the crime. Highly critical of the Mormon church, though Lee himself was a Mormon. Written after Lee was sentenced to death.

A Mormon of 1831, A Book of Horrors! The Crimes of the Latter Day Saints in Utah San Francisco: A.J. Leary, Printer and Publisher, 1884

Harsh condemnation of the Mormon church and description of countless crimes other than the Mountain Meadows Massacre committed by the Latter-Day Saints. The date 1831 is puzzling, because the book was clearly written much later; it refers to incidents after that year and was not published until 1884.

Note: Many of the secondary sources contain long excerpts from primary sources.