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National Culture, Personality, and Theocracy in the Early Mormon Culture of Violence

D. Michael Quinn¹

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It is extremely difficult for most of us today to comprehend the violence that was pervasive, often normative, in early American culture.² Much of this normative violence reflected the national society, while regions (such as the South and the West) had their own traditions of sanctioned violence in daily life.³ In other in-

¹ Beinecke Senior Fellow at Yale University, 2002–2003. While speaking or writing from my comfortable distance about the early Mormon culture of violence, I never forget the animals that proudly called themselves “anti-Mormons.” My first ancestral Mormon mother, Lydia Bilyeu Workman, died in Nauvoo on 30 September 1845, just days after she was burned out of her house by mobs. Her five youngest children were aged six to eighteen.

² Richard Maxwell Brown, “Historical Patterns of Violence in America,” in Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, editors, *The History of Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 45–89, provided a very useful summary of various kinds of violence—criminal, feuds, lynch mobs, racial, ethnic, religious, urban rioting, serial killing and mass murders, assassinations, police violence, labor violence, agrarian uprisings, vigilantes, and wars. This essay discusses only a few of these types.

³ H. C. Brearley, “The Pattern of Violence,” in W. T. Couch, editor, *Culture in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 678–692; John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South* (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1956); Jack K. Williams, *Vogues in Villainy: Crime and Retribution in Ante-Bellum South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959), 31–38; Richard Maxwell Brown, *American Violence* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970); Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); sections of relevant chronology in Richard Hofstadter and Michael Wallace, editors, *American Violence: A Documentary History* (New York: Knopf, 1970); Raymond D. Gastil, “Homicide and a Regional Culture of Violence,” *American Sociological Review* 36 (June 1971): 416–427; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); W. Eugene Hollon, *Frontier Violence: Another Look* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), especially 216 (for his thesis that Americans have tended “to over-emphasize the violent side of the frontier, in comparison to that of the cities, and to give short shrift to the peaceful and orderly side”); Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Michael Feldberg, *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975); David Grimsted, “Rioting in Its Jacksonian Setting,” *American Historical Review* 77 (April 1977): 361–397; David J. Bodenhamer, “Law and Disorder on the Early Frontier: Marion County, Indiana, 1823–1850,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 10 (July 1979): 323–336 (by contrast, found “a remarkably peaceful frontier” in this case study); Dickson Bruce Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); W. Stuart Harris, “Rowdiness, Public Drunkenness, and Bloody Encounters in Early Perry County,” *Alabama Review* 33 (January 1980): 15–24; Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), especially 77–80 (for “Recreational Rioting”); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 98–117; Roger D. McGrath, *Gunfighters, Highwaymen, and Vigilantes: Violence on the Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), especially 261–271 (for his summary of scholarly assessments that “The Frontier Was Violent” versus scholarly assessments that “The Frontier Was Not Especially Violent”); Elliott J. Gorn, “‘Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch’: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *American Historical Review* 90 (February 1985): 18–43; Carl E. Prince, “The Great ‘Riot Year’: Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (spring 1985): 1–19; David Brion Davis, *From Homicide to Slavery: Studies in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763–1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880–1960* (New York: Viking, 1988); Robert M. Ireland, “The Libertine Must Die: Sexual Dishonor and the Unwritten Law in the Nineteenth-Century United States,” *Journal of Social History* 23 (fall 1989): 29–44; Charles Van Ravenswaay, “Bloody Island: Honor and Violence in Early Nineteenth-Century St. Louis,” *Gateway Heritage* 10 (spring 1990): 4–21; Morgan Peoples, “Brawling and Dueling on the North Louisiana Frontier, 1803–1861: A Sketch,” *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal* 21 (fall 1990): 99–108; David T. Courtwright, “Violence in America,” *American Heritage* 47 (September 1996): 36–46; David T. Courtwright,

stances the rowdiness and violence were normative only for a subculture that was defined primarily by social class or ethnicity.⁴ Early Americans had perspectives about violence that were very different even from those of us who have served in the military or lived in war-torn societies, because nearly all of us grew up in peaceful environments where violence was a disapproved violation of social norms.⁵

To begin, Robert Shoemaker has observed of England's traditions of male honor before 1800: "In sum, violence for men was part of accepted codes of masculine behavior, and offered them a means of affirming their gender identity, and gentlemen a means of confirming their superior social position." Nevertheless, his statistical analysis showed that urban Englishmen of all classes were becoming less violent during the decades before 1800.⁶ Part of the reason for this decline of violence was the growing success of English common law's "duty to retreat."

Correspondingly, a crucial factor in the history of American violence was the nation's nineteenth-century abandonment of this aspect of the common law. Richard Maxwell Brown observes that this had produced in Britain a centuries-old "society of civility, for obedience to the duty to retreat—really a duty to flee from the scene altogether or, failing that, to retreat to the wall at one's back—meant that in the vast majority of disputes no fatal outcome could occur." Beginning with an 1806 decision by a Massachusetts court, gradually "the nation as a whole repudiated the English common-law tradition in favor of the American theme of no duty to retreat: that one was legally justified in standing one's ground to kill in self-defense." This resulted in America's

Violent Land: Single Men and Social Disorder from the Frontier to the Inner City (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 9–151; Richard E. Nisbett and Dov Cohen, *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); Hendrik Hartog, "Lawyering, Husband's Rights, and the Unwritten Law in Nineteenth Century America," *Journal of American History* 84 (June 1997): 67–96; Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscape of Violence and Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997); Anne Spencer Lombard, "Playing the Man: Conceptions of Masculinity in Anglo-American New England, 1675 to 1765," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1998; David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828–1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), ix (his omitting most "incidents of economic, racial, ethnic, religious, and youth" violence), 85–113 (the South's culture of violence, including dueling on 88–89, 97–99; David Peterson del Mar, "Violence Against Wives By Prominent Men in Early Clatsop County," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 100 (winter 1999): 434–450; Michael A. Bellisiles, editor, *Lethal Imagination: Violence and Brutality in American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Christine Daniels and Michael Kennedy, editors, *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Scott C. Martin, "Violence, Gender, and Intemperance in Early National Connecticut," *Journal of Social History* 34 (winter 2000): 309–325; David Edwin Ballew, "The Popular Prejudices of Our People: Kinship, Community, and Male Honor, in the Alabama–Mississippi Hill Country, 1820–1890," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Mississippi, 2000; Sean T. Moore, "'Justifiable Provocation': Violence Against Women in Essex County, New York, 1799–1860," *Journal of Social History* 35 (summer 2002): 889–918.

⁴ For example, Rhys Isaac, "Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists' Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1765 to 1775," *William and Mary Quarterly* 31 (July 1974): 345–368; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Barnburning and Other Snopesian Crimes: Class and Justice in the Old South," in Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath Jr., editors, *Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 173–206 (especially 177, that according to the South's norms, "class crimes were misdeeds of anonymity and insignificance," with title-word referring to Colonel Snopes in William Faulkner's short story "Barn Burning"); Susan G. Davis, "'Making the Night Hideous': Christmas Revelry and Public Disorder in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia," *American Quarterly* 34 (summer 1982): 185–199; Gene Sessions, "'Years of Struggle': The Irish in the Village of Northfield, 1845–1900," *Vermont History* 55 (spring 1987): 88; Peter Way, "Shovel and Shamrock: Irish Violence in the Digging of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal," *Labor History* 30 (fall 1989): 489–517; Michael A. Gordon, *The Orange Riots: Irish Political Violence in New York City, 1870 and 1871* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Michael Kaplan, "New York City Tavern Violence and the Creation of a Working-Class Male Identity," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (winter 1995): 591–617; Matthew E. Mason, "'The Hands Here Are Disposed To Be Turbulent': Unrest among the Irish Trackman of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad," *Labor History* 39 (August 1998): 253–272.

⁵ Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); Michael Hechter and Karl-Dieter Opp, editors, *Social Norms* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001).

⁶ Robert Shoemaker, "Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence in Eighteenth-Century London," *Social History* 26 (May 2001): 190–208, with quote on 200.

“proud new tolerance for killing in situations where it might have been avoided by obeying a legal duty to retreat.”⁷

During this same period, American norms were changing concerning violence by boys and teenagers. E. Anthony Rotundo observes: “Early in the 1800s, men and women had seen youthful brawls as a badge of evil and a sign that manly self-control was not yet developed.” However, during a decades-long transition, “bourgeois Northerners did more than endorse interpersonal violence: they now believed that fighting helped to build youthful character.”⁸

A few examples may be helpful in recognizing this early American culture of violence that extended from the elites to the underclasses, from the cities to the villages, from North to South, from the Eastern Establishment to the western frontier. Although dueling (usually with pistols) was permitted by the laws of various states and was regarded as honorable by most Americans of the time,⁹ Thomas Jefferson in 1798 persuaded Ambassador (and future president) James Monroe against trying to kill U.S. president John Adams in a duel.¹⁰ Alexander Hamilton, a founding father of the republic and secretary of the U.S. Treasury, died in an 1804 duel.¹¹ Dueling in the nation’s capital also included “an affair of honor” between Secretary of State Henry Clay

⁷ Richard Maxwell Brown, *No Duty to Retreat: Violence and Values in American History and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4–5 (for quotes), 7 (for 1806 decision and subsequent rejection by American jurisprudence of the English common-law “duty to retreat”). Shoemaker did not emphasize this as a factor in the statistical declines of violence he identified for London in the 1700s, so my concluding comment in the previous paragraph is my application of Brown’s thesis to Shoemaker’s study.

⁸ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 225–226 (for first quote), 225 (for second quote, which came first in his narrative).

⁹ Don C. Seitz, *Famous American Duels, with Some Account of the Causes That Led Up to Them and the Men Engaged* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1929); William O. Stevens, *Pistols at Ten Paces: The Story of the Code of Honor in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940); Harnett T. Kane, *Gentlemen, Swords, and Pistols* (New York: Morrow, 1951); J. Winston Coleman, *Famous Kentucky Duels: The Story of the Code of Honor in the Bluegrass State* (Frankfort, Kentucky: Roberts Printing Company, 1953); Wilmuth S. Rutledge, “Dueling in Antebellum Mississippi,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 26 (August 1964): 181–191; Guy A. Cardwell, “The Duel In the Old South: Crux of a Concept,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 66 (winter 1967): 50–69; Sheldon Hackney, “Southern Violence,” *American Historical Review* 74 (February 1969): 906–925; James D. Van Trump and James Brian Cannon, “An Affair of Honor: Pittsburgh’s Last Duel,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 57 (July 1974): 307–315; Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 17–118, 275–284; Nancy Torrance Matthews, “The Duel In Nineteenth-Century South Carolina: Custom over Written Law,” *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (1979): 78–84; Stephen M. Stowe, “The ‘Touchiness’ of the Gentleman Planter: The Sense of Esteem and Continuity in the Antebellum South,” *Psychohistory Review* 8 (1979): 6–17; Nicholas B. Wainwright, “The Life and Death of Major Thomas Biddle,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 104 (July 1980): 326–344 (in which he and Congressman Spencer Pittis killed each other in an 1831 duel); Jack K. Williams, *Dueling in the Old South: Vignettes of Social History* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1980); Michael Stephen Hindus, *Prison and Plantation: Crime, Justice, and Authority in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767–1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Stephen W. Brown, “Satisfaction at Bladensburg: The Pearson-Jackson Duel of 1809,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 58 (January 1981): 23–43 (involving Congressman Joseph Pearson); E. Lee Shepard, “Honor among Lawyers: The Case of Charles Marshall Jones and Edward Sayre,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 90 (July 1982): 325–338; Kenneth S. Greenberg, “The Nose, the Lie, and the Duel in the Antebellum South,” *American Historical Review* 95 (February 1990): 57–74; James M. Denham, “The Read-Alston Duel and Politics in Territorial Florida,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 68 (April 1990): 427–446; Dick Steward, *Duels and the Roots of Violence in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Arthur Scherr, “James Monroe, John Adams, and Southern Honor: Dueling with the Passions,” *Southern Studies* 7 (summer/fall 1996): 1–26.

¹¹ Joanne B. Freeman, “Dueling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr-Hamilton Duel,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (April 1996): 289–318; Arnold A. Rogow, *A Fatal Friendship: Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); Thomas Fleming, *Duel: Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, and the Future of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

and Senator John Randolph.¹² Known for dueling while he was justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court in the early 1800s, Andrew Jackson killed one opponent in 1806, engaged in a hotel brawl as army general with Thomas Hart Benton in 1813, massacred countless Creek Indian women and children (including hundreds on a single day), executed six Tennessee militiamen in 1814 for leaving camp when they thought their enlistments had expired, illegally invaded the Spanish territory of Florida 1818 and hanged two British men for befriending the Seminole Indians there, yet Jackson was elected U.S. president in 1828.¹³ As governor of Illinois Territory, William Henry Harrison declared “a war of extirpation” against the Kickapoo Indians who opposed white settlement on their ancestral lands, and he successfully used this to get elected as U.S. president in 1840.¹⁴ In 1842 Abraham Lincoln nearly engaged in a sword duel with the Illinois state auditor.¹⁵

Violence in the classroom was also common in early America. At Princeton University, students burned down the library in 1802 and engaged in five other “major campus rebellions” before 1830. Student rioting and violence also plagued the University of Virginia during the 1830s and 1840s. The problem was even worse at public schools struggling to teach the children of farmers, shopkeepers, and common laborers. In 1837 alone, 400 schools had to close in Massachusetts because of violence and disciplinary problems.¹⁶ From colonial times to the mid-1840s, it was a tradition on Sundays for young men to commit “organized and spontaneous mayhem in Philadelphia.”¹⁷

The pervasiveness of violence in early American culture, particularly by men, leads to an obvious question. Did every early American man, or even the vast majority, commit assault and battery? Existing evidence indicates that the answer is “no” for a large portion of American males during that era.

Why did many early American males avoid violence, even though it was socially sanctioned? Opinion polls did not exist, relatively few American males wrote diaries or letters about their personal feelings, and even fewer commented about their responses to violence (aside from service in the military). Therefore, the answer can be only tentative, but many of early America’s males apparently declined to participate in its culture of violence because of some combination of the following factors: non-aggressiveness in their personalities, their religious response to the Christian advice to “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39), their family indoctrination against violence, or their perception that there was never sufficient cause for them to resort to violence in their daily lives.

The existence of non-violence within the early American population leads to a separate question about the

¹² Myra L. Spaulding, *Dueling in the District of Columbia* (Washington, D. C.: Columbia Historical Society, 1928); Robert V. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 292–295.

¹³ *Official Record from the War Department, of the Proceedings of the Court Martial Which Tried, and the Orders of General Jackson for Shooting the Six Militia Men, Together with Official Letters from the War Department, (Ordered to be Printed by Congress) Showing That These Americans Were Inhumanely and Illegally Massacred* (Washington, D. C.: J. Elliot, 1828); Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson* (New York: Twayne, 1966), 41–43, 55–56, 57–58, 59, 60–61, 78–82; Lowell H. Harrison, “An Affair of Honor: The Jackson-Dickinson Duel,” *American History Illustrated* 8 (April 1973): 38–43; D. Michael Quinn, “Benton, Thomas Hart (1782–1858),” and Thomas D. Clark, “Jackson, Andrew (1767–1845),” in Howard R. Lamar, editor, *The New Encyclopedia of the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 92, 559–561.

¹⁴ John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 31–32; Thomas D. Clark, “Harrison, William Henry (1773–1841),” in Lamar, *New Encyclopedia of the American West*, 471. Illinois was originally part of Indiana Territory, over which Harrison was governor. For brief narratives, historians often simplify references to the Illinois portion of Indiana Territory by describing them as occurring in Illinois Territory. The same approach applies to early events in Arizona before it was officially split from New Mexico Territory.

¹⁵ Thomas O. Jewett, “Lincoln’s Duel,” *Lincoln Herald* 89 (winter 1987): 142–143; Lowell H. Harrison, *Lincoln of Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000), 73.

¹⁶ Joan Newman and Graeme Newman, “Crime and Punishment in the Schooling Process: A Historical Analysis,” in Keith Baker and Robert J. Rubel, editors, *Violence and Crime in the Schools* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books/D.C. Heath and Company, 1980), 11 (for Massachusetts schools in 1837), 12 (for Princeton and the University of Virginia).

¹⁷ Elizabeth M. Geffen, “Violence in Philadelphia in the 1840s and 1850s,” in Roger Lane and John J. Turner Jr., editors, *Riot, Rout, and Tumult: Readings in American Social and Political Violence* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 113.

term with which I began this discussion. Would we be justified in denying that there was a “culture of violence” in early America, simply because many of its males (and nearly all of its females) avoided violence? The answer to that question involves more than arrest records, or anecdotal references to violent incidents, or even estimates of those who did not engage in violent acts. The first question really depends on the answer to a more fundamental question: What were the norms of the society regarding violence? In terms of the previously cited examples of legally and socially sanctioned violence in daily life and of the election of national leaders with violent reputations, it should be obvious why historians regard early America as a violent culture. The incidents of violence are certainly important, both individually and statistically. However, the crucial question is whether the violent incidents occurred in concert with the society’s norms or in opposition to its norms.

This national context leads to the question of early Mormonism and what I identify as its culture of violence. Again, this is difficult to relate to for the vast majority of those who follow the Restoration message that began with the 1830 Book of Mormon. Its narratives endorsed self-defensive wars (Alma 43:26, 47) but also expressed discomfort or condemnation of violence in daily life (1 Nephi 4:7–18, Mosiah 29:14, Alma 35:15, 48:11). Members of the Community of Christ, headquartered in Independence, Missouri, can point to a tradition of gentle co-existence with their neighbors that extends to the movement’s founding in the 1850s.¹⁸ Members of the LDS Church, headquartered in Salt Lake City, can point to a similar tradition throughout their own lifetime and that of their parents, grandparents, sometimes great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents.¹⁹ However, the Utah church’s peaceful norms extend back only to the 1890s,²⁰ and the Community of Christ’s

¹⁸ Alma R. Blair, “The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: Moderate Mormonism,” in F. Mark McKiernan, Blair, and Paul M. Edwards, editors, *The Restoration Movement: Essays on the Mormon Past* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1973), 207–230; Paul M. Edwards, *Our Legacy of Faith: A Brief History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence: Herald House, 1991); Richard P. Howard, *The Church through the Years, Volume 1* (Independence: Herald House, 1992). In 2001 the RLDS Church officially changed its name to Community of Christ.

¹⁹ For example, in 1995 (with a 1996 addition) Jeff Lindsay wrote: “In Utah, I knew of very few Mormons who owned guns . . . I honestly don’t recall ever seeing a gun during my years living in that state . . . The Church teaches its members across the world to find peaceful, orderly solutions to problems, even when those problems might be oppressive governments.” In the middle of discussing Mormon history from Joseph Smith (including the Missouri “Danites”) to pioneer Utah, Lindsay exclaimed: “Violence is not part of Mormon culture!” On the Internet, this article “Militias and Mormon Culture???” does not show up in a search for its official URL, but (as of 2002) it is the first item in the list produced by a Google search on the terms: Mormon culture violence.

²⁰ As examples of the official endorsement by LDS headquarters of violence against newspaper reporters, LDS dissenters, unfriendly non-Mormons, and federal officials until 1890, see the following articles in newspapers published by LDS headquarters, *Deseret News* (the LDS Church’s official newspaper since 1850) and *Salt Lake Herald* (the official newspaper of the LDS Church’s political party, The People’s Party, from 1872 to 1891): “The Killing of Brassfield,” *Deseret News* [weekly], 12 April 1866, 148 (reported that the murder of a non-Mormon was due to a “general feeling of just indignation” that he had legally married a Mormon’s polygamous wife and attempted to adopt her children legally); “What Is a Riot?” *Deseret Evening News*, 19 August 1874, [3]; “‘Take That You Handsome Son of a Bitch’: Jerome B. Stillson, the New York Herald ‘Commissioner’ Attacked—In a Horn,” *Salt Lake Herald*, 1 June 1877, [3]; “Investigation of the Assassination Fabrication,” *Deseret Evening News*, 2 June 1877, [3]; “He Survives—The Improbable Story Going to Grass: Who Has Seen a Black Goatee with a Tall Gentleman Attached to It: Stillson the Laughing Stock of Salt Lakers,” *Salt Lake Herald*, 3 June 1877, [3]; “A Tribune Editor Assaulted,” *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, 14 November 1878, [3]; “Assault and Battery,” *Deseret Evening News*, 14 November 1878, [3]; “Retaliation” and “Another Whipping Affair,” *Deseret Evening News*, 6 August 1879, [2, 3]; “The Whipping Case,” *Deseret Evening News*, 8 August 1879, [3]; “CHASTENED. The ‘Tribune’ Local Editor Soundly Thrashed. THE PENALTY OF LYING,” *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, 1 November 1884, 9; “A REPORTER RAWHIDED. ENCOUNTER BETWEEN A RESPECTABLE CITIZEN AND A ‘TRIBUNE’ REPORTER,” *Deseret Evening News*, 10 November 1884, [3]; “A HAMMERED ‘HERO.’ A ‘TRIBUNE’ REPORTER COMES TO GRIEF,” *Deseret Evening News*, 8 December 1884, [3]; “A BLISSFUL LOT. Another of the ‘Tribune’ Crew Rewarded. A TROUNCING WELL MERITED,” *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, 9 December 1884, [2]; “Punishment for Scandal-Mongers,” *Deseret Evening News*, 12 December 1884, [2]; “MALICIOUS ACCUSATIONS,” *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, 16 September 1885, 4; “VARIAN TAKES A HAND: After Deputy [Andrew J.] Burt for Mauling [non-LDS] Deputy Collins . . . Burt Is Fined \$25 in the Police Court but Varian Wants Him Given an Extra Dose,” *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, 12 November 1885, 8;

norms do not define the Mormonism that existed before the Reorganization of the 1850s. To avoid the “presentist bias” of trying to make the past conform to our own experience and world views,²¹ we need to explore the personalities, norms, and behaviors of early Mormonism concerning violence.

In the above sentence, I mentioned “personalities” first because prior to the existence of Mormonism’s norms, its founder Joseph Smith Jr. had developed personality traits that interacted with the norms of the church he led from 1830 to his death in 1844. On the one hand, in 1836 a Kirtland resident called him “a pugnacious Prophet,”²² which described a recurring aspect of Smith’s personality—he physically assaulted those who offended him, and he spoke with pride about these violent incidents. His followers might justify such personal behaviors with religious proof texts about Jesus using a whip on money-changers in the temple at Jerusalem (John 2:15),²³ but the Mormon prophet’s resorting to assault and battery also reflected early America’s culture of violence and its code of male honor.²⁴

On the other hand, as God’s living prophet and mouthpiece on Earth, he also claimed that Mormons had the religious right to take vengeance on their enemies and had the theocratic right to form private armies. Joseph Smith’s personality and his theocratic teachings were the joint basis for early Mormonism’s norms for violent behavior. This resulted in a violent religious subculture within a violent national culture.

“When I was a boy” in Palmyra, New York—probably in the 1820s—Smith confronted a wife-beater: “I

“The Collin Examination: M’Murrin Not the Only Witness Missing . . . M’Niece Says There Was a Plot to Assassinate,” *Deseret Evening News*, 23 January 1886, [5]; “The Collin Case: Is Collin or McMurrin the Defendant?” *Salt Lake Herald*, 25 January 1886, 12; “McMurrin,” *Salt Lake Herald*, 26 January 1886, 4; “AN UNFORTUNATE OCCURENCE: District Attorney Dickson Assaulted by a 16-year-old Boy in the Continental Hotel—a Reprehensible Action . . . THE FEAR THAT HAUNTS AN F.O.H. [Federal Office Holder] WHEN HE THINKS A ‘MORMON’ IS LOOKING AT HIM,” *Deseret Evening News*, 23 February 1886, [3]; “THE ASSAULT ON DICKSON: Hugh [J.] Cannon Pleads Guilty, and Is Fined,” *Deseret Evening News*, 24 February 1886, [3]; “Blood Flows From a ‘Tribune’ Liar’s [Reporter’s] Nose,” *Deseret Evening News*, 10 March 1886, [3]; “THRASHING A REPORTER. Don Carlos Young Remodels the Phiz [*sic*] of C. T. Harte to Suit His Fancy,” *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, 11 March 1886, 8; “The Battery Case,” *Deseret Evening News*, 11 March 1886, [3]; “The Cannon Boys: Frank J. Cannon Shoulders the Blame—The Others Discharged,” *Salt Lake Herald*, 2 May 1886, 1; “A Just Verdict,” *Deseret Evening News*, 11 May 1889, [2] (editorial applauding the acquittal of Howard O. Spencer for first degree murder of Sgt. Pike who “richly deserved his fate”); “The Usual Dish of Sensations,” *Deseret Evening News*, 22 Nov. 1889, [2] (LDS headquarters’ last condemnation of investigation by non-LDS officials of religiously motivated killings by Mormons).

²¹ Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, revised edition (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 53; David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper Torchbooks/Harper and Row, 1970), 135–140; Paul K. Conkin and Roland N. Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge: The History and Theory of History* (Wheeling, Illinois: Forum Press, 1989), 204.

²² Truman Coe, “Mormonism,” *The Ohio Observer*, (11 August 1836): 82 (near end of long, first paragraph), original in Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Recent transcriptions of the original sometimes inaccurately lowercase “Prophet.”

²³ In fact, that is what Jeff Lindsay did in his Internet article, “Militias and Mormon Culture??”

²⁴ Although there is a regional emphasis on the South in much of the literature about the code of male honor in early America, it was a national phenomenon, as indicated in the previously cited studies by Brown (R. M.), Courtwright, Hartog, Ireland, Kaplan, Lombard, Martin, Moore, Stevens, and Van Trump/Cannon. For cross-cultural studies of the usually violent dimensions of male honor, see Donna T. Andrew, “The Code of Honour and Its Critics: The Opposition to Duelling in England, 1700–1850,” *Social History* 5 (October 1980): 409–434; Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Kevin McAleer, *Dueling: The Cult of Honor in Fin-de-Siecle Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Robert A. Nye, “The Modern Duel and Masculinity in Comparative Perspective,” *Masculinities* 3 (fall 1995): 69–79; Elizabeth Foyster, “Male Honour, Social Control and Wife Beating in Late Stuart England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 215–224; Petrus Cornelius Spierenburg, editor, *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998); Elizabeth Foyster, “Boys Will Be Boys?: Manhood and Aggression, 1600–1800,” in Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen, editors, *English Masculinities, 1660–1800* (London: Longman, 1999), 151–166; Thomas W. Gallant, “Honor, Masculinity, and Ritual Knife Fighting in Nineteenth-Century Greece,” *American Historical Review* 105 (April 2000): 359–382.

whipped him till he said he had enough.”²⁵ He also told Mormon friends another “anecdote. While young, his father had a fine large watch dog which bit off an ear from David Stafford’s hog, which Stafford had turned into Smith[’s] corn field. Stafford shot the dog and with six other fellows pitched upon him [Joseph] unawares. Joseph whipped the whole of them and escaped unhurt [—] which they swore to as recorded in Hurlburt’s or Howe’s Book.”²⁶ Not surprisingly, the official *History of the Church*, published in Salt Lake City, deleted this passage from the prophet’s personal journal, which endorsed the accuracy of affidavits by his Palmyra neighbors as published in the first anti-Mormon book, *Mormonism Unveiled*.²⁷

However, despite these violent incidents in his early life (one due to his code of male honor and one in self-defense), the first few years of Smith’s leadership of the church were remarkably non-violent. His pacifism was most extraordinary in March 1832. A mob broke into the homes of the church president and his counselor Sidney Rigdon in Hiram, Ohio, dragged them from their beds, attempted to poison Smith, nearly castrated him, beat both men unconscious, then tarred-and-feathered them. Worse, the prophet’s adopted child died from exposure to the cold as the mob ransacked his house. Nevertheless, Smith preached the next day to a congregation that included several of his attackers, and he sought no retribution. Among this mob was a former friend, apostate Symonds Rider.²⁸

I find it difficult to explain in satisfactorily human terms how Joseph Smith could manifest such Quaker-like pacifism²⁹ in his personal responses to this physical attack on himself and family in 1832, yet could lash out with vehemence at far lesser provocations during the last ten years of his life. To explain his behavior in 1832, I think the prophet believed that Mormonism required him to live a higher standard. However, that changed. Perhaps hackneyed phrases like “straw that broke the camel’s back” or “dam bursting” apply to the cumulative effect of the years of religious ridicule and personal insults, both of which provoked his conventionally American code of honor. At any rate, it is easier to explain the theocratic basis for violent aspects in his religious leadership after 1832.

Because Smith’s 1832 example was the only guide his followers had for how they should respond to violent attacks, Mormons behaved as pacifists when Missourians attacked them in Jackson County during July 1833. Mobs destroyed the Mormon newspaper, the home of editor William W. Phelps, and burned nearly all copies of the newly printed Book of Commandments, the first collection of Smith’s revelations. Then the mob

²⁵ Joseph Smith diary, 21 February 1843, in Joseph Smith Jr., et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, seven volumes (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1902–1932; second edition revised [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978], hereafter *History of the Church*), 5:285 (“till he said he had enough”); Scott H. Faulring, editor, *An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books/Smith Research Associates, 1987), 310 (“till he said enough”).

²⁶ Joseph Smith diary, 1 January 1843, in Faulring, *An American Prophet’s Record*, 267.

²⁷ *History of the Church*, 5:216; also Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reexamined* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990). I wish I had remembered Joseph Smith’s statement when I gave examples of Mormons who verified uncomfortable reports by his neighbors in Palmyra/Manchester, New York, as discussed in D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, revised and enlarged (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), xxxi, xxxviii, 39, 42–43, 56, 59, 60–62, 64, 72–73, 95, 137, 145–46, 147, 158–59, 164, 168, 172, 244, 245, 256, 322, 329n5.

²⁸ *History of the Church*, 1:261–265; Max H. Parkin, “A Study of the Nature and Cause of Internal and External Conflict of the Mormons in Ohio between 1830 and 1838,” M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1966, 248–255; Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 144–147; Susan Easton Black, “Hiram, Ohio: Tribulation,” in Larry C. Porter and Black, editors, *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1988), 161–174; Karl Ricks Anderson, “Hiram, Ohio,” in Daniel H. Ludlow, editor, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism: The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, five volumes (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:588; Blaine Yorgason and Brent Yorgason, *Joseph Smith: Tared and Feathered* (Orem: Grandin Books, 1994). *History of the Church*, 1:261n, explained that Rider apostatized because a revelation misspelled his name, but this official LDS account ironically misspelled both the first and last names of “SYMONDS RIDER,” as he signed his name in bold-face in a letter to the editor condemning the Mormons, in *Ohio Star* (Ravenna, Ohio), 29 December 1831.

²⁹ D. Elton Trueblood, *Studies in Quaker Pacifism* (Philadelphia: Friends Peace Committee, 1934); Peter Brock, *The Quaker Peace Testimony, 1660 to 1914* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

tarred-and-feathered Bishop Edward Partridge and other Mormon men for not agreeing to leave the county immediately. The Missouri Mormons gave no resistance to these attacks, brandished no weapons, and did not speak of revenge.³⁰ As resident John Corrill wrote, “up to this time the Mormons had not so much as lifted a finger, even in their own defense, so tenacious were they for the precepts of the gospel—‘turn the other cheek.’”³¹ That changed after Smith made the first revelatory pronouncement that Mormon theocracy was a here-and-now reality, not some distant event connected with the millennial return of Jesus.³²

In August 1833 he announced the words of God: “And now verily I say unto you, concerning the laws of the land, it is my will that my people should observe to do all things whatsoever I command them.” The document also required Mormons to obey divine rule, not secular authority, concerning war and militarism: “And again, this is the law I gave unto mine ancients, that they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save I, the Lord, commanded them” (Doctrine and Covenants 98:4–11, 33).³³ The revelation implied that God would reveal such commands through the LDS prophet. That became explicit within months, when Joseph Smith became the theocratic commander in chief of the “armies of Israel.”

Having previously endured an anti-Mormon attack without retribution, the Mormon community in Missouri responded to this document’s instructions to endure a total of three attacks and “bear it patiently.” However, on the fourth attack by anti-Mormons, “thine enemy is in thine hands and thou art justified.” This theocratic justification extended to vengeance against “all their enemies, to the third and fourth generation” (Doctrine and Covenants 98:23, 25–26, 31, 37).

In October 1833 Missourians raided isolated Mormon homes, which was the second major attack of “your enemy.” On 1 November, mobs destroyed the church’s gristmill in Independence and attacked Mormon homes there. This was the third attack and, in compliance with the August revelation, they again chose to “bear it patiently.” The next night the Missourians raided Mormon settlements in the Blue River Valley. This time—the fourth attack—the Mormons surprised their enemy by fighting back. Skirmishes increased until the “Battle of Blue River” on 4 November, when Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer led the Mormons in killing two Missourians and severely wounding others. In response, Jackson County’s leaders called out the militia to

³⁰ *History of the Church*, 1:390–395; Richard L. Bushman, “Mormon Persecutions in Missouri, 1833,” *BYU Studies* 3 (autumn 1960): 11–20; Warren A. Jennings, “Zion Is Fled: The Expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County, Missouri,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1962; Warren A. Jennings, “Factors in the Destruction of the Mormon Press in Missouri, 1833,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 35 (winter 1967): 57–76; Warren A. Jennings, “The Expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County, Missouri,” *Missouri Historical Review* 64 (October 1969): 41–63; T. Edgar Lyon, “Independence, Missouri, and the Mormons, 1827–1833,” *BYU Studies* 13 (autumn 1972): 10–19; Warren A. Jennings, “The City in the Garden: Social Conflict in Jackson County, Missouri,” in *Restoration Movement*, 99–119; Ronald E. Romig and John H. Siebert, “Jackson County, 1831–1833: A Look at the Development of Zion,” *Restoration Studies* 3 (1986): 286–304; *Church History in the Fulness of Times* (Salt Lake City: Church Educational System, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 127–139; Ronald E. Romig and John H. Siebert, “First Impressions: The Independence, Missouri, Printing Operation, 1832–1833,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1990): 51–66; James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, second edition revised (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 94–95; Robert J. Woodford, “Book of Commandments,” Clark V. Johnson, “LDS Communities in Jackson and Clay Counties,” Max H. Parkin, “Missouri Conflict,” in Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:138, 2:922–925, 927–928.

³¹ John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, (Commonly Called Mormons;) . . . with the Reasons for the Author for Leaving the Church* (St. Louis: By the author, 1839), 19.

³² The best work on this idea/theology during Joseph Smith’s lifetime is Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). For the continued legacy of Smith’s statements, the disappointed expectations of his followers, and the institutional redefinitions by the LDS Church (headquartered in Salt Lake City), see Dan Erickson, *As a Thief in the Night: The Mormon Quest For Millennial Deliverance* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

³³ For the full text, context, and implications of this 1833 revelation, see D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books/Smith Research Associates, 1994), 80–84. Nevertheless, as I discuss on its page 111, early Mormon pamphleteering and editorials continued to describe theocracy as a distant, millennial circumstance until Smith changed the emphasis both publicly and privately in 1842.

whom the Mormons surrendered their weapons and began leaving their homes.³⁴

It is possible that the 1833 Missouri mobbings caused the prophet to enlist some of his followers as bodyguards, but the practice would have been understandable after his being tarred and feathered in 1832. In any event, a non-Mormon in Ohio wrote in January 1834 that “Smith has four or five armed men to gard [*sic*] him every night.”³⁵

A month later, Smith dictated a revelation concerning “the redemption of your brethren who have been scattered on the land of Zion” and “in avenging me of mine enemies.” In order to do this, the revelation commanded Smith to organize at least “a hundred of the strength of my house, to go up with you unto the land of Zion,” adding the instruction: “And whoso is not willing to lay down his life for my sake, is not my disciple” (Doctrine and Covenants 103:1, 26, 28, 34). This was the beginning of a Mormon military expedition called “Zion’s Camp.”³⁶ Perhaps the most significant dimension of this “commandment” (verse 1) was its provision that “ye shall avenge me of mine enemies . . . unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (verses 25–26). This verified that the restraints in the 1833 revelation had been fulfilled, and that the Latter-day Saints were now free to take “vengeance” at will against any perceived enemy. This February 1834 revelation was the equivalent of a standing order from God—you may fire when ready.

Zion’s Camp did not succeed in redeeming Zion, but it transformed Mormon leadership and culture. In February 1834 the high council in Kirtland, Ohio, also elected Joseph Smith as “commander-in-chief of the armies of Israel.”³⁷ This was one of the first acts of the newly organized high council that thus acknowledged Smith’s religious right to give God’s command to “go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people” (Doctrine and Covenants 98:4–11, 33). Zion’s Camp was the first organization established for the external security of Mormonism. In June 1834 Joseph Smith created the second by reorganizing his private bodyguards into an organization led by a captain, his brother Hyrum, who presided over twenty of “my life guards.”³⁸

Six months later, the military experience of Zion’s Camp (rather than any ecclesiastical service) was the basis on which Joseph Smith said he was selecting men for the newly organized Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the Seventy.³⁹ Unlike other American religious denominations, “the church militant” was a literal fact in Mormonism, not just a symbolic slogan.⁴⁰

³⁴ Previous note 30; *History of the Church*, 1:407, 410–415, 423–431; Howard H. Barron, *Orson Hyde: Missionary, Apostle, Colonizer* (Bountiful: Horizon Publishers, 1977), 42–43; also B. Pixley’s different perspective about this Mormon “ambuscade” in his letter to editors of *New York Observer*, 7 November 1833, in William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, editors, *Among the Mormons: Historic Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (New York: Knopf, 1958), 81–83. William G. Hartley, *My Best for the Kingdom: History and Autobiography of John Lowe Butler, A Mormon Frontiersman* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1994), 44–45, also interpreted the military provisions of the 1833 revelation in a cumulative manner. However, he offered a lengthier time frame: “Saints probably counted the expulsion from Jackson [in 1833] as one provocation and the forced departure from Clay County [in 1836] as a second. Persecutions in Kirtland and its collapse [in late 1837] might have been seen as a third offense. Expected abuses of Saints in northern Missouri [in mid-1838] could easily run the count up past four.” To the contrary, as indicated in my discussion to follow, an 1834 revelation and commandment verified that the three-fold restraints of the 1833 revelation had been fulfilled and no longer applied.

³⁵ B. F. Norris to Mark Norris, 6 January 1834, Mark Norris papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

³⁶ *History of the Church*, 1:493, 263; Warren A. Jennings, “The Army of Israel Marches into Missouri,” *Missouri Historical Review* 62 (January 1968): 107–135; Roger D. Launius, *Zion’s Camp: Expedition to Missouri* (Independence: Herald House, 1984); Lance D. Chase, “Zion’s Camp,” in Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1627–1629; Bruce A. Van Orden, “Zion’s Camp: A Refiner’s Fire,” in Porter and Black, *The Prophet Joseph*, 192–207.

³⁷ *History of the Church*, 2:39.

³⁸ *History of the Church*, 2:88 (referring to 12 June 1834).

³⁹ *History of the Church*, 2:39, 180–186, 201–204.

⁴⁰ Nicholas Lockyer, *Christ’s Communion with His Church Militant . . .* (London: John Rothwell, 1644); William Tilson Marsh, *The Tabernacle and the Temple, or, The Church Militant, and the Church Triumphant . . .* (London: Hatchard; 1839); *Hymns of the Church Militant* (New York: R. Carter, 1858).

During this period, Joseph Smith was also involved in two outbursts of personal violence in Kirtland. Sometime between April 1834 and April 1835, there was an incident that he described. After a Baptist minister threatened him with a cane, the prophet said: "I whipped him till he begged. He threatened to prosecute me. I sent Luke Johnson[,] the constable[,] after him and he run him out of the County into Mentor."⁴¹ Johnson explained that this occurred because the minister, after receiving the hospitality of the prophet's home, then "called Joseph a hypocrite, a liar, an imposter and a false prophet, and called upon him to repent." Therefore, "Joseph boxed his ears with both hands, and, turning his face towards the door, kicked him into the street."⁴² In April 1835 Smith's brother-in-law Calvin W. Stoddard accused him of assault and battery. At a preliminary hearing, the judge ruled that "it is considered that the charge is sustained," and the prophet was bound over for trial at the Court of Common Pleas. However, because Stoddard failed to appear at the May trial, Smith was acquitted, and the plaintiff had to pay court costs.⁴³

Despite this charge of battering his brother-in-law in a dispute during the spring, the prophet showed remarkable restraint in the fall with his brother William, who had an equally pugnacious reputation.⁴⁴ Because Joseph would not allow their mother to testify at a high council trial, William Smith "became enraged. I finally ordered him to set [*sic*] down. He said he would not unless I knocked him down." Although furious at his brother, Joseph did not respond to this challenge with violence. Concerning a subsequent argument, Joseph wrote that William "used violence upon my person."⁴⁵

However, this fraternal conflict of 1835 had a final outcome that the prophet's diary and official LDS history did not mention. His devoted friend Benjamin F. Johnson, a Kirtland resident, noted that "for insolence to him, he soundly thrashed his brother William who boasted himself as invincible."⁴⁶

Less than four years later, Smith's former secretary Warren Parrish referred in print to these incidents. He condemned "the Prophet[']s fighting four pitched battles at fisticuff, without four years, one with his own natural brother, one with his brotherinlaw [*sic*], one with Ezra Thair [Thayer], and one with a Baptist priest." His

⁴¹ Joseph Smith diary, 1 January 1843, in Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record*, 267; *History of the Church*, 5:216, deleted this entry. Luke S. Johnson served as Kirtland's constable from April 1834 to April 1835, and not again until the last week of December 1837. The latter period would have been too late for this incident due to Smith's own hasty retreat from Ohio in January 1838. See Kirtland Township Trustees minutes (1817–1838), 123–124 (7 April 1834), 135 (6 April 1835), 161 (23 December 1837), Lake County Historical Society, Mentor, Ohio.

⁴² "History of Luke Johnson [by himself]," originally published in *Latter-Day Saints Millennial Star* 26 (1864): 834–836, 27 (1865): 5–7; transcribed in its entirety on the Internet at www.math.byu.edu/~smithw/lds/LDS/Early-Saints/LUJohnson.html (or more simply by doing a Google search on "History of Luke Johnson").

⁴³ Calvin W. Stoddard v. Joseph Smith Junior (based on an original complaint by Grandison Newell), court documents (21 April, 7 May 1835), Janes Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; State of Ohio v. Joseph Smith Jr., Book Q, 497–498 (16 June 1835), Court of Common Pleas records, Geauga County courthouse, Chardon, Ohio. From 1827 to his death in 1836, Stoddard was married to Joseph's older sister Sophronia Smith (born 1803).

According to Ohio law at this time, a criminal case ("State of Ohio versus") could be instituted by a citizen's complaint against the defendant for criminal behavior ("Calvin W. Stoddard versus"), which in turn could begin with an original complaint by a third party (in this case, Grandison Newell) on behalf of the battered plaintiff. It is unclear, at least to me, whether the court costs were assessed against Stoddard (for allowing the criminal complaint to proceed to trial concerning the charge of battery against himself, the plaintiff) or were assessed against Newell (the original complainant who began the court proceedings).

⁴⁴ Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 594–595; Irene M. Bates and E. Gary Smith, *Lost Legacy: The Mormon Office of Presiding Patriarch* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 74.

⁴⁵ *History of the Church*, 2:295, 335; Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record*, 43, 79; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:59, 107. Melvin T. Smith suggested that I include these incidents when he commented on my presentation of a shortened version of this paper at the 2002 JWHA conference.

⁴⁶ "Benjamin F. Johnson to George S. Gibbs, April–October 1903," in E. Dale LeBaron, *Benjamin Franklin Johnson: Friend to the Prophets* (Provo: Grandin Book Company, 1997), 221.

statement was endorsed by two disaffected apostles and two disaffected presidents of the Seventy.⁴⁷

However, rather than being disaffected by such personal violence, some faithful Mormons cited these incidents as justification for their own aggressive behavior. Following his ordination in Kirtland to the LDS offices of elder and seventy,⁴⁸ Elijah Abel served a proselytizing mission. After this African–American elder threatened “to knock down elder Christopher Merkley on their passage up Lake Ontario, he publicly [*sic*] declared that the elders in Kirtland make nothing of knocking down one another.” Jedediah M. Grant and Zenas H. Gurley disapproved of Abel’s preaching this, and they formally accused him of misconduct.⁴⁹

On 24 September 1835, in the absence of an external threat, Smith organized militarily in Kirtland. He proposed “by the voice of the Spirit of the Lord” to raise another Mormon army “to live or die on our own lands, which we have purchased in Jackson County, Missouri.” His manuscript diary concluded in his own handwriting: “I ask God in the name of Jesus that we may obtain Eight hundred men or one thousand well armed [men] and that they may ac[c]omplish this great work.” A thousand-man army was a remarkable goal for an organization with less than nine thousand men, women, and children, which may be why the official LDS history changed the phrase to “one thousand emigrants.”⁵⁰ John Whitmer, who was church historian at this time, added something that Smith’s diary left unstated: on this day the high council “by revelation” appointed the church president as head of the “war department” of the “Lord’s Host.”⁵¹

This was a significant expansion of Smith’s previous role as commander in chief of the armies of Israel because “war department” assumed crucial circumstances. First, he used the phrase that defined the jurisdiction of the U.S. Secretary of War, and this assumed a nationalist dimension in Mormonism. Second, because the U.S. War Department was a permanent function, in war or peace,⁵² Smith’s military oversight was also perma-

⁴⁷ Warren Parrish letter, 5 February 1838, with signed endorsement by Apostles Luke S. Johnson and John F. Boynton, and by Seventy’s presidents Sylvester Smith and Leonard Rich, published in *Painesville Republican* (Painesville, Ohio) (15 February 1838).

⁴⁸ Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saints Biographical Encyclopedia*, four volumes (Salt Lake City: Deseret News/Andrew Jenson Historical, 1901–1936), 3:577; *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1830–1972), 31 May 1879, 246 reels, microfilm, Special Collections, Marriott Library, with original in Church Library, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; Lester E. Bush Jr., “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8 (spring 1973): 16–21; Newell G. Bringhurst, “Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks within Mormonism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12 (summer 1979): 23–36; Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People within Mormonism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 37–38; entry for Mormons,” in Jack Salzman, David Lionel Smith, and Cornel West, editors, *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, five volumes (New York: Macmillan Library Reference USA/Simon and Schuster, 1996), 4:1854–1855.

⁴⁹ Last accusation against Elijah Abel by Jedediah M. Grant, which “was substantiated by the written testimony of elder Zenas H. Gurley,” in First Council of Seventy minute book (1835–1843), 81–82 (1 June 1839), LDS Archives. This meeting (in fact, the entire day) is absent from *History of the Church*. For Grant, see Gene A. Sessions, *Mormon Thunder: A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982). For Gurley, see Clare Vlahos, “Ecstasy and Orthodoxy: Zenas H. Gurley, Sr. and the Formation of the Early Reorganization,” an essay in this collection. Gurley’s first name has been spelled both “Zenas” and “Zenos,” but I used the spelling I found in most manuscripts and original sources.

⁵⁰ Joseph Smith diary, 24 September 1835, in Faulring, *An American Prophet’s Record*, 35; Dean C. Jessee, editor, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, two+ volumes, with a different subtitle for each volume (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–1992+), 2:412–442; *History of the Church*, 2:282; *Deseret News 1993–1994 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1992), 396, shows 8,835 total members in 1835, with 7,500 located in the two stakes of the church (one in Ohio and one in Missouri).

⁵¹ F. Mark McKiernan and Roger D. Launius, editors, *An Early Latter Day Saint History: The Book of John Whitmer* (Independence: Herald House, 1984), 151 (hereafter cited as *The Book of John Whitmer*); also Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:42n2.

⁵² For example, *Letter from the Secretary of War, Transmitting a List of the Names of the Clerks Employed in the War Department during the Year 1820; and the Compensation Allowed to Each . . .* (Washington, D. C.: War Department, 1821), which was a peace-time publication. During the “Cold War” with the Soviet Union after 1945, the U.S. government officially changed these terms to “Secretary of Defense” and “Department of Defense.”

ment. Third, as head of Mormonism's "war department," he did not need to be a line officer in the field during hostilities. Like the U.S. Secretary of War, Smith now had oversight of all Mormon military operations. Fourth, he had no mortal superior, and therefore combined in himself the roles that the U.S. government found it wise to separate in time of war—military command and civilian oversight. Because his diary stated his military goals for Missouri but did not reveal his actual organizational responsibility, this may indicate that Smith wanted to be an unseen hand to outside observers of Mormon military ventures.⁵³ Nevertheless, in May 1836 a hostile resident referred to Kirtland's Mormons as "a military array of ragamuffins, headed by the modern Mohammed."⁵⁴

Furthermore, tensions with non-Mormons at Kirtland led Joseph Smith to take an extraordinary step in November 1836. He and eleven other general authorities (including four of his counselors in the First Presidency) joined with fifty-nine other Mormons in signing a warning to the non-LDS justice of the peace to "depart forthwith out of Kirtland." Of those who signed this warning against Kirtland's judicial officer, at least a dozen later joined the "Danites" in Missouri, and this 1836 document foreshadowed their activities less than two years later.⁵⁵ John Whitmer probably meant this November ultimatum when he referred to the beginning of "secret combinations" in Kirtland "in the fall of 1836."⁵⁶

In another incident about which Smith's personal diary and official history are completely silent, he was acquitted in June 1837 of conspiring to murder anti-Mormon Grandison Newell. The silence may be due to the fact that two of Smith's supporting witnesses in the case, both apostles, acknowledged that the prophet discussed with them the possibility of killing Newell. Apostle Orson Hyde testified that "Smith seemed much excited and declared that Newell should be put out of the way, or where the crows could not find him; he said that destroying Newell would be justifiable in the sight of God, that it was the will of God, &c." Hyde tried to be helpful by adding that he had "never heard Smith use similar language before," and the apostle insisted: "I have known him for some time and think him to be possessed of much kindness and humanity towards his fellow beings." Likewise, Apostle Luke S. Johnson acknowledged to the court that Smith had said "if Newell or any other man should head a mob against him, they ought to be put out of the way, and it would be our duty to do so." However, Johnson also affirmed: "I believe Smith to be a tender-hearted, humane man." Whether or not the court agreed with that assessment, the judge acquitted Smith because there was insufficient evidence to

⁵³ Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 53.

⁵⁴ "Another Mormon Invasion," *Daily Missouri Republican* (St. Louis, Missouri), 17 May 1836, referring to "letters from Kirtland, Ohio have been received here by the last mail from persons of undoubted veracity."

⁵⁵ "Petition of Joseph Smith Jr. to Ariel Hanson," 7 November 1836, Lake County Historical Society. The signers (showing those with verified membership in the Mormon paramilitary Danites in 1838) were LDS First Presidency members Joseph Smith (Danite), Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon (Danite), Frederick G. Williams, and John Smith (Danite), Apostles Brigham Young, William Smith, and Parley P. Pratt (Danite), Seventy's presidents Joseph Young, Zebedee Coltrin, Lyman R. Sherman, and Leonard Rich. Re-arranged in alphabetical order with corrected spellings of names, the other signers were: Solomon Angell, Loren W. Babbitt, Edson Barney, Royal Barney Jr., Isaac H. Bishop, Roswell Blood, Edmund Bosley, Norman Buell, Jacob Bump, Horace Burgess, Reynolds Cahoon (Danite), William F. Cahoon, James M. Carroll, Jared Carter (Danite), Hiram Clark (Danite), Marcellus F. Cowdery, Warren A. Cowdery, William Cowdery, John Davidson, Lysander M. Davis, Maleum C. Davis, David Dort, Bechias Dustin, Sterry Fisk, Solomon Freeman, George W. Gee (Danite), John P. Greene (Danite), John Gribble, S[elah] J. Gri[ffin], Isaiah Harvey, Nathan Haskins, Jonathan H. Holmes, Vinson Knight (Danite), Lorenzo L. Lewis, Garland W. Meeks, Artemus Millet, Roger Orton, Ebenezer Page (Danite), John D. Parker, Burton H. Phelps, William D. Pratt, David H. Redfield, John Reed, Ezekiel Rider, Ebenezer Robinson (Danite), Peter Shirts, Asael Smith, Don C. Smith, George A. Smith (Danite), Samuel H. Smith (Danite), Harvey Stanley, Christopher Stillwell, Hyrum Stratton, Ezra Strong, Benjamin Sweat, Chauncy G. Webb, Edwin Webb, Joseph Willard, and Willard Woodstock. The others who remained loyal to Smith in the summer of 1838 were probably Danites if they lived in Caldwell County, Missouri. See also appendix, "Danites in 1838: A Partial List," in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, [479]–490, which gives sources identifying each man's membership in the organization.

⁵⁶ McKiernan and Launius, *The Book of John Whitmer*, 161.

support the charge of conspiracy to commit murder.⁵⁷

In the fall of 1837 David W. Patten investigated the prophet's secret relationship with his servant girl Fanny Alger,⁵⁸ and the hapless apostle collided with Smith's code of male honor. Brigham Young described what happened: "David in[sult]ed Joseph & Joseph slap[p]ed him in the face & kicked him out of the yard."⁵⁹

However, the Mormon prophet's code of honor took offense at far lesser provocations. Benjamin F. Johnson reminisced that "criticism, even by his associates, was rarely acceptable, and contradiction would rouse in him the lion at once, for by no one of his fellows would he be superseded or disputed and in the early days at Kirtland, and elsewhere[,] one or more of his associates were more than once, for their impudence, helped from the congregation by his (Joseph's) foot."⁶⁰

When armed dissenters joined anti-Mormons in forcing Smith and his loyal followers to flee Kirtland in January 1838,⁶¹ this finalized a worldview that was indelible throughout the rest of the nineteenth century: Mormonism was fighting for its life against conspiracies of anti-Mormons and of Mormon traitors. Every generation of the Mormon hierarchy remembers this heritage of anti-Mormon persecutors and collaborating apostates. This is the context in which, as Marvin S. Hill observed, "The desire for refuge from pluralism and the uncertainty of choice in a free society encouraged a quest to eliminate opposition both within and without the [LDS] church through intimidation and, when necessary, violence."⁶² As a result, whether the perceived threat has been actual or potential, the Mormon hierarchy has rarely been far from a siege mentality.

Some of Kirtland's dissenters also resettled at the new Mormon headquarters of Far West, Missouri, where

⁵⁷ *Painesville Telegraph* (Painesville, Ohio), (9 June 1837); also *Grandison Newell v. Joseph Smith Junior*, Court of Common Pleas records, Book T, 52–53 (5 June 1837), Geauga County; Edwin Brown Firmage and Richard Collin Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 55–56, 384n17; and a brief discussion of the case in B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, six volumes (Salt Lake City: "By the Church," 1930), 1:405.

⁵⁸ Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, editors, *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 167 (for April 1838 testimony about the investigations "last fall"), 171n18 (for Fanny Alger); Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 37–38 (which gives the incorrect date of "the summer of 1837" for Patten's inquiry); Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 22.

⁵⁹ Brigham Young statement to apostles in Scott G. Kenney, editor, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal: 1833–1898 Typescript*, nine volumes (Midvale: Signature Books, 1983–1985), 5:63 (25 June 1857). Young accurately dated this incident as occurring "in the fall of 1837." See previous note for the date. Young said that he was less severe with other Mormons than the founding prophet was. See *Journal of Discourses*, twenty-six volumes (London and Liverpool: Latter Day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–1886), 8:317–318.

⁶⁰ LeBaron, *Benjamin Franklin Johnson*, 221.

⁶¹ *History of the Church*, 2:484–493, 508–512, 529; Mary Fielding Smith letters to Mercy R. Fielding Thompson, July–October 1837, in Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, and Jill Mulvay Derr, editors, *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 60–68; Robert Kent Fielding, "The Growth of the Mormon Church In Kirtland, Ohio," Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1957, 245–264; Parkin, "Study of the Nature and Causes of External and Internal Conflict of the Mormons in Ohio between 1830 and 1838," 309–317; Davis Bitton, "The Waning of Mormon Kirtland," *BYU Studies* 12 (summer 1972): 455–464; Marvin S. Hill, "Cultural Crisis in the Mormon Kingdom: A Reconsideration of the Causes of Kirtland Dissent," *Church History* 49 (September 1980): 286–297; Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 310–341; Karl Ricks Anderson, *Joseph Smith's Kirtland: Eyewitness Accounts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 193–223; *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 169–180; Kenneth H. Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830–1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 106–128; Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, 55–80; Milton V. Backman Jr. and Ronald K. Esplin, "History of the Church: 1831–1844," and Backman, "Kirtland," in Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:609–610, 797; Allen and Leonard, *Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 117–125; Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 61–62.

⁶² Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, 70. In view of that assessment by Marvin S. Hill in 1989, I was mystified by his rejection in *Sunstone* (November 1997) of my analysis of early Mormonism's culture of violence as presented in *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books/Smith Research Associates, 1997).

they associated with local dissenters. Smith and his loyal followers were determined to prevent these formerly faithful leaders from causing mass disaffection a second time. They did this through a organization that functioned both militarily and theocratically.

In June 1838 Sampson Avard, who considered himself an ultra-loyal Mormon, proposed organizing the “Danites” among other ultra-loyal Mormons. The Danites were the first civil appendage of Mormon power since 1834. Some historians have claimed that Joseph Smith and the rest of the First Presidency were unaware of the Danite organization,⁶³ but documentary evidence shows otherwise.

Founding member William Swartzell later said that they organized formally as the “Daughters of Zion” in June 1838 at Far West, and took their nickname from the prophecy of Daniel about the stone cut out of the mountain without hands (Daniel 2:44–45).⁶⁴ While the organization was still functioning, loyal LDS member Albert P. Rockwood wrote in 1838: “the Companies are called Danites because the Prophet Daniel has said [Daniel 7:18] the Saints shall take the kingdom and possess it for-ever.”⁶⁵

Two weeks after the formation of a second group at Adam-ondi-Ahman, Missouri, John Smith (who was stake president, plus being a special counselor in the First Presidency) called the organization “the Danites” in his diary, which also described Danite meetings as routine events.⁶⁶ Soon the group developed an infamous reputation for its intimidation of Mormon dissenters and its warfare against anti-Mormon militia units. Those two purposes were the explanation in Joseph Smith’s diary for why “we have a company of Danites in these times.”⁶⁷ Counselor Rigdon later made a similar statement in the official church newspaper.⁶⁸

Thus, the prophet’s own diary corroborates the later statement by Ebenezer Robinson, who remained a be-

⁶³ Francis M. Gibbons, *Joseph Smith: Martyr, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 228–229; Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 65. Hill, *Joseph Smith*, gave the traditional account (223–224) that Smith was unaware of the Danites and quickly repudiated them, but she concluded (225) that he had at least peripheral involvement with the Danites and gave approval of their early activities.

⁶⁴ William Swartzell (a Danite) daily journal, 14 July 1838, in his *Mormonism Exposed, Being a Journal of a Residence in Missouri from the 28th of May to the 20th of August, 1838* (Pekin, Ohio: A. Ingram Jr., Printer, 1840), 18.

⁶⁵ Dean C. Jessee and David J. Whittaker, “The Last Months of Mormonism in Missouri: The Albert Perry Rockwood Journal,” *BYU Studies* 28 (winter 1988): 23, as a slightly different version of Albert P. Rockwood to Luther Rockwood, 29 October 1838 (rather than 22 October, as in Jesse and Whittaker), Beinecke Library.

Nevertheless, as I discuss in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 111, until 1842, early Mormon pamphleteering and editorials did not discuss the Daniel prophecies as applying to the LDS Church at present, but instead discussed theocracy as a distant, millennial circumstance. Joseph Smith changed the emphasis both publicly and privately in 1842, thus introducing the Missouri Danite interpretation to the church at large.

⁶⁶ John Smith diary, 4 August, 1 September 1838, George A. Smith family papers, Manuscripts Division, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City; John E. Thompson, “A Chronology of Danite Meetings in Adam-ondi-Ahman, Missouri, July to September, 1838,” *Restoration: News, Views, and History of the Latter Day Saint Movement* 4 (January 1985): 11–14; Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 38, 44.

Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Clarifications of Bogg’s [sic] ‘Order’ and Joseph Smith’s Constitutionalism,” in Arnold K. Garr and Clark V. Johnson, editors, *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Missouri* (Provo: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1994), 64, claimed that the “only official and contemporary” reference by LDS leaders to the Danites was a statement by George W. Robinson (“a Danite officer and Church recorder”) in Joseph Smith’s “Scriptory Book” (Anderson, 71n19, 80n147). However, Anderson nowhere acknowledges that John Smith, an assistant counselor in the First Presidency and the prophet’s uncle, made repeated references of a positive or neutral nature to the Danites in his 1838 diary. This diary’s quotes about the Danites and “the Daughters of Zion” appeared on page 44 of LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War*, which Anderson’s article was trying to refute. By linking “official” and “contemporary,” Anderson was able to legalistically exclude most of the first-hand Danite evidence he didn’t like. However, since he included the private diary of the LDS president, even Richard L. Anderson’s own rules of evidence should have required him to include the Danite references written in 1838 by the First Presidency’s assistant counselor, who was also serving as a stake president in Missouri.

⁶⁷ Joseph Smith diary, 27 July 1838, in Faulring, *An American Prophet’s Record*, 35; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:262. This entry did not make it into the official *History of the Church*.

⁶⁸ *Times and Seasons* 4 (15 July 1843): 271.

lieving Mormon but regretted his Danite activities: “Both Joseph Smith, jr. and Sidney Rigdon sanctioned and favored the only organization of ‘Danites’ of which the writer has any knowledge.”⁶⁹

While describing Danite security arrangements, the manuscript autobiography of loyal Mormon Luman A. Shurtliff revealed that Joseph Smith was also a Danite. In between two discussions of Danite “sighns [*sic*] and passwords” and the Danite “countersign,” Shurtliff noted how the church president gave the necessary “countersign” as he approached Shurtliff who was the night sentry. A little further in his narrative, Shurtliff added that while he was on guard duty with newly appointed apostle John Taylor, “I did not feel at liberty to use any sighn [*sic*] or password” because “Br Taylor was not a Danite.”⁷⁰ However, the LDS prophet was, and he used the Danite countersign.

On 17 June 1838 First Counselor Sidney Rigdon preached his “Salt Sermon” as a warning that Mormon dissenters would “be cast out and trodden under foot of men.”⁷¹ Rather than simply being an echo of Matthew 5:13, Rigdon’s sermon was restating what an 1834 revelation had authorized the First Presidency to do to Mormons who “hearken not to observe all my words” (Doctrine and Covenants 103:8–10).

The next day, Second Counselor Hyrum Smith and his uncle John Smith (an assistant counselor in the First Presidency) joined with Danite leader Sampson Avard (as first signer) and eighty other Danites in a threatening letter to Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, John Whitmer, Lyman E. Johnson, and William W. Phelps. Presidency counselor John Smith was the only general authority who signed both this 1838 warning and the earlier warning to Kirtland’s justice of the peace. This Danite threat instructed these excommunicated dissenters to “depart, or a more fatal calamity shall befall you.”⁷² Ebenezer Robinson, one of the signers, later wrote that all the signers were members of the recently organized Danite “military organization,” and that he was told in June 1838 that the document itself “was gotten up in the office of the First Presidency.”⁷³ Avard specified that Counselor Rigdon wrote the text of this Danite ultimatum.⁷⁴ Although the Danites had been organized primar-

⁶⁹ Ebenezer Robinson, “Items of Personal History of the Editor,” *The Return* 2 (February 1890): 217. Hartley, *My Best for the Kingdom*, 47, also observed: “Evidence indicates that President Rigdon knew about them and gave them his blessing.”

⁷⁰ Luman A. Shurtliff manuscript autobiography (1807–1851), 120, 122, 125 (for August 1838), Archives, LDS Historical Department (hereafter cited as LDS Archives), also typescript at L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

In *Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &c in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons . . .* (Fayette, Missouri: Boon’s Lick Democrat, 1841), 98, Sampson Avard, the Danite leader at Far West, testified: “As for Joseph Smith, jr., and his two counsellors, the witness does not know that they ever took the Danite oath.” This indicates that Smith was not initiated at Far West, and instead the prophet undoubtedly received his Danite initiation from Lyman Wight, the Danite leader at Adam-ondi-Ahman, the second largest organization of Danites. There was a certain symmetry in this, since Smith had ordained Wight as the church’s first high priest in 1831, and Wight in turn had ordained Smith as a high priest. Three years later Smith secretly ordained Wight “to the office of Benamey [“Baneemy”] in the presence of an angel.” See *History of the Church*, 1:176n; Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 67; Lyman Wight to Cooper and Chidester, editors of the Strangite newspaper *Northern Islander*, July 1855, in Wight letterbook, 23, Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri; Appendix, “Danites in 1838: A Partial List” in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 484.

⁷¹ Anson Call statement to B. H. Roberts (an LDS general authority serving in the First Council of the Seventy) and John M. Whitaker (the Council’s secretary), 30b December 1885, typescript, 1, Whitaker file, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City; Corrill, *Brief History*, 30; Hartley, *My Best for the Kingdom*, 46; John E. Thompson, “The Far West Dissenters and the Gamblers at Vicksburg: An Examination of the Documentary Evidence and Historical Context of Sidney Rigdon’s Salt Sermon,” *Restoration* 5 (January 1986): 21–27.

⁷² *Document Containing the Correspondence*, 103–107.

⁷³ Ebenezer Robinson, “Items of Personal History of the Editor,” *The Return* 1 (October 1889): 145–147, 2 (February 1890): 218–219.

⁷⁴ Avard testimony in *Document Containing the Correspondence*, 102. Leland H. Gentry, “The Danite Band of 1838,” *BYU Studies* 14 (summer 1974): 424n14, acknowledged Avard’s testimony, but noted that since Rigdon did not sign the ultimatum, “it is possible, therefore, that Avard drew up the document himself.” Likewise, *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 191, described this as “an unauthorized document . . . signed by eighty-four Church members, and it pointedly ordered the apostates to leave the county or face serious consequences.” However, “unauthorized” hardly fits a document that

ily for external security against the possibility of Missouri mobs,⁷⁵ they now functioned as an organization for internal security—to intimidate and possibly kill dissenting Mormons.

Speaking of prominent dissidents who received this death-threat in June, Joseph Smith's "Scriptory Book" noted: "These men took warning, and soon they were seen bounding over the prairie like the scape Goat to carry o[ff] their own sins."⁷⁶ Unable to see the situation in such light-hearted terms, dissenter John Whitmer wrote: "While we were gone[,] Jo. & Rigdon & their band of gadiantons kept up a guard and watched our houses and abused our families and threatened them if they were not gone by morning they would be drove out & threatened our lives if they [the Danites] ever saw us in Far West."⁷⁷ "Gadianton" was a Book of Mormon term for thieves and murderers who were bound by secret oaths (Helaman 6:18, 24, 26).

This 1838 ultimatum was not an aberration in Mormonism, but was a direct fulfillment of God's commandment four years earlier concerning unfaithful Latter-day Saints "who call themselves after my name" (Doctrine and Covenants 103:4). Likewise, Stephen C. LeSueur observed: "The Danite organization was the product of, not an aberration from, Mormon attitudes and teachings. The Danites represented mainstream Mormonism."⁷⁸ Despite trying to put the best face possible on this event, Leland H. Gentry acknowledged: "The method chosen by the Latter-day Saints to rid themselves of their dissenting Brethren was unfortunate since it furnished the dissenters with further proof that the Saints were inimical to law and order."⁷⁹

Regarding this Danite expulsion of prominent Mormon dissenters, Counselor Rigdon told Apostle Orson Hyde at Far West that "it was the imperative duty of the Church to obey the word of Joseph Smith, or the presidency, without question or inquiry, and that if there were any that would not, they should have their throats cut from ear [to] ear." Remarkably, an official LDS newspaper later published this verification of the First Presidency's 1838 authorization of theocratic killings.⁸⁰

Benjamin Slade, a lifelong Mormon, soon testified that Counselor Rigdon referred to carrying out that threat shortly thereafter. "Yesterday a man had slipped his wind, and was thrown into the bush," Rigdon told a closed-door meeting of Mormon men (apparently Danites), and added: "the man that lips it shall die."⁸¹

was signed by an assistant counselor in the First Presidency and by Second Counselor Hyrum Smith, brother of the church president. Gentry did not list any of the signers except Avard, but suggested (425): "It is possible that the document was . . . presented for signing at one or more Danite meetings."

⁷⁵ Some have viewed the Danite organization as formed in June 1838 for the sole purpose of opposing a handful of LDS dissenters, whose intimidation was unquestionably its first action. Although its blood-oath enforced internal loyalty, its constitution provided for military titles, structure, and chain-of-command. This indicates that large-scale military activities were paramount for its intended use from the very beginning of the Danite organization, not an afterthought following the expulsion of the dissenters. For the Danite constitution, see *Document Containing the Correspondence*, 102.

⁷⁶ Joseph Smith diary, June 1838, in Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record*, 187, and in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:249, 249n1; also Hartley, *My Best for the Kingdom*, 46.

⁷⁷ McKiernan and Launius, *The Book of John Whitmer*, 165.

⁷⁸ LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*, 46. In confirmation of just how mainstream one LDS apologist regards this 1838 death threat against Mormon dissenters, Anderson, "Clarifications of Bogg's [sic] 'Order' and Joseph Smith's Constitutionalism," 63, stated: "Like many responsible contemporaries, Joseph Smith experimented with prior restraint of defamation in times of danger. But the flight of the Cowdery-Whitmer group is an exception in Joseph Smith's policy of full rights for Mormons and neighbors."

⁷⁹ Leland H. Gentry, "A History of the Latter-day Saints In Northern Missouri From 1836 to 1839," Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1965, 171. However, despite the Mormon paranoia of 1838, the following is an overstatement by Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, 126: "The banishment of the dissenters initiated a veritable reign of terror against those who might doubt the wisdom of church policy."

⁸⁰ Orson Hyde letter, 21 October 1844, in LDS newspaper *Nauvoo Neighbor* (edited by Apostle John Taylor in Nauvoo), 4 December 1844. Although LDS headquarters intended Hyde's letter to attack the character of Rigdon, who had been recently excommunicated for opposing the 1844 succession claims of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Hyde's letter inadvertently verified the First Presidency's 1838 authorization of theocratic killings.

⁸¹ Benjamin Slade testimony (November 1838) about Rigdon's statement the previous month, in *Document Containing the Correspondence*, 143. For Slade as a loyal Mormon in Nauvoo and Utah, see his entry in Susan Ward Easton Black,

Then on 4 July, a month before the county election, the First Presidency virtually dared the Missourians to try to stop Mormons from exercising their civil liberties: "It shall be between us and them a war of extermination," Counselor Rigdon warned, "for we will follow them, till the last drop of their blood is spilled, or else they will have to exterminate us."⁸² Joseph Smith published this Independence Day talk as a pamphlet, advertised it in the church periodical, and explained that Rigdon's sermon expressed "the fixed determinations of the saints, in relation to the persecutors . . . for to be mob[b]ed any more without taking vengeance we will not."⁸³

Non-Mormons were determined to prevent Mormons from voting in Daviess County, which resulted in violence at the county seat of Gallatin in August 1838. "The first thing that came to my mind was the covenants entered into by the Danites," wrote lifelong Mormon John L. Butler of this incident. He rallied the dozen other Mormons at the voting place by shouting: "O yes, you Danites, here is a job for us." Among the Danites he rallied to fight the Missourians was Samuel H. Smith (Book of Mormon witness and brother of the LDS president). This account was included in the LDS Church's official "Journal History."⁸⁴ Although there were no fatalities, this election-day "battle" between self-professed Danites and anti-Mormons started a virtual civil war that engulfed four Missouri counties.⁸⁵

In retaliation for raids against isolated Mormon farms, Mormon forces (primarily, if not exclusively, Danites) pillaged two non-Mormon towns. "There is no question," wrote Brigham Young University professor William G. Hartley, "that Latter-day Saint rangers burned buildings at Millport and Gallatin," including the U.S. post office and county treasurer's office. In the most candid account ever written by a Utah Mormon historian about the Missouri Danites, he also acknowledged: "It is certain that some of the Missouri Danites played the thief, and it is possible, although unproven, that one or two were murderers."⁸⁶

However, Hartley's comparison of the Danites with the National Guard was a flawed attempt for "balanced assessment," since the Danites were religious vigilantes, not legally constituted soldiers. Likewise, his effort fails in defining Danite atrocities as "wartime . . . military actions," when in fact the Danite acts of "arson, vandalism, and robbery" were what they appeared to be, "clearly crimes" (his quotes). These Mormon crimes may have been understandable responses to even more savage attacks, but the retaliation was illegal by any definition. Worse, the Danites targeted a class of individuals (non-Mormons) rather than the specific perpetrators of the attacks for which Mormons sought revenge.⁸⁷

Justus Morse, a Danite, listened to Joseph Smith authorize a Danite meeting (apparently after the Gallatin fight) to "suck the milk of the gentiles." Morse, who remained loyal to the prophet throughout his life, added that Smith explained "that we had been injured by the mob in Missouri, and to take from the gentiles was no sin," merely retribution.⁸⁸

Danites who maintained lifelong loyalty to the LDS Church later wrote of what they did to defenseless

Membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1848, fifty volumes (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984–1988), 40:539–540.

⁸² *Oration Delivered by Mr. S. Rigdon on the 4th of July 1838* (Far West, Missouri: Elder's Journal Office, 1838), 12, as the only quote from this document in *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 92. A photographic reprint of the oration is in Peter Crawley, "Two Rare Missouri Documents," *BYU Studies* 14 (summer 1974): 517–527.

⁸³ *Elder's Journal* 1 (August 1838): 54.

⁸⁴ John L. Butler reminiscence, in *Journal History*, 6 August 1838, page 3; also John L. Butler, history and autobiography, typescript, 16–17, Lee Library.

⁸⁵ *History of the Church*, 3:56–58; *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 193–210; Reed C. Durham, "The Election Day Battle at Gallatin," *BYU Studies* 13 (autumn 1972): 36–61; LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*, 58–64.

⁸⁶ Hartley, *My Best for the Kingdom*, 69, 42. He referred to the post office mentioned by Philip Covington, justice of the peace for Daviess County, affidavit, 22 September 1838, and to the treasurer's office in William P. Peniston's affidavit, 21 October 1838, both in *Document Containing the Correspondence*, 43–44.

⁸⁷ Hartley, *My Best for the Kingdom*, 42.

⁸⁸ Justus Morse affidavit, 23 March 1887, LDS Archives, with complete transcription in folder 3, box 22, H. Michael Marquardt papers, Marriott Library; *History of the Church*, 5:302, 6:337, for Morse's continued association with Smith. Closer to the events of 1838, dissident Mormons and former Danite officers Sampson Avard and Reed Peck described Smith's similar encouragement to plunder Missourians in *Document Containing the Correspondence*, 98, 117.

“gentiles” during this “Mormon War” in Missouri. For example, twenty-year-old Benjamin F. Johnson participated in a raid that Danite captain Cornelius P. Lott led against an isolated settlement:

My sympathies were drawn toward the women and children, but I would in no degree let them deter me from duty. So while others were pillaging for something to carry away, I was doing my best to protect, as far as possible, the lives and comfort of the [non-Mormon] families who were dependent on getting away on horseback. . . . While others were doing the burning and plunder, my mission was of mercy so far as duty would permit. But of course I made enemies at home [among fellow Mormons], and became more known by those who were our avowed enemies. Before noon we had set all [houses and barns] on fire and left upon a circuitous route towards home.

The LDS publishing house of the Central States Mission printed that uncomfortable acknowledgement of Mormon depredations.⁸⁹

On the other hand, Oliver B. Huntington offered no apology. This lifelong Mormon wrote decades later that he and other Danites had “the privilege of retaking as much as they took from us.” However, sometimes Danites plundered the property of gentiles who had previously been friendly to their Mormon neighbors. The Danites involved did not know these friendly non-Mormons.⁹⁰

Moreover, in the skirmishes that both sides called “battles,” Mormons used deadly force without reluctance. Benjamin F. Johnson wrote that Danite leader (and future apostle) Lyman Wight told his men to pray concerning their Missouri enemies: “That God would damn them, and ‘give us power to kill them.’”⁹¹ According to lifelong Mormon and Danite, Nathan Tanner, Apostle David W. Patten (a Danite captain with the code-name “Fear Not”) told his men: “Go ahead, boys; rake them down.” This was at the beginning of the Battle of Crooked River on 25 October.⁹²

The highest-ranking Mormon charged with murder for obeying this order was Apostle Parley P. Pratt, who allegedly took the careful aim of a sniper in killing one Missourian and then severely wounding militiaman Samuel Tarwater. This was after Apostle Patten had received a fatal stomach wound.⁹³ In their fury at the sight of their fallen leader, some of the Danites mutilated the unconscious Tarwater “with their swords, striking him lengthwise in the mouth, cutting off his under teeth, and breaking his lower jaw; cutting off his checks . . . and leaving him [for] dead.” He survived Crooked River to press charges against Pratt for attempted murder.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, Mormon marauding against non-Mormon Missourians in 1838 was mild by comparison with the brutality of the anti-Mormon militias. Three days after Governor Lilburn W. Boggs issued a military order that the Mormons “must be exterminated, or driven from the State,” a Missouri militia unit attacked the LDS

⁸⁹ Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review* (Independence: Zion's Printing and Publishing, 1947), 39. For Johnson and Lott as Danites, see appendix, “Danites in 1838: A Partial List,” in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 482.

⁹⁰ Oliver B. Huntington manuscript autobiography, book 1, 37–38 (1838), Lee Library; LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*, 119, 136. For Huntington as a Danite, see appendix, “Danites in 1838: A Partial List,” in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 482.

⁹¹ LeBaron, *Benjamin Franklin Johnson*, 222.

⁹² Nathan Tanner reminiscence, in George S. Tanner, *John Tanner and His Family* (Salt Lake City: John Tanner Family Association/Publishers Press, 1974), 386. For Patten and Tanner as Danites, see appendix, “Danites in 1838: A Partial List,” in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 483, 484.

⁹³ Indictment of Parley P. Pratt for murder of Moses Rowland, filed 2 April 1839, Boone County Circuit Court Records, Case 1379, folder 17, Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri; John D. Lee autobiography in *Mormonism Unveiled: or the Life and Confessions of the Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee* (St. Louis: Bryan, Brand and Co., 1877), 73; also Reed Peck's similar description of acts by the unnamed Parley P. Pratt, a “cold hearted villain (I know him well),” in Reed Peck manuscript, 18 September 1839, pages 99–100, Huntington Library. For Pratt as a Danite, see appendix, “Danites in 1838: A Partial List,” in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 483.

⁹⁴ James H. Hunt, *Mormonism . . . Their Troubles in Missouri and Final Expulsion from the State* (St. Louis: Ustick and Davies, 1844), 190–191. Although he did not acknowledge that Tarwater sustained these injuries after he was shot and lying unconscious on the ground, an assistant LDS Church historian gave a more gruesome description of his injuries, including “a terrible gash in the skull, through which his brain was plainly visible.” See Andrew Jenson, “Caldwell County, Missouri,” *The Historical Record* 8 (January 1888): 702; also Alexander L. Baugh, “The Battle between Mormon and Missouri Militia at Crooked River,” in Garr and Johnson, *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Missouri*, 93 (for discussion of Tarwater).

settlement at Haun's Mill on 30 October 1838. They shot at and wounded thirteen fleeing women and children, then methodically killed eighteen males, including the point-blank execution of two boys (ages nine and ten). Militiamen also used a "corncutter" to mutilate the still-living Thomas McBride. When the survivors found the elderly man, his corpse was "literally mangled from head to foot."⁹⁵

However, a generally unacknowledged dimension of both the extermination order and the Haun's Mill massacre is that they both resulted from Mormon actions in the Battle of Crooked River. Knowingly or not, Mormons had attacked state troops, and this had a cascade effect. Local residents feared annihilation: "We know not the hour or minute we will be laid in ashes," a local minister and county clerk wrote the day after this battle. "For God's sake give us assistance as quick as possible." Correspondingly, the attack on state troops weakened the position of pro-Mormon Missourians in the state's militias and government offices. Finally, on receiving news of the injuries and death of state troops at Crooked River, Governor Boggs immediately drafted his extermination order on 27 October 1838 because the Mormons "have made war upon the people of this state."⁹⁶ Worse, the killing of one Missourian and mutilation of another while he was defenseless at Crooked River led to the mad-dog revenge by Missourians in the slaughter at Haun's Mill.

The day after that massacre, Joseph Smith and other LDS leaders surrendered to the Missouri militia, which had encircled Far West. After Sampson Avard testified against him in open court, the prophet publicly repudiated the Danite general and his oath-bound organization. Charged with the capital crime of treason, the prophet and several colleagues remained in jail for six months before they escaped to Illinois.⁹⁷

However, it is anachronistic to apply Smith's later rejection of Avard to the activities of the general and the Danites months earlier.⁹⁸ Avard was the stalking-horse for the First Presidency from the summer to fall of 1838. The Danite constitution specified: "All officers shall be subject to the commands of the Captain General, given through the Secretary of War." The prophet had held the latter position "by revelation" in the church's "war department" for three years.⁹⁹ He had been commander in chief of the armies of Israel for four years.

⁹⁵ *History of the Church*, 3:184–87, 326n, and 175 (for text of the governor's extermination order; "A Heroine of Haun's Mill Massacre," in *Heroines of "Mormondom," the Second Book of the Noble Women's Lives Series* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884), 86–96; "Exterminate or Expel Them!" and "Massacre at Haun's Mill," in Mulder and Mortensen, *Among the Mormons*, 102–106; Gentry, "History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri," 430–66; "Alma R. Blair," "The Haun's Mill Massacre," *BYU Studies* 13 (autumn 1972): 62–67; Clark V. Johnson, "Missouri Persecutions: The Petition of Isaac Leany," *BYU Studies* 23 (winter 1983): 101–103; Clark V. Johnson, editor, *Mormon Redress Petitions: Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 17–18, 28–31, 89–90, 274–276, 320–321, 408–409, 417–418, 440–441, 451–452, 477–478, 486–488, 490–491, 505–506, 637–639, 720–724; Alma R. Blair, "Haun's Mill Massacre," in Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:577. Traditional accounts misstate both the age and military experience of victim McBride. Born in 1776, he was too young to be a "veteran of the Revolution" (*History of the Church*, 3:220n), which war ended in 1783. The Journal History for 30 October 1838 acknowledged that historical impossibility and suggested that McBride was a veteran of the War of 1812.

⁹⁶ LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*, 138, 144–152. While Anderson, "Clarifications of Bogg's [*sic*] 'Order'" acknowledges that the Boggs extermination order responded to what Anderson calls "the hot skirmish at Crooked River" (45), he emphasizes the "unfounded rumors" (45), "the upcoming fictitious attack on the county seat" (46), the "false rumors" (47), "this mythical Mormon offensive" (48) described by Missourians, and then dismisses Crooked River as "the attack of 70 Mormons on a state patrol of 50, which was intimidating Mormon settlers instead of acting on defensive orders" (48). Anderson argues at length (27–47) that the governor simply ratified long-standing calls for expulsion by anti-Mormons. Thus (47), Boggs "served special interests in upper Missouri when they demanded extermination orders. This executive was more conduit than commander" in issuing the October 1838 extermination order against the Mormons.

⁹⁷ *History of the Church*, 3: 58–322; Gentry, "History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri," 527–598; Leonard J. Arrington, "Church Leaders in Liberty Jail," *BYU Studies* 12 (autumn 1972): 20–26; Dean C. Jessee, "'Walls, Grates and Screaking Iron Doors': The Prison Experience of Mormon Leaders in Missouri, 1838–1839," in Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, editors, *New Views of Mormon History: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 19–42; LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*, 46–48, 63–263, 125n35; Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, 75, 76, 92, 225n65.

⁹⁸ Which is exactly what Anderson, "Clarifications of Bogg's [*sic*] 'Order,'" 68, does.

⁹⁹ *Document Containing the Correspondence*, 102; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:42n2.

What the Danites did militarily during 1838 was by the general oversight and command of Joseph Smith, and their violent acts resulted in multiple disasters: the massacre of a Mormon settlement, the ransacking of LDS headquarters, and the expulsion of the Mormon population from Missouri.

And that perspective is necessary to understand a curious dimension in the next stage of early Mormonism's culture of violence. During the balance of Smith's leadership, strident Mormon militarism co-existed with military non-violence among the Mormons.

Through negotiations with Illinois political leaders eager for the support of the bloc-voting Mormons,¹⁰⁰ LDS headquarters in February 1841 gained a state-chartered private army, the Nauvoo Legion. The LDS president was its governor-appointed commander with the rank of lieutenant-general. Aside from Smith, only George Washington had held that rank. By 1842 this Mormon army of 2,000 was the largest military organization in Illinois. Within two years, the Nauvoo Legion had about 5,000 men under arms, compared with the U.S. army's total of less than 8,500 soldiers. Under Smith's direction, the Nauvoo Legion drilled and held mock battles.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, it engaged in no violent actions, even when its commander was kidnapped, arrested, and nearly dragged back to Missouri for certain death. Although most members of the Mormon "Relief Expedition" that came to Smith's aid were officers and soldiers in the Nauvoo Legion, they acted as a ragtag collection of friends, rather than as the Nauvoo Legion under orders.¹⁰² Despite being the commander of a Mormon militia that rivaled the size of the U.S. Army, Smith did not lead it into violent conflicts. Nor did his subordinates. Haunted by the 1838 consequences of violent Mormon militarism, for which he had clearly been responsible, Smith limited himself to saber-rattling in Illinois.

Although he avoided violent militarism, the LDS prophet expanded the Mormon culture of violence in personal, civil, and theocratic ways at Nauvoo. He boasted of his past physical assaults, advocated theocratic blood atonement, and committed acts of assault and battery—all due to what he regarded as justifiable provocation.

As an extension of Smith's "spilling his blood on the ground" doctrine (which he did not announce publicly until 1843),¹⁰³ it will probably never be known if the prophet privately authorized his bodyguard and former-Danite Orrin Porter Rockwell to kill Missouri's ex-governor Boggs in May 1842. Smith held Boggs directly responsible for the expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County in 1833 and for the disasters of 1838.¹⁰⁴ Killing Boggs would have fit within the provisions of the 1833 revelation (Doctrine and Covenants 98:31), as well as be consistent with another Danite's pledge to Joseph Smith in 1839: "I from this day declare myself the Avenger of the blood of those innocent men, and the innocent cause of Zion." The prophet had this copied into his personal letterbook.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 19; Kenneth Gordon Crider, "Rhetorical Aspects of the Controversies over Mormonism in Illinois, 1839–1847," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1956, 270–271; Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Causes of the Mormon Non-Mormon Conflict in Hancock County, Illinois, 1839–1846," Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1967, 43–47; Andrew F. Smith, *Saintly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 58–61.

¹⁰¹ *History of the Church*, 5:3–4, 56, 369, 383–384, 6:34; Hamilton Gardner, "The Nauvoo Legion, 1840–1845: A Unique Military Organization," in Roger D. Launius and John E. Hallwas, editors, *Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited: Nauvoo in Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 53 (for lieutenant-general rank), 57 (for "an estimated five thousand members"); with lower estimates in John Sweeney Jr., "A History of the Nauvoo Legion In Illinois," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974, 70, 73; compared with Thomas H. S. Hamersly, *Regular Army Register of the United States, 1779–1879* (Washington: By the author, 1880), 84–89.

¹⁰² *History of the Church*, 5:482.

¹⁰³ See discussion for following note 120.

¹⁰⁴ *History of the Church*, 1:434, 3:81, 204, 328, 5:15; "Mormons Held Boggs Responsible for Their Hardships," in L. Dean Marriott, "Lilburn W. Boggs: Interaction with Mormons following Their Expulsion from Missouri," Ed.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1979, 27–30. For Rockwell as a Danite, see appendix, "Danites in 1838: A Partial List," in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 484.

¹⁰⁵ Alanson Ripley to "Dear brethren in Christ Jesus," with Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Caleb Baldwin, Alexander McRae, and Lyman Wight identified by initials at the end of letter, 10 April 1839, Joseph Smith letterbook 2:17, Smith pa-

The attempt to kill Boggs also occurred one month after Smith received a revelation that has never been officially published. The full content of this document of 7 April 1842 is presently unknown, but it provided the ponderous name for a future theocratic organization that was nicknamed the Council of Fifty: "Verily thus saith the Lord. This is the name by which you shall be called—The Kingdom of God and His Laws, with Keys and power thereof, and judgment in the hands of his servants. Ahman Christ."¹⁰⁶ Killing Boggs a month later would have been the first theocratic "judgment in the hands of his servants." One of the church newspapers (edited by the prophet's brother William, an apostle) called the attempted assassination a "noble deed."¹⁰⁷

Completely loyal at this time, the prophet's second counselor William Law understandably asked him in 1842 about this matter. He later claimed that Smith replied: "I sent Rockwell to kill Boggs, but he missed him, [and] it was a failure; he wounded him instead of sending him to Hell."¹⁰⁸ On 5 July 1842 witnesses overheard an argument between Rockwell and recently excommunicated First Presidency counselor John C. Bennett about the attempted assassination. Four days later, two men signed affidavits that during this argument "Rockwell said he had been up into Boggs's neighborhood, in Missouri; and said he, 'If I shot Boggs, they have got to prove it.'"¹⁰⁹ Decades later, Rockwell also allegedly acknowledged: "I shot through the window and thought I had killed him, but I had only wounded him; I was damned sorry that I had not killed the son of a bitch."¹¹⁰ Boggs miraculously survived this attempt on his life in May 1842, despite two large balls of buckshot lodged in his brain and two in his neck.¹¹¹ Already a fugitive from Missouri punishment for capital crimes, Joseph Smith

pers, original in LDS Archives, with microfilm copies at Community of Christ Archives, at Lee Library, and at Marriott Library; quoted in Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, 100. For Ripley as a Danite, see appendix, "Danites in 1838: A Partial List," in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 483.

¹⁰⁶ William Clayton diary, 1 January 1845, in George D. Smith, editor, *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books/Smith Research Associates, 1991), 153, gives the earliest available statement of the revelation's text but does not date it. The earliest known statement that this revelation occurred on 7 April 1842 is Council of Fifty minutes, 10 April 1880, typed copy, Lee Library, also in Joseph F. Smith diary, 10 April 1880, LDS Archives, and in Andrew F. Ehat, "It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth": Joseph Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God," *BYU Studies* 20 (spring 1980): 254n3. Restatements and slight variations of this council's long name (given by the 1842 revelation) appear in Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal: 1833–1898 Typescript*, 3 (29 May 1847): 188; John D. Lee diary, 3 March 1849, in Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, editors, *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848–1876*, two volumes (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1955), 1:98; Joseph F. Smith diary, 16 March 1880; Franklin D. Richards diary, 16 March 1880, LDS Archives; Council of Fifty minutes, 10 April 1880, LDS Archives; Joseph F. Smith memorandum, 31 December 1880, LDS Archives; Abraham H. Cannon diary, 9 October 1884, Lee Library, Marriott Library, and Utah State Historical Society; John Taylor revelation of 27 June 1882, in Annie Taylor Hyde notebook, 67, LDS Archives; and in Fred C. Collier, *Unpublished Revelations of the Prophets and Presidents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, second edition (Salt Lake City: Collier's Publishing, 1981), 134v29.

¹⁰⁷ *The Wasp* (Nauvoo, Illinois), (28 May 1842).

¹⁰⁸ William Law statement, 31 July 1887, in Lyndon W. Cook, editor, *William Law: Biographical Essay, Nauvoo Diary, Correspondence* (Orem: Grandin Book, 1994), 116–117.

¹⁰⁹ Jonas Hobart affidavit on 9 July 1842 (for quote), Samuel Marshall affidavit on 9 July 1842 (for third person paraphrase of quote), both in John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints . . .* (Boston: Leland and Whiting, 1842), 285. Lacking the effusiveness and sensationalism that Bennett and his allies typically used, these affidavits quoted/paraphrased Rockwell's guarded and not-quite-incriminating statement. Under the circumstances, the affidavits sound like unexaggerated statements of what Hobart and Marshall actually heard him say.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Harold Schindler, *Orrin Porter Rockwell: Man of God, Son of Thunder* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1966), 80.

¹¹¹ William M. Boggs, "A Short Biographical Sketch of Lilburn W. Boggs, By His Son," *Missouri Historical Review* 4 (January 1910): 107; also Nicholas Van Alfen, *Orrin Porter Rockwell: The Frontier Mormon Marshal* (Logan: LDS Institute of Religion, 1964), 20–32; Monte B. McLaws, "The Attempted Assassination of Missouri's Ex-Governor, Lilburn W. Boggs," *Missouri Historical Review* 60 (October 1965): 50–62; Flanders, *Nauvoo*, 104–105; Schindler, *Orrin Porter Rockwell*, 74–109; Richard Lloyd Dewey, *Porter Rockwell: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Paramount Books, 1986), 49–77.

made several denials that he was involved in the attempt to kill Boggs.¹¹²

In May 1842 Joseph Smith also reorganized his bodyguards who were primarily those with experience as Danites in Missouri. Former Danites such as Dimick B. Huntington, Daniel Carn, and Albert P. Rockwood began serving as Nauvoo's "Night Watch."¹¹³ Previously a Danite captain, Rockwood had already been serving as "commander of my life guards,"¹¹⁴ and the prophet's bodyguards included such well-known Danites as John L. Butler, Reynolds Cahoon, Elias Higbee, Vinson Knight, Orrin Porter Rockwell, and Samuel H. Smith. The others with Missouri experience were probably lesser-known Danites.¹¹⁵ In December 1842 a bounty-hunter wrote to Missouri's governor: "All of our efforts to seize the renegade Smith, have proved fruitless. He keeps constantly around him as body guard some 12 to 14 enthusiastic fanaticks which makes a secret approach impossible."¹¹⁶

In January 1843 Smith told dinner guests about whipping the Protestant minister in Kirtland "till he begged."¹¹⁷ A month later, he preached publicly about whipping the Palmyra wife-beater.¹¹⁸ On 28 March, the prophet wrote that Seventy's president "Josiah Butterfield came to my house and insulted me so outrageously that I kicked him out of the house, across the yard, and into the street."¹¹⁹ This was another incident of upholding his sense of male honor.

Also in March 1843 Joseph Smith told the Nauvoo city council that he was opposed to hanging: "If a man kill another[,] shoot him or cut his throat[,] spilling his blood on the ground and let the smoke thereof ascend up to God. If I ever have the privilege of making a law on this point, I will have it so." This echoed First Counselor Rigdon's throat-cutting statements to Mormons in Missouri five years earlier.¹²⁰

¹¹² Joseph Smith letter to Mr. Bartlett, 22 May 1842, in *Quincy Whig* (Quincy, Illinois), (4 June 1842); Joseph Smith letter to the editor, 27 May 1842, in *Quincy Herald* (Quincy, Illinois), (2 June 1842); *History of the Church*, 5:9, 15, 6:151.

¹¹³ *History of the Church*, 5:4, 13; Book of the Law of the Lord, 19 May 1842, in Jesse, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:384; *The Wasp* (Nauvoo, Illinois), (21 May 1842): [3], (4 June 1842): [3]. The Night Watch in 1842 included Dimick B. Huntington, William D. Huntington, Lucius N. Scovil, Charles Allen, Albert P. Rockwood, Noah Rogers, Shadrach Roundy, Josiah Arnold, David H. Redfield, Hiram Clark, S. B. Hicks, Erastus H. Derby, John A. Forgeus, Gilbert D. Goldsmith, Daniel Carn, and John G. Luce. See appendix, "Danites in 1838: A Partial List," in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, [479]–490.

¹¹⁴ *History of the Church*, 5:4.

¹¹⁵ James B. Allen, *Trials of Discipleship: The Story of William Clayton, A Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 140. Based on the list of Smith's personal staff and "guards" in the Nauvoo Legion as of February 1841 (*History of the Church*, 4:296), Hartley, *My Best for the Kingdom*, 120, lists as Smith's twelve bodyguards the following men: John L. Butler, Thomas Grover, Christian M. Kremeyer, John Snyder, Alpheus Cutler, Reynolds Cahoon, Henry G. Sherwood, Shadrach Roundy, Vinson Knight, James Allred, Elias Higbee, and Samuel H. Smith. A problem with this list is that it omits Orrin Porter Rockwell, widely known as one of Smith's bodyguards. Hartley also omits Albert P. Rockwood, the actual commander of the "lifeguards," with the explanation that the 1841 entry in *History of the Church* listed Rockwood only as a "drill master" with the Nauvoo Legion. Apparently, Smith's "lifeguards" in the Nauvoo Legion were for ceremonial purposes and overlapped with his actual bodyguards who were "ordained" to protect his life. For sources about the Danite affiliation of the above men, see appendix, "Danites in 1838: A Partial List," in Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, [479]–490.

¹¹⁶ L. B. Fleak (at Keokuk, Iowa) to Governor Thomas Reynolds, 4 December 1842, folder 14346, box 319, Reynolds Correspondence, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Missouri. For the context of why Missouri's governor was receiving reports from attempted kidnapers, see George R. Gayler, "Attempts by the State of Missouri to Extradite Joseph Smith, 1841–1843," *Missouri Historical Review* 58 (October 1863): 21–36. Stanley B. Kimball, "Missouri Mormon Manuscripts: Sources in Selected Archives," *BYU Studies* 14 (summer 1974): 476–477, summarized eleven of Fleak's letters to Reynolds about efforts to kidnap Smith, but does not refer to Fleak's interesting comment about bodyguards.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Smith diary, 1 January 1843, in Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record*, 267; *History of the Church*, 5:216, deleted this entry.

¹¹⁸ *History of the Church*, 5:285.

¹¹⁹ *History of the Church*, 5:316.

¹²⁰ Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record*, 326, for quote from Smith's original diary; phrased differently in *History of the Church*, 5:296 ("I will shoot him, or cut off his head, spill his blood on the ground," also "on that subject"). The LDS Church's official history changed the phrase to "cut off his head" as an apparent effort to make readers think the founding

Although his instructions about capital punishment to the city council could be viewed as a mayor's comments about secular laws, theocracy was the context of his comments as church president to the LDS general conference on 6 April 1843: "I'll wring a thief's neck off if I can find him, if I cannot bring him to Justice any other way."¹²¹ When former Danite John L. Butler heard his prophet preach on this occasion, he understood him to say "that the time would come that the sinners would have their heads cut off to save them." Butler said the "spirit" of God filled him as he listened to those words. His account was included in the LDS Church's official "Journal History."¹²²

In June, Smith instructed the Nauvoo Mormons about the next stage of violence against their enemies. He warned what would happen "if Missouri continues her warfare, and to issue her writs against me and this people unlawfully and unjustly . . . if they don't let me alone, I will turn up the world—I will make war."¹²³

In August, the Mormon prophet also showed that he did not hesitate to physically assault a civil officer: "[Walter] Bagby called me a liar, and picked up a stone to throw at me, which so enraged me that I followed him a few steps, and struck him two or three times." He added in a sermon: "I seized him by the throat to choke him off." He pleaded guilty to assault and battery on the county tax collector, and the Nauvoo judge assessed a fine for this crime.¹²⁴ Smith's secretary, William Clayton, added that Daniel H. Wells had ended the brawl when he "stepped between them and succeeded in separating them." But Smith obviously wanted to do more damage to Bagby, and complained in a sermon about "Esquire Wells interfering when he had no business."¹²⁵

Concerning Nauvoo's Sunday meeting of 17 September 1843, Smith's official history stated: "I took my post as Mayor outside the assembly to keep order and set an example to the other officers."¹²⁶ Some non-Mormon attendees had a different perspective about the example Smith was setting. These residents of Warsaw, Illinois,

were at Nauvoo, in attendance upon public preaching, near the Temple. Bennett [not John C.] and his companion

prophet was referring to the civil execution by decapitation as practiced in the decades-earlier French Revolution. However, Smith's actual phrase "cut his throat" replayed the throat-cutting threats by Missouri Danites (including Sidney Rigdon) in 1838 (see quotes for previous notes 80 and 81). The LDS prophet's 1843 statement was also an official precedent for Counselor Rigdon's throat-slitting statement to April 1844 general conference (see quote for following note 145). Smith's 1843 statement was also an obvious precedent for Brigham Young's similar phrases in his published sermons about "blood atonement" during the 1850s (see following note 148). Published in Salt Lake City, the LDS Church's official *History of the Church*, 5:296 even described Smith's remarks as "The Questions of 'Currency' and Blood Atonement, in the Nauvoo City Council." Note that the editors did not put quotation marks around Blood Atonement, but did for "Currency."

¹²¹ Joseph Smith statement, manuscript minutes of 6 April 1843 conference, first version (page 10), and with quoted words lined out in second version (page 4), both documents in LDS Archives. This statement by Joseph Smith is absent from the report of his remarks in *Times and Seasons, History of the Church*, and in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, editors, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 173–181.

¹²² John L. Butler reminiscence, in *Journal History*, 6 August 1838, 6.

¹²³ *History of the Church*, 5:473.

¹²⁴ *History of the Church*, 5:524, 531; Joseph Smith diary, 13 August 1843, in Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record*, 405; also Allen, *Trials of Discipleship*, 114–115, 144n15.

¹²⁵ William Clayton diary, 1 August 1843, in Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 114; *History of the Church*, 5:531. In *Warsaw Message* (Warsaw, Illinois) (11 October 1843): [1–2], Bagby wrote that Joseph Smith "insulted me in the grossest manner, without any provocation, (as I think will appear in the sequel) and at a time too, when I was enfeebled by long and severe illness, being then but just able to walk . . . and what, Mr. Editor, may you suppose was the cause of this attack? Why, simply because, as collector of the county, I advertised, according to law, a certain lot in Nauvoo, to which he afterwards set up a claim. Such was the ostensible cause that produced the cause above alluded to.

" . . . And I would here remark, that, but for the timely interference of Dan'l H. Wells Esq., who happened to be near, and who nobly threw himself into the breach, I would, doubtless, have suffered great personal injury, by the dastardly beast [Smith], whose fury increased in an inverse ratio to his discovery of my entire inability from the effect of disease, and the want of suitable weapons, to resist his brutal violence."

¹²⁶ *History of the Church*, 5:34; the original in Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record*, 414, specified "under officers."

were engaged in some conversation about the time of day, when the Prophet, who happened to be near, came blustering up, and seizing him by the collar, led him out of the crowd. After letting go, Bennett turned to speak to him, when Smith commenced beating him with his cane, declaring that, if he didn't shut his mouth, he would cane him out of the corporation [city limits]. Bennett came home, and on Tuesday made complaint before Justice [George] Rockwell for assault & battery. A writ was issued, and put into the hands of Mr. [James] Charles, Constable, who on appearing before the Prophet on Wednesday, was coolly told that he was too late! He had procured an arrest, and had a trial before a Nauvoo court, and was discharged.

In other words, acquitted.¹²⁷

Although not dated in the autobiography that recorded it, the following incident may also have occurred in 1843. Ira N. Spaulding was riding in Smith's carriage, when "there came a man who held a [promissory] note against Joseph. He talked kindly to the man and begged him to wait a short time for the money as he could not pay him then[,] but good words would not satisfy him. He abused him [the prophet] shamefully, calling him every mean name he could think of." The man should have known that this was not a wise thing for anyone to do. Smith "stepped outside the carriage and knocked him down flat as a beef, not speaking a word and come into the carriage and traveled on."¹²⁸

Even the Mormon prophet's well-known hobby of wrestling manifested an unpleasant willingness to take physical advantage of smaller men. While celebrating Smith's "athletic nature," Alexander L. Baugh noted: "On occasion, the Prophet even challenged much smaller individuals we might consider to be the more non-athletic type to wrestle with him." He quoted Howard Coray about one example that ended badly. Smith told his devout follower:

"Brother Coray, I wish you was a little larger, I would like to have some fun with you." I replied, perhaps you can as it is— not realizing what I was saying—Joseph a man of over 200 lbs. weight, while I [was] scarcely 130 lb., made it not a little ridiculous for me to think of engaging with him in any thing like a scuffle. However, as soon as I made this reply, he began to trip me; he took some kind of a lock on my right leg, from which I was unable to extricate it. [A]nd throwing me around, broke it some 3 inch(es) above the ankle joint.

Breaking Coray's leg was an accident, which the prophet immediately regretted.¹²⁹

However, Baugh did not comment on an obvious question. Why would a tall, husky man like Joseph Smith want to humiliate small, scrawny men by either easily defeating them in a wrestling match or giving them a challenge they would lose honor by declining? It does not matter that he often wrestled larger men for sport or that he sometimes engaged in serious fights with several opponents at once. Whenever he challenged smaller, obviously weaker males to a physical contest, he went beyond the male code of honor and engaged in the kind of behavior that Americans described at the time as "bullying."¹³⁰ This also puts another perspective on his boasting about beating up enemies until they begged him to stop.

Despite his endorsements of decapitation in 1843, there is no evidence that Smith ever authorized such punishment in Nauvoo. However, one of his housegirls wrote (apparently in late that November) that Dr. Robert D. Foster, surgeon-general and brevet-brigadier-general of the Nauvoo Legion, had used a sword to decapitate a man execution-style "on the prairie 6 miles" from LDS headquarters. Foster was not a dissenter then,

¹²⁷ "The Last Case At Nauvoo," *Warsaw Message* (Warsaw, Illinois) (27 September 1843): [3]. Bennett's first name was not given in this long article, nor in the first reference to this altercation "On Sunday Last," in *Warsaw Message* (20 September 1843): [2]. However, Smith's excommunicated counselor John C. Bennett was not "one of our citizens" at Warsaw, because (Smith, *Saintly Scoundrel*, 138) he was residing in Iowa from May to December 1843.

¹²⁸ "Story as related to me by Ira N. Spaulding of East Weber," in David Osborn autobiography, Lee Library; transcribed in its entirety on the Internet at www.math.byu.edu/~smithw/lds/LDS/Early-Saints/DOSborn.html (or more simply by doing a Google search on "Ira N. Spaulding"). Born in 1809, Spaulding died in 1882 at Uintah, Weber County, Utah. One of his children was born in Nauvoo in 1844. See the Ancestral File of the LDS Church, available on the Internet at www.familysearch.org.

¹²⁹ Alexander L. Baugh, "Joseph Smith's Athletic Nature," in Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr., editors, *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, The Man* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 140.

¹³⁰ For example, Isaac M. Dwight, *To the Public, Augusta, Dec'r 2d, 1823* (Augusta, Georgia: N.p., 1823). This was a refutation of printed charges posted by Thomas Broughton Jr., accusing the author of being "a bullying coward, a braggadocio in words and a poultron in deeds."

but would become one within four months.¹³¹

In December 1843 Smith organized the “Police Force of Nauvoo,” with Jonathan Dunham and Hosea Stout (former Danites) as captain and vice-captain. Among the forty police were such other Danites from Missouri as Charles C. Rich, John D. Lee, Daniel Carn, James Emmett, Stephen H. Goddard, Abraham C. Hodge, John L. Butler, Levi W. Hancock, Abraham O. Smoot, Dwight Harding, and William H. Edwards. Several continued to double as his personal bodyguards.¹³²

These Mormon policemen were proud of their Danite background. According to one complaining Mormon at Nauvoo, policeman Daniel Carn “told me several times [that] Daniteism was not down . . . said it was a good system.” Carn laconically replied (in Joseph Smith’s presence): “Daniteism is to stand by each other [—] that is all I know about Daniteism.”¹³³

As mayor, Smith authorized his police to kill “if need be,” and then said his own life was endangered in December 1843 by a “little dough-head” and “a right-hand Brutus.” The latter remarks put the police on notice to look for Mormon dissenters as traitors. Within a week, Nauvoo’s police terrified Smith’s second counselor William Law and Nauvoo’s stake president William Marks into fearing that he had marked them for death.¹³⁴ Both were foes of the prophet’s secret practice of polygamy.¹³⁵

On 11 March 1844 Joseph Smith secretly organized the theocratic Council of Fifty as fulfillment of the revelation nearly two years earlier.¹³⁶ Several months later, disaffected members claimed that he “swore them all to present secrecy, under penalty of death!”¹³⁷ Although the 1844 minutes of the Council of Fifty are sequestered in the LDS First Presidency’s vault, the claim of a theocratic “penalty of death” in 1844 is verified by available minutes of later date that referred to a “Penalty.”¹³⁸

¹³¹ Phebe Wheeler Olney statement, written between November 1843 and April 1844 on the back of Susan McKee Culbertson’s application for membership in the Nauvoo Relief Society, 21 [July] 1843, Western Americana MSS S-1644/F349, Beinecke Library. Nauvoo’s 1842 census showed “Phoebe” Wheeler as the first of the six girls residing as house servants with the Joseph Smith family. Despite her marriage to Oliver Olney on 19 October 1843, performed by Patriarch Hyrum Smith, Phebe apparently continued as a servant in the Smith home until 1844. Its unrelated reference to “Mrs Sagers” indicates that this entry dates from November 1843 to April 1844, when the marital complaints of Mrs. Harrison Sagers involved the high council. The more likely time period for discussion of the Harrison case in the Smith household was November 1843, the only time Smith’s manuscript diary referred to the complaint against Harrison. See Joseph Smith diary, 25 November 1843, in Faulring, *An American Prophet’s Record*, 428; Nauvoo high council minutes, 25 November 1843, 14 April 1844; *History of the Church*, 6:118, 333 (which retroactively adds the April 1844 reference to Sagers as if it were part of Smith’s diary); Nauvoo 1842 census in Lyman De Platt, *Nauvoo: Early Mormon Records Series* (Highland, Utah: By the author, 1980), 86; Lyndon W. Cook, compiler, *Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 1839–1845* (Orem: Grandin Book, 1994), 107; also Joseph Smith diary, 2 March 1843 to 21 January 1844, in Faulring, *An American Prophet’s Record*, 314, 323, 324, 334, 335, 336, 337, 373, 388, 403, 412, 424, 433, 438, 442, for his positive (as late as 29 October 1843) or neutral references to Foster. Smith’s next reference (460) described Foster as a dissenter trying to destroy him. *History of the Church*, 5:369, 6:355, for Foster’s positions in the Nauvoo Legion. *History of the Church*, 6:61, dropped Smith’s positive statement about Foster in October 1843.

¹³² *History of the Church*, 6:149–150; compare appendix, “Danites in 1838: A Partial List,” in Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, [479]–490.

¹³³ Statements by Eli Norton and Daniel Carn in presence of Mayor Joseph Smith, Nauvoo City Council Minutes, 3 January 1844, LDS Archives, with complete transcription in Cook, *William Law*, 40n–41n.

¹³⁴ *History of the Church*, 6:151, 152, 166–170; William Law diary, 2–5 January 1844, in Cook, *William Law*, 38–45.

¹³⁵ Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 147, 177; John Frederick Glaser, “The Disaffection of William Law,” *Restoration Studies* 3 (1986): 163–177; Cook, *William Law*, passim; Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 3, 476–477, 549.

¹³⁶ *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 270; Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 120–122, also appendix, “Members of the Council of Fifty, 1844–1845, Ranking as of 27 June 1844 (at Joseph Smith’s death),” [521]–528; Ehat, “It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth,” passim.

¹³⁷ George T. M. Davis, *An Authentic Account of the Massacre of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, and Hyrum Smith, His Brother, Together with a Brief History of the Rise and Progress of Mormonism, and All the Circumstances Which Led to Their Deaths* (St. Louis: Chambers and Knapp, 1844), 7, emphasis in original. Davis, a newspaper editor, was in Nauvoo gathering information just before Joseph Smith’s death. See *History of the Church*, 6:587.

available minutes of later date that referred to a “Penalty.”¹³⁸

BYU professor Hartley has written that the Missouri “Danite oaths [were] not to betray each other, the breaking of which could bring the death penalty.”¹³⁹ At least eighteen members of the Council of Fifty had already taken oaths as Danites before Smith required this new guarantee of deadly secrecy in the spring of 1844.¹⁴⁰

Within two weeks, he took the first step toward abandoning the non-violent militarism that had characterized his leadership of the Nauvoo Legion during the years since he had escaped a death sentence for Danite militarism in Missouri. On 26 March, the Council of Fifty authorized him to ask Congress to commission him to recruit “one hundred thousand armed volunteers in the United States and Territories.” As secretly approved by this theocratic council, Smith’s “memorial” to Congress promised that he would use this military force “to extend the arm of deliverance to Texas [then an independent nation]; [and to] protect the inhabitants of Oregon from foreign aggressions and domestic broils; to prevent the crowned nations from encircling us as a nation on our western and southern borders.” This petition also asked Congress to provide for the arrest and two-year imprisonment of anyone who “shall hinder or attempt to hinder or molest the said Joseph Smith from executing his designs.” In case Congress was unwilling to grant these powers, Smith prepared a similar petition to the U.S. president. Ostensibly representing Smith as mayor, Orson Hyde carried this memorial to the nation’s leaders as secret ambassador from the theocratic Council of Fifty, which commissioned him in its 4 April meeting.¹⁴¹ Two months before asking federal authority for him to lead military forces against “foreign aggressions and domestic broils,” Joseph Smith had publicly announced himself as candidate for U.S. president.¹⁴²

Contrary to the previous five years, he was no longer content with mere saber rattling on the part of the armed forces he was leading. Uriah Brown was initiated into the secretive Council of Fifty because of the prophet’s 1844 interest in this non-Mormon’s invention of “liquid fire to destroy an army or navy.”¹⁴³ Thirty years earlier, Brown had unsuccessfully offered his idea “for destroying by fire the vessels of the enemy” in a

¹³⁸ Council of Fifty minutes by Joseph F. Smith, 12 October 1880, emphasis in original, LDS Archives, with modified transcription in “jfs box 11 [page] 14–14–14–14,” in folder 6, box 6, Scott G. Kenney papers, Marriott Library; also discussion in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 128–129.

¹³⁹ Hartley, *My Best for the Kingdom*, 50. For the documentary evidence on which his statement is based, see *Document Containing the Correspondence*, 97 (which was quoted by Schindler, *Orrin Porter Rockwell*, 46–47, and by Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, 1:501); also variant of the oath in William Swartzell daily journal, 21 July 1838, in his *Mormonism Exposed*, 22. In his manuscript autobiography (1807–1851), pages 120, 125 (for August 1838) at LDS Archives, lifelong Mormon Luman A. Shurtliff verified that the Danites took a solemn “oath,” without giving its details. His reference to “oath” was removed in the typescript, “Luman Andros Shurtliff: My Grandfather, 1807,” at Utah State Historical Society.

However, David J. Whittaker, “The Book of Daniel in Early Mormon Thought,” in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, editors, *By Study and Also By Faith*, two volumes (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, and Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990), 1:171, observes that in the letters of Albert P. Rockwood to his relatives about the Danites in 1838, “nowhere is there the cutthroat secrecy that Avard later succeeded in convincing Judge Austin King and the non-Mormon public that there was.” However, since Rockwood as a Danite was already bound by a penal oath of secrecy (as friendly Mormon sources verify was the case), he understandably did not volunteer that information to his uninitiated relatives. Whittaker’s argument is the fallacy of irrelevant proof.

¹⁴⁰ Compare appendix, “Danites in 1838: A Partial List,” in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, [479]–490 with its appendix, “Members of the Council of Fifty, 1844–45, Ranking as of 27 June 1844 (at Joseph Smith’s death),” [521]–528.

¹⁴¹ *History of the Church*, 6:270, 274–277, 282–283, 286, 286n; Faulring, *An American Prophet’s Record*, 461, 463; William Clayton diary, 4 April 1844, in Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 128; Ehat, “‘It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth,’” 275.

¹⁴² “WHO SHALL BE OUR NEXT PRESIDENT?” in *Nauvoo Neighbor* (Nauvoo, Illinois), 14 February 1844, [2], and in *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 February 1844): 441; also *History of the Church*, 6:64–65, 144, 155–160, 376–377, 428–429, 439; Hill, *Joseph Smith*, 374–375.

¹⁴³ Uriah Brown to Brigham Young, 3 November 1845, LDS Archives; statements of Phineas Young and Almon W. Babbitt, in Council of Fifty minutes, 25 August 1851, LDS Archives; also Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 127–128, for discussions of the three non-Mormons in Smith’s theocratic Council of Fifty.

proposal to the U.S. Navy.¹⁴⁴

The last public endorsement of violence during Smith's life occurred at the General Conference on 6 April 1844. Sidney Rigdon undoubtedly startled many Mormons by announcing: "There are men standing in your midst that you cant do anything with them but cut their throat & bury them." The prophet said nothing in dissent from his first counselor's remarks.¹⁴⁵

Ten weeks later, Joseph Smith died as a martyr to his faith in Carthage Jail. But he was neither a willing nor non-violent martyr. As the mob clamored up the stairs, he fired at them with a six-shooter pistol, wounding three.¹⁴⁶

Mormon culture became increasingly violent following the murder of its founding prophet. Claiming apostolic succession from his fallen leader, Brigham Young authorized assault and battery against Nauvoo dissidents, and applauded Porter Rockwell for killing some of those identified as involved in murdering Smith and other Mormons.¹⁴⁷ On the pioneer trail and in the Utah society he created, Young increasingly preached about "blood atonement" against sinful Mormons and about "avenging the blood of the prophets" against anti-Mormons. These themes of violence and vengeance became both normative and pervasive in LDS sermons, hymns, newspaper editorials, and patriarchal blessings for decades.¹⁴⁸ However, LDS apologists claim that

¹⁴⁴ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Report of the Committee on Naval Affairs, on the Petition of Uriah Brown, January 27, 1815. Read and Ordered to Lie on the Table*, document 53 in *State Papers, 3rd Session, 13th Congress* (Washington, D. C.: Roger C. Weightman, 1815), whose one-page text stated in part: "The committee on naval affairs, to whom was referred the memorial of Uriah Brown, together with the report of the acting secretary of the navy, have, according to order, had the said memorial and report under consideration, and thereupon submit the following report: . . . many difficulties would be presented to the execution of such a plan, as it is represented by the memorialist, that to be able to effect it, the vessel carrying the materials must approach within three or four hundred feet of the vessel to be attacked. The memorialist supposes that fifty thousand dollars would be necessary to carry his plan into execution; the committee taking into consideration the present situation of the finances . . . think it would be inexpedient at this time to authorize an appropriation for the purpose proposed by the memorialist."

¹⁴⁵ Sidney Rigdon sermon on 6 April 1844, compiled on 24 April 1844 by Thomas Bullock, LDS Archives; deleted from the published report.

¹⁴⁶ *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 281, for photograph of the "six-shooter" Joseph Smith used and the single-shot handgun he gave his brother Hyrum who declined to fire it. John Hay, "The Mormon Prophet's Tragedy," *Atlantic Monthly* 24 (December 1869): 675, identified three men who were shot by Joseph Smith: John Wills in the arm, William Vorhees in the shoulder, and William Gallagher in the face. Hay was a son of Charles Hay, a surgeon of the Carthage militia and apparently a member of the mob. *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 282, agrees that Smith wounded three men.

¹⁴⁷ Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 176–181; Marshall Hamilton, "From Assassination to Expulsion: Two Years of Distrust, Hostility, and Violence," in Launius and Hallwas, *Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited*, 214–230; John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, editors, *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁸ John Smith (former Danite) patriarchal blessing to John Smith (born 1832), 22 January 1845, quoted in Irene M. Bates, "Patriarchal Blessings and the Routinization of Charisma," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26 (fall 1993): 12, 12n45, 21; Hosea Stout diary, 27 September 1845, in Juanita Brooks, editor, *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1861*, two volumes (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964), 1:76; Elden J. Watson, editor, *MANUSCRIPT HISTORY of Brigham Young, 1846–1847* (Salt Lake City: By the author, 1971), 480 (24 February 1847); Elisha H. Groves patriarchal blessing to William H. Dame, 20 February 1854, in Harold W. Pease, "The Life and Works of William Home Dame," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1971, 64–66; Groves patriarchal blessing to William Leany, 23 February 1854, in Leany autobiography, 8, typescript in Utah State Historical Society; "DISCOURSE By Jedediah M. Grant, Tabernacle, G.S.L. City, March 12th 1851 [1854]," *Deseret News* [weekly], 27 July 1854, [2]; "REMARKS By President J. M. Grant, Bowery, Sunday Morning, Sept. 21, 1856," *Deseret News* [weekly], 1 October 1856, 235; Elisha H. Groves patriarchal blessing to Joseph Fish, 30 January 1857, in Paul H. Peterson, "The Mormon Reformation," Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1981, 192; Isaac Morley (former Danite) patriarchal blessing to Philip Klingensmith, 28 May 1857, in Anna Jean Backus, *Mountain Meadows Witness: The Life and Times of Bishop Philip Klingensmith* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1995), 124; *Journal of Discourses*, 1:73 (Hyde/1853), 1:83 (B. Young/1853), 1:97 (G. A. Smith/1851), 1:108 (B. Young/1853), 3:246–247 (B. Young/1856), 4:49–51 (J.M. Grant/1856), 4:53–54 (B. Young/1856), 4:173–174 (Kimball/1857), 4:219–220 (B. Young/1857), 4:375 (Kimball/1857), 6:38 (Kimball/1857), 7:20

faithful Mormons were really non-violent pioneers who regarded as mere “rhetorical devices” or “hyperbolic rhetoric” all evidence of this wholesale endorsement of theocratic violence.¹⁴⁹ To the contrary, there were many examples of religiously motivated assaults and murders until the LDS First Presidency in December 1889 publicly abandoned previous Mormon teachings about blood atonement for apostates and about the temporal church’s theocratic prerogatives.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, Utah pioneer diaries, correspondence, and church minutes indicate that ordinary Mormons believed that they had the religious obligation to “blood atone” apostates and to avenge the blood of the prophets on anti-Mormon gentiles.¹⁵¹ The fact that many Utah Mormon men did not act on the norms for violence that Brigham Young and other general authorities promoted is beside the point that those were the officially approved norms of the LDS Church in pioneer Utah. Likewise, most Mormon men did not marry polygamously, even though this was an unrelenting norm of the LDS Church until 1890.

Nevertheless, Young did not originate Mormonism’s culture of violence. It had been nurtured by Joseph Smith’s revelations, theocracy, and personal behavior. Like all prophets before or since, Smith was also influenced by his environment, which included a national culture of violence and its code of male honor. ◀

(Kimball/1854), 7:146 (B. Young/1859), 10:110 (B. Young/1857); *Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News/George Q. Cannon, 1871), 73–74, 314, 332, 337, 385; Sessions, *Mormon Thunder*, 125–130, 211; John W. Welch and John William Maddox, “Reflections on the Teachings of Brigham Young,” in Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter, editors, *Lion of the Lord: Essays on the Life and Service of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 393 (which listed two of these sermons on “Blood Atonement”); Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, especially 246–257.

¹⁴⁹ Charles W. Penrose, *Blood Atonement, as Taught by Leading Elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884), 35; Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, 4:126; Eugene England, *Brother Brigham* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 169, 182; Lowell M. Snow, “Blood Atonement,” in Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:131; Ronald W. Walker review in *Journal of Mormon History* 20 (spring 1994): 170, 173.

¹⁵⁰ Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 242–261; “OFFICIAL DECLARATION,” *Deseret Evening News*, 14 December 1889, [2]; James R. Clark, editor, *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, six volumes (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–1971), 3:185, 186.

¹⁵¹ Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 242, 245, 248–249, 257, 273.