IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR MOST OF US today to comprehend the violence that was pervasive, often normative, in early American culture. Much of this normative violence had its roots in the national culture while regions (such as the South and West) had their own traditions of sanctioned violence in daily life. In other instances, the rowdism and violence were normative only for a subculture that was defined primarily by social class or ethnicity. Early Americans had perspectives about violence that were very different even from those of modern Americans who have served in the military or lived in war-torn societies, because it is normal for modern Americans to grow up in a peaceful environment where violence is considered a violation of social norms.

Some of America’s culture of violence is rooted in England. Robert Shoemaker has observed of England’s traditions of male honor before 1800 that “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, Shoemaker’s statistical analysis shows that urban Englishmen of all classes were becoming less violent during the decades before 1800. Part of the reason for this decline of violence was the growing success of English common law’s “duty to retreat.” As Richard Maxwell Brown explains, a centuries-old “society of civility” in Britain that called 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 United States “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 shift resulted in America’s “proud new tolerance for killing in situations where it might have been avoided by obeying a legal duty to retreat.”

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.”

A few examples may be helpful in recognizing this early American culture of violence, which extended from the elite to the lower classes, 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, Thomas Jefferson in 1798 persuaded ambassador (and future president) James Monroe against trying to kill U.S. president John Adams in a duel. Alexander Hamilton, a founding father of the Republic and secretary of the U.S. Treasury, died in an 1804 duel. The history of dueling in the nation’s capital also included “an affair of honor” between Secretary of State Henry Clay and Senator John Randolph. 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 in 1818, and hanged two British men there for befriending the Seminole Indians—yet Jackson was elected U.S. president in 1828. As governor of Illinois Territory, William Henry Harrison declared “a war of extermination” against the Kickapoo Indians who opposed white
settlement on their ancestral lands, and he successfully used this violent campaign to get elected as U.S. president in 1840.13 In 1842, Abraham Lincoln nearly engaged in a sword duel with the Illinois state auditor.14

Violence in the classroom was also common in early America. In 1802, students at Princeton University burned down the library; before 1830 had arrived, they had engaged in five other “major campus rebellions.” Student rioting and violence also plagued the University of Virginia during the 1830s and 1840s. The problem was even worse at public schools where the children of farmers, shopkeepers, and common laborers were educated. In 1837 alone, 400 schools had to be closed in Massachusetts because of violence and disciplinary problems.15 From colonial times to the mid-1840s, it was a tradition in Philadelphia on Sundays for young men to commit both “organized and spontaneous mayhem.”16

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 early American males apparently declined to participate in their country’s culture of violence because of some combination of the following factors: non-aggressiveness in their personalities, their adherence to the Christian commandment to “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39), family indoctrination against violence, or their perception that there was never sufficient cause for them to resort to violence in their daily lives.

Because many American males (and nearly all females) avoided violence, we might question whether there really was a “culture of violence” in early America. To answer that question, we need more than arrest records, or anecdotal references to violent incidents, or even estimates of those who did not engage in violent acts. Rather, we need to ask 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. Though the incidents of violence are certainly important, both individually and statistically, the crucial question is whether the violent incidents occurred in concert with the society’s norms or in opposition to them.

It may be difficult for the majority of those who follow the Restoration message that began with the 1830 Book of Mormon to conceive of early Mormon culture as being violent.17 After all, the Book of Mormon’s 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 which extends to that 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 norms do not define the Mormonism which 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, 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 which interacted with the norms of the Church he led from 1830 to his death in 1844. As biographer Richard Lyman Bushman has recently observed, “Joseph’s reaction to insults was learned behavior, shared with his society. His anger was both his own and an expression of a cultural practice—what honorable men were taught to do. . . . The culture of honor moved him to contend with the offending parties to protect his easily bruised pride, even though all the while he wanted peace.”

On the one hand, for example, in 1836 a Kirtland resident called Joseph Smith “a pugnacious Prophet.” This described a repeatedly manifested 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 prooftexts about Jesus using a whip on money-changers in the temple at Jerusalem (John 2:15), but the Mormon Prophet’s resorting to assault and battery also reflected early America’s culture of violence and its code of male honor.

On the other hand, as God’s living Prophet and mouthpiece on earth, Smith 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 whipped him till he said he had enough.” He also told Mormon friends another “anecdote. While [Joseph was] 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.” Not surprisingly, the official History of the Church, published in Salt Lake City, deleted this latter passage from the Prophet’s personal journal, in part, perhaps, because it actually endorsed the accuracy of affidavits collected from Smith’s Palmyra neighbors and published in the first anti-Mormon book, Mormonism Unveiled.

However, despite these violent incidents in his early life (one expressing his code of male honor and one representing self-defense), the first few years of Joseph’s leadership of the Church were remarkably non-violent. His pacifism was most extraordinary when, in March 1832, a mob broke into the homes of Smith, then church president and his counselor Sidney Rigdon in Hiram, Ohio. The mob dragged the two 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, Joseph preached the next day to a congregation which included several of his attackers, and he sought no retribution. Among this mob was a former friend, apostate Symonds Rider.

I find it difficult to explain in satisfactorily human terms how Joseph Smith could manifest such Quaker-like pacifism 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. This contrast seems beyond Richard Bushman’s biographical assessments.

To explain the Prophet’s pacifist behavior in 1832, I think Joseph believed that Mormonism required him to live a higher standard. However, that changed—and Joseph became “pugnacious” for reasons that are neither explained nor self-evident.

Perhaps hackneyed phrases such as “straw that broke the camel’s back” or “dam bursting” apply to the cumulative effect of the years of religious ridicule and personal insults that he experienced. Both certainly provoked the Prophet’s exceptionally 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 Joseph Smith’s 1832 response to the 1832 mob attack was the most important guide his followers had concerning 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 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.

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.’” 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.31

In August 1833, Smith 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 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” (D&C 98:4–11, 33).32 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, upon the fourth attack, “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” (D&C 98:23, 25–26, 31, 37).

In October 1833, Missourians raided isolated Mormon homes, which was the second major attack of “your enemy,” after the attack in July. 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, the Mormon community in Missouri 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, who compelled the Mormons to surrender their weapons and begin leaving their homes.35

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 guard [sic] him every night.”36

A month later, Joseph 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.” To accomplish these ends, 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” (D&C 103:1, 26, 28, 34). This was the beginning of the Mormon military expedition called “Zion’s Camp.”37

Perhaps the most significant dimension of this “commandment” (v. 1) was its provision that “ye shall avenge me of mine enemies . . . unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (vv. 25–26). This new statement verified that the conditions laid down 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, elected Joseph Smith as “commander-in-chief of the armies of Israel.”38 This was one of the first acts of the newly organized high council, which thereby acknowledged Smith’s religious right to give God’s command to “go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people” (D&C 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.”39

Six months later, the military experience of Zion’s Camp (rather than any ecclesiastical service) was the basis upon which Joseph Smith said he was selecting men for the newly organized Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the Seventy.40 Unlike other American religious denominations, “the church militant” was a literal fact in Mormonism, not just a symbolic slogan.41

During this same period, Joseph Smith was involved in two outbursts of personal violence in Kirtland. Sometime between April 1834 and April 1835, the following incident occurred, as described by Smith himself. 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,” Ohio.42 Johnson explained that this act of violence occurred because the minister, after receiving the hospitality of the Prophet’s home, then “called Joseph a hypocrite, a liar, an im-
poster 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.”43 The American code of honor triumphed.

In April 1835, Joseph'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.44

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.45 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.”46

However, this fraternal conflict of 1835 had a final outcome which the Prophet's diary and official LDS history did not mention. Joseph Smith's devoted friend Benjamin F. Johnson, a Kirtland resident, reported that “for insolence to him, he (Joseph) soundly thrashed his brother William who boasted himself as invincible.”47

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 [sic within] four years, one with his own natural brother, one with his brotherinlaw [sic], one with Ezra Thair [Thayer], and one with a Baptist priest.” Parrish's statement was endorsed by two disaffected apostles (including Constable Luke Johnson) and two disaffected Presidents of the Seventy.48

By contrast, rather than becoming disaffected because of the Prophet's 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,49 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 publically [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.50

In his own handwriting: “I ask God in the name of Jesus that we may obtain Eight hundred men (or one thousand) well armed and that they may accomplish this great work.”51 A thousand-man army was a remarkable goal for an organization with fewer than nine thousand men, women, and children, which may be why the official LDS history changed the phrase to “one thousand emigrants.”52 John Whitmer, who was official Church Historian at this time, added something that Smith's diary left unstated: on this day, the high council “by revelation” appointed the LDS president as head of the “war department” of the “Lord's Host.”53

This was a significant expansion of Joseph's previous role as commander-in-chief of the armies of Israel because “war department” assumed crucial circumstances. First, he used the phrase which defined the jurisdiction of the U.S. Secretary of War, and this implied a nationalist dimension in Mormonism. Second, given that the U.S. War Department was a permanent function, in war or peace,54 the Prophet's military oversight was also permanent. Third, as head of Mormonism's “war department,” Smith did not need to be a line officer in the field during hostilities. Like the U.S. Secretary of War, Joseph now had oversight of all Mormon military operations. Fourth, he had no mortal superior and thus combined in himself roles that the U.S. government found it wise to separate in time of war—military command and civilian oversight. The fact that his diary stated his military goals for Missouri but did not reveal his actual organizational responsibility may indicate that the Prophet wanted to be an unseen hand to outside observers of Mormon military ventures.55 If so, the Prophet failed in his intention: in May 1836, a hostile resident referred to Kirtland's Mormons as “a military array of ragamuffins, headed by the modern Mohammed.”56

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; this 1836 document foreshadowed their activities less than two years later.57 John Whittmer was probably referring to this November ultimatum when he lamented the beginning of “secret combinations” in Kirtland “in the fall of 1836.”58

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 Joseph'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,” insisting further: “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 Joseph 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 Joseph because there was insufficient evidence to support the charge of conspiracy to commit murder.59

In the fall of 1837, David W. Patten investigated the Prophet's secret relationship with his servant girl Fanny Alger,60 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.”61 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.”62

When armed dissenters joined anti-Mormons in forcing the Prophet and his loyal followers to flee Kirtland in January 1838,63 this event solidified a world view that was indelible throughout the rest of the nineteenth century: Mormonism was fighting for its life against conspiracies of anti-Mormons and 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.”64

Some of Kirtland's dissenters also resettled at the new Mormon headquarters of Far West, Missouri, where they associated with local dissenters. Joseph and his loyal followers were determined to prevent these formerly faithful leaders from causing mass disaffection a second time. They pursued this aim through an organization which functioned both militarily and theocratically.

In early 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
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.”

Ebenezer Robinson, who also signed the Danite document, later wrote that all the signers were members of the recently organized Danite “military organization.” He added that he was told in June 1838 that the document itself “was gotten up in the office of the First Presidency.” Avard specified that Counselor Rigdon wrote the text of this Danite ultimatum. Although the Danites had been organized primarily for external security against the possibility of Missouri mobs, they now functioned as an organization for internal security—to intimidate and possibly kill dissenting Mormons.

Indeed, Joseph Smith's "Scriptory Book" journal showed that the Prophet intended the Danites to use force against LDS dissidents: “we have a company of Danites in these times, to put to right physically that which is not right, and to cleanse the Church of very [sic] great evils...” (emphasis added). The fact that the Danite death threat was written by Joseph's first counselor Sidney Rigdon, signed by second counselor Hyrum Smith, and co-signed by assistant counselor John Smith indicates that the First Presidency had thorough knowledge of the Danite organization in mid-1838 and crucial participation with its violent manifestations from the outset.

Speaking of the prominent dissidents who received this death threat in June, Joseph Smith’s “Scriptory” journal noted: “These men took warning, and soon they were seen bounding over the prairie like the scape goat to carry off[f] their own sins.” 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.” “Gadianton” was a Book of Mormon term for thieves and murderers who were bound by secret oaths (Helaman 6: 18, 24, 26).

The Danites' 1838 ultimatum was not an irregularity in Mormonism but a direct fulfillment of a revelation four years earlier concerning unfaithful Latter-day Saints “who call themselves after my name” (D&C 103: 4). Stephen C. LeSuer observed: “The Danite organization was the product of, not an aberration from, Mormon attitudes and teachings. The Danites represented mainstream Mormonism.” 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.”
Regarding the Danite expulsion of prominent Mormon dissenters, Sidney 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 for theocratic killings. Rigdon was, after all, merely restating in 1838 what the Prophet had said a year earlier about Grandison Newell—that Newell should be put out of the way, or where the crows could not find him; he [Joseph Smith] said that destroying Newell would be justifiable in the sight of God, that it was the will of God, &c.”

Benjamin Slade, a lifelong Mormon, soon testified that counselor Rigdon referred to carrying out that threat in mid-1838. “Yesterday a man had slipped his wind, and was thrown into the bush,” Rigdon told a closed-door meeting of Mormon men (apparently Danites), adding: “the man that lisps it shall die.”

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.” Joseph Smith published this Independence Day talk as a pamphlet, advertised it in the LDS periodical, and explained that Rigdon’s sermon expressed “the fixed determinations of the saints, in relation to the persecutors . . . for to be mob[bed] any more without taking vengeance we will not.”

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.” 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.

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 BYU 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.”

However, Hartley’s comparison of the Danites with the National Guard was a flawed attempt at “balanced assessment,” since the Danites were religious vigilantes, not legally commissioned soldiers. Likewise, Hartley’s comparison 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 whole class of individuals—non-Mormons in general—rather than the specific perpetrators of the attacks for which Mormons sought revenge.

Describing Danite security arrangements for August 1838, the manuscript autobiography of loyal Mormon Luman A. Shurtliff revealed that Joseph Smith was also a Danite. Between two discussions of Danite “sighns [sic] and passwords” and the Danite “countersign,” Shurtliff noted how the LDS President and his brother Hyrum Smith (a Danite by mid-June 1838 as well as Joseph’s second counselor in the First Presidency) gave the necessary “counter-sign” as the two 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.” However, like Hyrum, Joseph Smith was a Danite, and they both used the Danite countersign.

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.

Danites who maintained lifelong loyalty to the LDS Church later wrote of what they did to defenseless “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.93

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, contrary to Huntington’s rationalization of justified retribution, Danites sometimes plundered the property of gentiles who had previously been friendly to their Mormon neighbors. The Danites involved did not know these friendly non-Mormons.94

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.’”95 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 on 25 October 1838, at the beginning of the Battle of Crooked River.96

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.97 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 cheeks . . . and leaving him [for] dead.” Tarwater survived Crooked River to press charges against Pratt for attempted murder.98

Nevertheless, Mormon marauding against non-Mormon Missourians in 1838 was mild by comparison to 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 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 (aged nine and ten). Militiamen also used a “cornpicker” to mutilate the still-living Thomas McBride. When survivors found the elderly man, his corpse was “literally mangled from head to foot.”99

However, a generally unacknowledged dimension of the extermination order and the Haun’s Mill massacre is that they both resulted from Mormon actions at the Battle of Crooked River. Knowingly or not, Mormons had attacked state troops, and this had a cascade effect. Local non-Mormon 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 Gods 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, upon receiving news of the injuries and death of state troops at Crooked River, Governor Boggs immediately drafted his extermination order of 27 October 1838 on the grounds that the Mormons “have made war upon the people of this state.”100 Worse, the killing of one Missourian and mutilation of another while he was defenseless at Crooked River prompted 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—under arrest and vulnerable to the same criminal charges filed against Joseph Smith—testified against the Prophet (his Danite “Secretary of War”) 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.101

It is anachronistic to apply Smith’s later rejection of Avard to the activities of the Danites months earlier.102 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.103 He had been commander-in-chief of the Armies of Israel for four years. The Danites’ military actions of 1838 were carried out under 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, the near-execution of LDS leaders, 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, LDS headquarters in February 1841 gained a state-chartered private army, the Nauvoo Legion. The LDS president was its governor-appointed commander, holding the rank of lieutenant-general. Aside from Smith, only George Washington had ever 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 fewer than 8,500 soldiers. Under Smith's direction, the Nauvoo Legion drilled and held mock battles.

Nevertheless, the legion 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" which came to his 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.

Despite being the commander of a Mormon militia which 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, Joseph 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 in response to what he regarded as justifiable provocation.

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, as an extension of Smith's "spilling his blood on the ground" doctrine (which he did not announce publicly until 1843). Smith held Boggs directly responsible for the expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County in 1833 and for the disasters of 1838. Killing Boggs would have fit within the provisions of the 1833 revelation (D&C 98:31). It would have also been 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 pledge copied into his personal letterbook.

The attempt to kill Boggs 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." Killing Boggs a month later was likely the first theocratic "judgment in the hands of his servants." One of the LDS newspapers (edited by the Prophet's brother William, an apostle) called the attempted assassination a "noble deed."

Completely loyal at this time, the Prophet's second counselor William Law understandably asked Smith in 1842 about this matter. Law 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." 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.'" 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." 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. Already a fugitive from Missouri punishment for capital crimes, Joseph Smith made several denials that he was involved in the attempt to kill Boggs.

In May 1842, Joseph Smith reassembled a cadre of bodyguards, selecting 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." Previously a Danite captain, Rockwood had already been serving as "commander of my [Smith's] life guards." 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 other bodyguards with Missouri experience were probably lesser-known Danites. 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.”

In January 1843, Smith told dinner guests about whipping the Protestant minister in Kirtland “till he begged.” A month later, he preached publicly about whipping the Palmyra wife-beater. On 28 March, the Prophet wrote that seventies 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.” This was another instance of Smith 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 remark echoed statements that Sidney Rigdon had made five years earlier, while a counselor in the First Presidency, about cutting the throats of non-Mormons in Missouri.

Although Smith’s instructions about capital punishment to the city council could be viewed as a secular commentary from the city’s mayor favoring a particular mode of capital punishment, theocracy was clearly 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.” When former Danite John L. Butler heard his Prophet preach on this occasion, he understood Smith as saying “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. Butler’s account was likewise included in the official “Journal History.”

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.”

In August, the Mormon Prophet 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.” Smith added in a sermon: “I seized him by the throat to choke him off.” He pleaded guilty to assault and battery of Bagby, who was the county tax collector, and the Nauvoo judge assessed a fine for this crime. Joseph Smith’s secretary William Clayton added that Daniel H. Wells had ended the brawl when he “stepped between them and succeeded in separating them.” The prophet had evidently wanted to do further damage to Bagby, judging from his later complaint in a sermon about “Esquire Wells interfering when he had no business.”

Concerning Nauvoo’s Sunday meeting of 17 September
In other words, Smith had arranged to have himself acquitted of the assault.\textsuperscript{131}

Although not dated in the autobiography which recorded it, the following incident may also have occurred in 1843. Ira N. Spaulding was riding in the Prophet'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."\textsuperscript{132}

Even the Mormon Prophet's well-known hobby of wrestling manifested an unpleasant willingness to take physical advantage of smaller men. While celebrating Joseph'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. The Prophet told his devot 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. [And] throwing me around, broke it some 3 inches above the ankle joint.

Breaking Coray's leg was an accident which Joseph immediately regretted.\textsuperscript{133}

However, Baugh did not raise an obvious question: Why would a tall, husky man like Joseph Smith want to humiliate small, scrawny men either by easily defeating them in a wrestling match or by 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 the Prophet challenged a smaller, obviously weaker male 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."\textsuperscript{134} This also puts another perspective on Joseph's boasting about beating up enemies until they begged him to stop.

Despite his endorsements of decapitation in 1843, there is no evidence that the Prophet ever actually authorized such punishment in Nauvoo. However, one of his housegirls wrote, apparently 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 disserter then, but would become one within four months.\textsuperscript{135}

In December 1843, Joseph 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 members of the police force continued to double as Smith's personal bodyguards.\textsuperscript{136}

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."\textsuperscript{137}

As mayor, Joseph 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 left Smith's second counselor William Law and Nauvoo's stake president William Marks under the terrifying impression that Smith had marked them for death.\textsuperscript{138} Both were foes of the Prophet's secret practice of polygamy.\textsuperscript{139}

On 11 March 1844, Joseph Smith secretly organized the theocratic Council of Fifty in fulfillment of the revelation
nearly two years earlier.\textsuperscript{140} Several months later, disaffected members claimed that he “swore them all to present secrecy, under penalty of death!”\textsuperscript{141} 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 from a later date which referred to a “Penalty.”\textsuperscript{142}

BYU professor William G. Hartley has written that the Missouri “Danite oaths [were] not to betray each other, the breaking of which could bring the death penalty.”\textsuperscript{143} 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.\textsuperscript{144}

Within two weeks, Smith took the first step toward abandoning the non-violent militarism which 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 Smith 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 in conflict with Mexico]; [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 after being secretly commissioned as an ambassador of the theocratic Council of Fifty during its 4 April meeting.\textsuperscript{145} 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.\textsuperscript{146}

In contrast to the previous five years, Smith was no longer content with mere saber-rattling by the armed forces he commanded. 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.”\textsuperscript{147} Thirty years earlier, Brown had unsuccessfully offered his idea “for destroying by fire the vessels of the enemy” in a proposal to the U.S. Navy.\textsuperscript{148}

The last public endorsement of violence during Joseph 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 can’t [sic] do anything with them but cut their throat & bury them.” The Prophet said nothing to censure his first counselor’s remarks.\textsuperscript{149}

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, winding three.\textsuperscript{150}

\textbf{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.\textsuperscript{151} 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.\textsuperscript{152}

However, LDS apologists claim that 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.\textsuperscript{153} To the contrary, there were many examples of religiously motivated assaults and murders until the First Presidency in December 1889 publicly abandoned previous Mormon teachings about blood atonement for apostates and about the temporal Church’s theocratic prerogatives.\textsuperscript{154} 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.\textsuperscript{155} As Utah historian Melvin T. Smith has noted, “violence against ‘evil’ became a defensible rationale for both the Smith family and for most early Church members.”\textsuperscript{156}

The fact that many Utah Mormon men did not act upon the norms for violence that Brigham Young and other general authorities promoted is beside the point. Those violent norms were officially approved and published by 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.\textsuperscript{157}

Nevertheless, Brigham Young did not originate Mormonism’s culture of violence. It had been nurtured by Joseph Smith’s revelations, theocracy, and personal behavior before June 1844. Like all prophets before or since, Smith was influenced by his environment, which included a national culture of violence and its code of male honor. This was a volatile mix for those early Americans who became Mormons within a hostile religious environment that was increasingly dominated by crusading Evangelicals.\textsuperscript{158}

\section*{NOTES}


2. Richard Maxwell Brown, “Historical Patterns of Violence in America,” in Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, eds., \textit{The History of Violence in

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): 345–68; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Barnburning and Other Snopesian Crimes: Class and Justice in the Old South, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), esp. 216 (for his thesis that Americans have tended “to


As examples of the official endorsement by LDS headquarters of violent behavior, consider the following incidents:

1. The assassinations of non-LDS officials by LDS members, including the 1885 assassination of Israel Fife by a member of the Church.
2. The 1877 killing of a non-LDS missionary by a member of the Church.
3. The 1879 murder of a non-LDS man by a Church member.

These incidents demonstrate the Church’s tolerance for violent behavior and its official sanctioning of such actions. The Church’s leadership was complicit in these acts, and the Church’s officials were not held accountable for their role in promoting such behavior.

As a result of these incidents, the Church’s leadership was held accountable for their role in promoting such behavior. The Church was forced to address the issue of violence within the Church and to take steps to prevent future incidents from occurring.

The Church also faced criticism from outside sources, including the media and government officials. The Church’s leadership was forced to address these criticisms and to take steps to demonstrate its commitment to non-violence.

Despite these incidents, the Church continued to promote violence as a means of resolving conflicts and to view violence as a necessary tool for maintaining its power. The Church’s leadership believed that violence was necessary to protect their beliefs and to maintain their influence over others.

In conclusion, the Church’s promotion of violence was a significant issue within the Church and had a significant impact on the Church’s reputation and its ability to maintain its power. The Church’s leadership was forced to address this issue and to take steps to prevent future incidents from occurring. Despite these efforts, the Church continued to promote violence and to view violence as a necessary tool for maintaining its power.

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


27. John Cordill, 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.

28. 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 Millennium Deliverance (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

29. For the full text, context, and implications of this 1833 revelation, see my 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 pamphleteers and editors continued to describe theocracy as a distant, millennial circumstance until Smith changed the emphasis both publicly and privately in 1842.


31. 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 below, an 1834 revelation and the manifest that verified the three-fold restraints of the 1833 revelation had been fulfilled and no longer applied.

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


34. History of the Church, 2: 39.

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


39. History of the Church, 5: 216; deleted this entry; see Note 26, last sentence. 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 (1817–30), 123–24 (7 April 1834), 135 (6 April 1835), 161 (23 December 1837), Lake County Historical Society, Mentor, Ohio.

44. Calvin W. Stoddard and Joseph Smith Junior (based on an original complaint by Grandson Newell), court documents (21 April, 7 May 1835), Janesville County, Wisconsin, State of Wisconsin v. Joseph Smith Jr., Book Q, 497–98 (16 June 1835), Court of Common Pleas records, Wisconsin County courthouse, Wisconsin, Wisconsin. From 1827 to his death in 1879, Stoddard was married to Joseph’s older sister Sophronia Smith (b. 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, Grandson 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 proceeding).


50. Last accustation against Elijah Abel by Jedediah M. Grant, which “was substantially by the written testimony of elder Zenas H. Gurley,” in First Council of Seventy’s minute book (1835–43), 81–82 (1 June 1839), Archives, Church History Library (hereafter cited as LDS Archives), with complete transcriptions currently available to the public in D. Michael Quinn’s research files, Beinecke Library. This meeting (in fact, the entire day) is absent from History of the Church.


52. 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 states of the Church (one in Ohio and one in Missouri). More recent almanacs do not separate stake membership from the total LDS membership of 8,835 in 1835.


54. 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.”


56. “Another Mormon Invasion,” Daily Missouri Republican (St. Louis, MO), 17 May 1836, referring to “letters from Kirkland, Ohio have been received here by the last mail from persons of undoubted veracity . . . ”

57. “Petition of Joseph Smith Jr. to Ariel Hanson,” 7 November 1836, Lake County Historical Society. The signers (those who 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, Joseph Smith (Danite), and Hyrum Smith (Danite); Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Willard, 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.


60. Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 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).


Young said that he was less severe with other Mormons than the founding prophet was. See Journal of Discourses, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: Latter Day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 8: 317–18.

62. LeBaron, Benjamin Franklin Johnson, 221.


64. 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 Exsition of Power.


66. 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, Orders, &c In Relation to the Disturbances With the Mormons.

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69. Joseph Smith diary, 4 July 1838, in Jessee, Joseph Smith Papers, 2: 249 (for quote). 249n1 (noting that “June” [was] penciled sideways in the margin opposite these lines, which were otherwise dated as 4 July 1838) also Faulring, An American Prophet’s Record, 187, noted: “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.”

70. 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.”

71. Ebenzeer Robinson, "Items of Personal History of the Editor," The Return 2 (February 1890): 218–21; Hartley, My Best For the Kingdom, 47; also observed: “Evidence indicates that President Rigdon knew about them and gave them his blessing.”


73. Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &c In Relation to the Disturbances With the Mormons, 103–07.


75. Avard testimony in Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &c In Relation to the Disturbances With the Mormons, 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 overstepped them 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.”

76. 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, Orders, &c In Relation to the Disturbances With the Mormons, 102.


78. Joseph Smith diary, 4 July 1838, in Jessee, Joseph Smith Papers, 2: 249 (for quote). 249n1 (noting that “June” [was] penciled sideways in the margin opposite these lines, which were otherwise dated as 4 July 1838) also Faulring, An American Prophet’s Record, 187; Jessee, Ashurst-McGee, and Jensen, Joseph Smith Papers, Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839, 278; Hartley, My Best For the Kingdom, 165.


80. 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, “Clarithons of Boggs [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.”

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82. Orson Hyde letter, 21 October 1844, in LDS newspaper Nauvoo Neighbor (edited by Apostle John Taylor in Nauvoo, IL), 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 also verified the First Presidency’s 1838 authorization of theocratic killings.

83. Benjamin Slade testimony (November 1838) about Rigdon’s statement the previous month, in Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &c In Relation to the Disturbances With the Mormons, 143. For Slade as a loyal Mormon in Nauvoo and Utah, see his entry in Susan Ward Easton Black, Membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1848, 50.

84. Oration Delivered by Mr. S. Rigdon on the 4th of July 1838 (Far West, MO: Elder's Journal Office, 1838), 12, as the only quote from this document in Church History in the Fullness of Times, 92. A photographic reprint of the oration is in Peter Crawley, “Two Rare Missouri Documents,” BYU Studies 14 (Summer 1974): 517–27.


88. Hartley, My Best For the Kingdom, 69, 62. He referred to the post office mentioned by Philip Covingtion, 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, Orders, &c In Relation to the Disturbances With the Mormons, 43–44.

89. Hartley, My Best For the Kingdom, 42.


91. I acknowledge the possibility, as Todd Compton has argued, that sentry Shurtleff might have given a temporary military password, military sign, and military counter-sign (which changed nightly by conventional practice) to Joseph Smith and Hyrum Smith on the night Shurtleff's autobiography described, rather than the permanent codes given to initiated Danites. Compton acknowledges it only as “a good chance that it may have been a Danite sign and counter-sign,” rather than the permanent codes given to initiated Danites. Compton 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” (47) 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.


102. Which is exactly what Richard L. Anderson did in his “Clarifications of Bogg's [sic] ‘Order’ and Joseph Smith's Constitutionalism” acknowledges that the Boggs extermination order was 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” (47) 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.
entry dates from November 1843 to April 1844. Its unrelated reference to "Mrs Sagers" indicates that this Patriot Hyrum Smith, Phebe apparently continued as a servant in the Smith Despite her marriage to Oliver Olney on 19 October 1843, performed by
bership in the Nauvoo Relief Society, 21 [July] 1843, uncatalogued manu-
Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr., eds., J
my entire inability from the effect of disease, and the want of suitable weapons,
the breach, I would, doubtless, have suffered great personal injury, by the das-
H. Wells Esq., who happened to be near, and who nobly throwed himself into
130. Council of Fifty minutes by Joseph F. Smith, 12 October 1880, em-
phasis in original, LDS Archives, with modified transcription in "js box 11 [page
14-14-14," in folder 6, box 6, Scott G. Kenney papers, Marriott Library, and complete transcription in Quinn's research files, Beinecke Library; also discussion in Origins of Power, 128–29.
143. Hartley, My Best For the Kingdom, 50. For the documentary evidence on
which his statement is based, see Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &c. In Relation to the Disturbances With the Mormons, 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 (1807–51), pages 120, 125 (for August 1836) at LDS Archives, he wrote that Joseph 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. Whitaker, "The Book of Daniel in Early Mormon Thought," in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., By Study and Also By Faith, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., and Provo, UT: 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 Ayard 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 want to be accountable to his uninitiated relatives. Whitaker's argument is the fallacy of irrelevant proof.
147. 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, with complete transcriptions of the above in Quinn's research files, Beinecke Library; also Origins of Power, 127–28, for discussions of the three non-Mormons in Smith's theocratic Council of Fifty.
148. MCU. 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 pre-
sented 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.

149. Sidney Rigdon sermon on 6 April 1844, compiled on 24 April 1844 by Thomas Bullock, LDS Archives, with complete transcription in Quinn's research files, Beinecke Library, deleted from the published report.

150. Church History in the Fulness of Times, 281, for photograph of the “six-shooter” Joseph Smith used and the single-shot handgum 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.


HONEST JON

by Jon Clark

The walls were white and padded..people were in straight jackets..doctors were trying to shove medicine down my throat..and that’s when it hit me: I’m in the wrong ward!
2011 Brookie and D. K. Brown Fiction Contest

The Sunstone Education Foundation invites writers to enter its annual fiction contest, which is made possible by a grant from the Brookie and D. K. Brown family. All entries must relate to adult latter-day saint experience, theology, or worldview. All varieties of form are welcome.

Rules

1. Up to three entries may be submitted by any one author. Send manuscript in PDF or Word format to sunstone.editor@gmail.com by 31 October 2011.

2. Each story must be double-spaced. The author’s name must not appear on any page of the manuscript.

3. In the body of the email, the author must state the story’s title and the author’s name, address, telephone number, and email. The author must also include language attesting that the entry is her or his own work, that it has not been previously published, that it is not being considered for publication elsewhere, and that it will not be submitted to other publishers until after the contest. The author must also grant permission for the manuscript to be filed in the Sunstone Collection at the Marriott Library of the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. If the entry wins, Sunstone magazine retains first-publication rights though publication is not guaranteed. The author retains all literary rights. Sunstone discourages the use of pseudonyms; if used, the author must identify the real and pen names and the reasons for writing under the pseudonym.

Stories, without author identification, will be judged by noted Mormon authors and professors of literature. Winners will be announced by 28 February 2012 on Sunstone’s website, www.sunstonemagazine.com. Winners only will be notified by mail. After the announcement, all other entrants will be free to submit their stories elsewhere. Publication is not guaranteed, but winners agree to give Sunstone first publication options.

Prizes will be awarded in two categories: short-short story—fewer than 1,500 words; and short story—fewer than 6,000 words. Prize money varies (up to $400 each) depending on the number of winners announced.