The Mormon Battalion's Manifest Destiny: Expansion and Identity during the Mexican-American War

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This thesis examines the experience of the Mormon Battalion, a group of five hundred Mormon soldiers commissioned by President James K. Polk to enlist in the U.S. military and aid in the newly declared war against Mexico in 1846. The war was a result of a belligerent and aggressive form of territorial expansion justified by the ideology of Manifest Destiny. Polk and many other Americans believed it was their Manifest Destiny to dominate a continental nation, and the Mormon Battalion was assigned to march to California to conquer Mexican territory for the United States. An examination of the Mormon soldiers’ journals and letters, as well as official Mormon Church records and correspondence, reveals that, despite participating in a war that promoted aggressive expansion, the Mormons’ understanding of Manifest Destiny contained unique perspectives regarding racial hierarchies and displays of masculinity, key elements of that popular ideology. The peculiar approach that the Mormons’ had to Manifest Destiny was directly influenced by their history as a persecuted body of believers. Ultimately, the Mormon soldiers agreed to volunteer for the war not because they wanted to express patriotism, but because they had a firm dedication to their church and resolved obedience to their leader, Brigham Young.

Additionally, an examination of popular contemporary media outlets and their responses to the enlistment of the Mormon Battalion, as well as the relevant historiography, is included to demonstrate the evolution of the Mormon Battalion in historical memory, both inside and outside the Mormon Church. The treatment of the battalion by popular media outlets reflected changing attitudes regarding the implications of promoting a martial and aggressive society, while the role of the battalion in Mormon history evolved in tandem with Mormons’ fluctuating identities as U.S. citizens.
CITATION

Material from this thesis was accepted for publication in the *University of Vermont History Review* on November 21, 2014, in the following form:

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Bruce and Sharonlee Gunn, whose educational pursuits inspired my own. I can only hope to one day be half as good a parent and person as they are.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It goes without saying that I would not have been able to complete this thesis without the help of my advisor, Nicole Phelps. Her seemingly infinite insight into the deepest and darkest corners of history never ceases to amaze me. Her dedication to this thesis and my personal education goes unmatched in my entire academic career. I am also eternally grateful for her ability to soften the blow of draft edits by quoting *The Princess Bride*.

I also would like to thank Andrew Buchanan, who originally inspired me to turn a final class paper on the Mormon Battalion into the thesis it is now. Sean Field is also greatly deserving of my thanks, as he garnered my interest in religious history and was willing to advise me on one of my comprehensive exams.

Lastly, I want to thank the additional members of my thesis committee, Dona Brown and Elizabeth Fenton, who were enthusiastic about reading an entire thesis on the Mormon Battalion.

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HISTORIOGRAPHY AND INTRODUCTION

The historiography of the Mormon Battalion is as important as its history. Understanding why certain people contributed to the history of the Mormon Battalion sheds light on how that entity has evolved in historical memory, both inside the Mormon Church and out. The complex nature of the battalion as a religious organization, military unit, and an American frontier experience attracts various types of authors, many whom assume either an academic or religious approach. This has led to multiple disagreements among scholars regarding some of the more intricate details of the battalion, but overall, the discussion concerning how the Mormon soldiers interpreted their involvement in an American military unit has been exhausted both within academia and without. This thesis will take the experience of the Mormon Battalion a step further into the analytical sphere by contextualizing the soldiers’ recorded experiences within a frontier narrative of U.S. territorial expansion. I will explore the potential justifications behind the Mormons’ actions during the Mexican-American War, attempt to discern the extent their actions and participation conformed to contemporary American social norms, and determine what the Mormon Battalion meant not just for Mormons, but for other U.S citizens. Works that focus on the Mormon Battalion have generally presented the experience of the Mormon Battalion as an isolated entity and have neglected to identify the extent to which the actions and attitudes of the Mormon soldiers deviated from the perceived norm, if they did at all. I will contextualize the Mormon Battalion in the greater narrative of American territorial expansionism fueled by a belief in Manifest Destiny as it was understood in antebellum America.
For nearly a century after the formation of the Mormon Battalion, a single comprehensive and autobiographical account written by battalion veteran Sergeant Daniel Tyler remained the single most accepted and reliable source of the battalion’s history for not only Mormons, but interested historians as well. Interpretation of historical events in this account is limited to a Mormon perspective, and Tyler presents the battalion as a bastion of virtuous suffering and an epic narrative of righteousness overcoming opposition. Tyler’s 1881 work, titled *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion, 1846-1848*, begins the battalion’s history with a vivid account of the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, the founder and first president of the Mormon Church. In this preface, Tyler highlights the persecution endured by the Mormons at the hands of Missouri mob violence, effectively drawing the experience of the battalion into a greater narrative of suffering embodied within the Mormon Church. This narrative is continually reinforced in *Concise History*; some events, like the administration of calomel to sick Mormon Battalion soldiers by a purportedly “evil” surgeon, or the forced marching of sick soldiers and reduction of rations by the battalion’s captain, serve as focal points in the battalion’s experience in order to emphasize a legacy of suffering. The battalion soldiers as portrayed in *Concise History* demonstrate that, even though the Mormon religion and community were continually persecuted, they also perpetually endured. For many members of the Mormon faith, this narrative is essential to understanding their place in Christianity as a people who have survived the test of the refiner’s fire. Together, the personal and social narratives, unequaled contribution to the historiography, and cultural value of Tyler’s work makes it an absolute necessity when
learning not only about the experiences, but the legacy of the Mormon Battalion, and I have drawn heavily from its pages.¹

Because Tyler heralded his work as an exhaustive account of the battalion, *A Concise History* served as the foundation for historians and other researchers interested in the battalion’s legacy for either scholastic, religious, or personal reasons. During the latter end of the twentieth century, non-academic essays about the Mormon Battalion began to be published in state and local historical journals. These publications were generally non-analytical and instead served as a mechanism for the authors to publish formerly unknown accounts passed down by battalion participants or family ancestors. For those authors not versed in academic historical research practices, *Concise History* served as the foundation upon which they built and enhanced narratives from other surviving journals and diaries. Dependence on Tyler’s account ensured the Mormon Battalion’s narrative of suffering continued into the twenty-first century.

The first challenge to the traditional portrayal of the Mormon Battalion, including that of its spiritual and military leaders, was put forth by John Yurtinus in 1975 in the form of a graduate dissertation. Because he was a student at Brigham Young University, a private school run by the Mormon Church, Yurtinus was undoubtedly a member of the Mormon faith and had likely been exposed to the version of the Mormon Battalion’s history as espoused by popular Mormon thought. Much like Tyler’s account, Yurtinus’s dissertation, “A Ram in the Thicket: The Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War,” became a staple reference for future publications regarding the battalion. The 1975 dissertation is

strikingly similar in format to *Concise History*, and an almost complete reliance on journals and other written communication recorded by battalion participants makes it a virtual reproduction of Tyler’s work, with one striking dissimilarity: whereas Tyler helps to create and solidify a narrative of suffering, Yurtinus directly challenges that view by pointing out “myths” embraced in battalion narratives. Frustratingly, Yurtinus stops short of presenting an opposing view of the battalion in his dissertation. Though he brings to light rather controversial issues, he does not extrapolate on them. What is novel about his work is the attention given to the internal divisions that wracked the Mormon Battalion which were virtually ignored in *Concise History*.²

These internal divisions within the Mormon Battalion became a point of contention for subsequent scholars. Some, like Susan E. Black, professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University, assert that the conflict was strictly between the military leaders and the Mormon soldiers. Government-appointed individuals, she claims, purposefully persecuted the Mormon soldiers in such a harsh manner that some soldiers considered staging a rebellion. I have chosen to label this form of discord as vertical conflict, as the tensions in the Mormon Battalion, when considered this way, run up and down the military ranks. Black directly references *Concise History* when she asserts that any other group of soldiers would have mutinied, but that the obedient and honest nature

of the Mormons prevented them from doing so. Black continues to pull from Tyler and other primary accounts left by Mormon Battalion members to highlight the egregious treatment exhibited by government-appointed military personnel, thus reinforcing the popular narrative of suffering.3

In 1993, an indirect counter presentation of the Mormon Battalion was written by Larry D. Christiansen. As a non-academic author, Christiansen was dependent on the popular and more easily available histories of the battalion, and Tyler’s Concise History served as his main springboard. Even though Christiansen utilized almost the same sources as Black, he came to an entirely different conclusion. Like Yurtinus, Christiansen saw the religious influence exhibited by ecclesiastical authorities upon the soldiers as the primary source of discord in the battalion. This clash among soldiers, when limited to the Mormon participants of the battalion, is what I will refer to as horizontal conflict.4

Conflicting interpretations of primary sources left behind by the Mormon Battalion and the subsequent selective memory employed by some religious authors also appears in two books published at the end of the twentieth century. Both are compilations of battalion narratives and other contemporary sources, including letters written to and from other Church personnel. Edited by non-academics, these books were likely marketed to a religious audience. The Mormon Battalion: U.S. Army of the West, 1846-1848 was published in 1996, and the second, Army of Israel: Mormon Battalion Narratives, was published in 2000. The former was written by Norma Ricketts. It was the most extensive

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collection of primary sources to that date. Ricketts’ approach to battalion history is reminiscent of the articles from the 1970s and 1980s in both its non-academic origins and use of journals or diaries to convey a predetermined religious view of the battalion as a victimized group. Considering that the bulk of her sources came from her own private collection, religious and personal connections to the Mormon Battalion are the most likely explanations for her presence in the field. Frequent referrals to Tyler’s *Concise History* convey the kind of approach taken in Ricketts’s *Army of the West*, which centers on the vertical tensions in the battalion between the military authorities and the Mormon soldiers.

The second book, *Army of Israel*, was edited by David Bigler and Will Bagley. David Bigler was a descendant of one of the most prominent soldiers of the battalion, Henry Bigler. Unlike Ricketts, these two editors do not hesitate to include the less glamorous details of the horizontal conflicts that plagued the Mormon soldiers. Perhaps the most striking inclusion in *Army of Israel*, however, is the coverage of wavering opinions espoused by Brigham Young in regard to the battalion. This examination of the second Mormon president had not been conducted since Yurtinus’s studies in the 1970s and 80s. However, Bagley’s and Bigler’s assessment of this particular situation is more like Yurtinus’s dissertation in that the issue is brought up, but neither analyzed nor explained.5

At that point in the historiography, the authors involved seemed to demonstrate that when it came to writing about the battalion, there were essentially two options: validating the narrative first put forth by Daniel Tyler in *Concise History*, or a refutation of that

narrative of suffering. Yurtinus came closest to merging the two, but perhaps for religious, personal, or scholastic restraints exercised by his academic institution, he stopped short of fully examining the less glamorous aspects of the battalion, namely the horizontal conflicts and the wavering opinions of Brigham Young.

A harmonious and respectful inclusion of multiple, but not all aspects of the Mormon Battalion was finally produced in 2006 by Mormon Battalion researcher Sherman L. Fleek. Fleek can arguably be considered one of the most qualified to write about the battalion, and his book *History May Not Be Searched in Vain: A Military History of the Mormon Battalion* highlights his accomplishments as a professional historian, active member of the U.S. military, and devout adherent to the Mormon faith. With vested interest in the battalion for all plausible reasons, Fleek brought to the table a fresh and forthright approach to the battalion as a military unit, contextualizing the soldiers’ experiences as volunteers enlisted to fight in the Mexican-American War. Although his work is, above all else, a militaristic analysis of the battalion, Fleek still provides readers with a succinct introduction to Mormon history and Brigham Young, yet he manages to do so without succumbing to the overwhelming narrative of suffering that figured so prominently in prior writings.6

Looking over the various authors who have contributed to the historiography of the Mormon Battalion, it is difficult to lump them into clean categories for analytical purposes. Many, if not most, are themselves Mormon and carry with them a religious interest in the legacy of the battalion. Some of the most disparate views of the battalion, however, have

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been put forth by these religious scholars, with some, like Yurtinus and Fleek, directly challenging the traditionally accepted narrative of suffering that permeates Mormon histories. Other authors brought new primary sources into the discussion with the publication of journals or diaries. However, these were not particularly influential as conversation-changers in the battalion historiography, and in many cases they submitted to and built upon the traditionally accepted narrative of suffering that was introduced in the late nineteenth century. Even after Yurtinus brought a new perspective to the battalion, this popular legacy still featured prominently in non-academic research and continually brought the discussion back to the vertical conflicts of military authority against Mormon soldiers.

It is really only by the passing of time that a slight but significant trend emerges that is linked to both the religious affiliation of the authors and the primary sources they choose to incorporate. Those who had connections to the Mormon faith or were themselves members had access to a wider swath of primary sources, such as journals or diaries that were passed down the family line. At the same time, some of these religious authors who also had experience in academia and historical research were more willing to challenge the traditional narrative of the Mormon Battalion. Each contributor to the history of the battalion took one step farther than those who came before, with Fleek being the most recent religious but liberal contributor to the historiography. Of course, this is not true for every person who writes about the Mormon Battalion, as evidenced by Black and Ricketts; for these two authors, it was not necessarily their religion or place in time that prevented their scholarship from progressing beyond a narrative of suffering, but their reliance on the relatively simplified and one-sided version of the story contained in Tyler’s Concise History.
Even though Fleek can be considered the most progressive author of the Mormon Battalion, his affiliation with the Mormon Church does raise an interesting question: can an active member of the Mormon Church study the battalion without a biased or pre-determined approach? Alternatively, is it possible for a non-Mormon to fully comprehend the religious passions that not only the soldiers, but the general membership of the Mormon faith experienced? The historiography seems to demonstrate that the answer to both questions is an uncertain “no.” It can be anticipated that any future work regarding the Mormon Battalion that might alter the state of the field will likely emerge from the academic realm and not the religious, though a personal understanding of religious culture in the United States will be an essential aspect of any contributing author’s work.

I am uniquely situated to meet the historiographical qualifications of academia, historical criticism, and religious understanding. Similar to many of the previously mentioned contributors to the historiography, my interest stems from an intimate familiarity with the Mormon Church, though unlike the previous authors, including Yurtinus and Fleek, my membership has been abandoned. My peculiar place within Mormon culture allows me to take a stand that is neither entirely critical nor apologetic of Mormon history and doctrine. Most importantly, having experienced religious passion for myself, I do not dismiss the beliefs of the Mormon soldiers as superficially manufactured or as merely the result of socioeconomic tensions, though the latter certainly did play a part in Mormon culture. Religious dedication was and is very real, and it is an essential element for Mormons’ understanding of the world and their place within it.

My academic practices, however, compel me to extend my understanding of historical occurrences beyond the religious viewpoints and experiences of the faithful. I
must look for the implications that certain spiritual practices have, not only for those who hold them, but for those who interact with the believers. The manner in which Mormons and the soldiers of the Mormon Battalion carried out their unique Manifest Destiny and interacted with American Indians, Mexicans, and slaves was heavily influenced by religious beliefs and contemporary attitudes toward non-whites that were prevalent in antebellum America. The delineation between matters of the spirit and matters of the mind is nearly impossible to create when trying to ascertain why religious people did what they did. A simplified but perhaps misguided answer would be that religious people, the Mormons in this case, were (and are) a product of a secular world but attributed their existence to a spiritual one. If this is the case, then only a scholar who is intimately familiar with both worlds can truly understand the place of Mormons in the greater American experience.

Though the events of the Mexican-American War of 1846-48 are often overshadowed by the catastrophic Civil War a generation later, the scholarship surrounding the conflict has provided historians with vibrant yet divisive material to aid in the understanding of its cultural, social, national, and diplomatic contexts. In the mid-to-late twentieth century, scholars of the Mexican-American War focused their work on patriotic sentiments and romantic interpretations of Manifest Destiny. These analyses, though insightful, were published during a time in American history when democracy was heralded as the world’s saving grace. The United States was presented as the bastion of republican success. These attitudes were reflected in the academic output of the era, shrouding historical events like
the Mexican-American War in a fog of patriotic fervor that had supposedly been permeating American popular sentiment since the days of the Revolution.

In 1962, during the height of the Cold War, an essay attempting to paint the Mexican-American War in a democratic light was published by historian Ted Hinckley. This article supported the idea that the overall atmosphere of the American 1840s was a “charitable environment,” an idea echoed in similar essays published in the Cold War era that attempted to highlight the republican virtues that allegedly graced the nation’s past. The essay claimed that the “character of America in the 1830s and 1840s was inimical to the undemocratic energies which made for collective fanaticism, religious, racial, or otherwise.” Hinckley swept away the notion that the war waged against Mexico was carried out despite a significant anti-war movement, opting instead for the opinion that an unavoidable war existed in the midst of an era defined by romantic national optimism.7

This sort of “feel-good” attitude was reiterated twenty years later in a book that claimed to contextualize the Mexican-American War within contemporary social and popular sentiments of the time. Authored by Robert Johannsen, To the Halls of the Montezumas envisioned the Mexican War through popular culture, such as poetry, newspapers, and personal correspondence. Johannsen states early in the book that he entirely disregarded political or congressional discourse surrounding the war, as he felt those kind of discussions did not reflect American popular sentiment. While he briefly nods to some of the less-glamorous aspects of the war, such as the negative press attention given to soldiers who massacred Mexican citizens, the overall message and conclusion of

Johannsen’s work optimistically claims that most people in antebellum America believed the war reinforced republican virtues and was an essential element in keeping the spirit of the founding fathers alive in the nineteenth century.⁸

In 2012, historian Amy Greenberg published *A Wicked War*, a captivating account of the Mexican-American War and some of its well-known participants, such as James K. Polk, Henry Clay, and Abraham Lincoln. The inclusion of the political realm filled the gaping hole left behind in the historiographical foundations laid by Hinckley and Johannsen. Greenberg’s analysis effectively changed the historical understanding of the Mexican-American War. Politics greatly influenced the cultural and popular attitudes of U.S. citizens during the 1840s, including Polk’s 1846 war bill which tied patriotism to support of the war, and Clay’s impassioned speech in 1847 that called for political action to end the war. Greenberg’s approach captures the spectrum of attitudes adopted by U.S. citizens concerning the fight against Mexico, and she argues that the 1840s was a decade rife with confusion and contention. Greenberg’s book documents the emergence of the nation’s first successful anti-war movement and effectively dismantles the idea of a “feel-good attitude” supported by Hinckley and Johannsen. It is from this book that I have drawn most of my evidence and personal understanding of the Mexican-American War, as Greenberg’s liberal inclusion of primary sources and her unique approach in the historiography most closely resembles the evidence I have found while researching the sentiments espoused by the soldiers in the Mormon Battalion.

A few years before she published *Wicked War*, Amy Greenberg wrote *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*, in which she argued that the ideology of Manifest Destiny was inherently gendered and encouraged different forms of masculinity. Prior to the Mexican-American War, Greenberg argues, masculinity and its relationship to Manifest Destiny was restrained, meaning assertions of superiority, whether racial, economic, cultural, or otherwise, were passive and based on moral sensibilities. As war with Mexico loomed on the horizon, this restrained masculinity transformed into a martial one, in which aggressive behavior and military aggrandizement buttressed American aspirations of territorial expansion. These two conflicting types of masculinity were espoused by various American citizens. Generally, those who opposed the war identified with restrained masculinity, while those who encouraged it resembled the martial version. The soldiers of the Mormon Battalion incorporated aspects of restrained masculinity both within their religious community and military unit. How this influenced their perceptions of Manifest Destiny and interactions with other American soldiers will be explored in Chapter Three, but I will draw upon Greenberg’s versions of masculinity throughout the entire thesis.  

For Mexican perspectives regarding the Mexican-American War, Timothy Henderson’s book *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States* is the foremost piece of work on the subject. Henderson’s book is invaluable for its focus on Mexico as a developing nation after gaining independence from Spain, which is a perspective glaringly absent from prior scholarly work regarding the war. Henderson

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brings to light the reasons why Mexico went to war, providing a refreshing departure from the popular examination that focuses on why and how the United States provoked it. Henderson argues that Mexico went to war not because its citizens were proud, vain, or naïve. He asserts that most Mexicans were aware that war with the United States would be disastrous. However, during a time when Mexico could not have been more internally divided, honor was paramount and became the desired mechanism to unite the Mexican people. Therefore, Mexico went to war not in spite of its weaknesses, but because of them. Henderson’s training as a historian of Mexico and his analysis of the Mexican-American War in Glorious Defeat gives long overdue credit to the Mexican citizens who were essentially fighting three simultaneous wars: one as an internal struggle between political ideologies, one against the United States and its bellicose foreign policies, and the third against a powerful Indian nation.¹⁰

A surface-level understanding of the Mexican War and the American military personnel who participated in it seems to demonstrate that the objective of the war was to conquer land that was considered owned and occupied only by Mexico. A more thorough understanding of the people who resided on these lands reveals a complex cast of characters. Recent historiographical contributions to the Mexican-American War bring American Indians into the picture as key figures who heavily influenced the outcome of the war. Pekka Hämäläinen argues that the Comanches determined the manner and nature of war in Mexico and made a profound influence in the southwest. Hämäläinen’s work challenges traditional American frontier history, asserting that a veritable Comanche

Empire existed alongside the growing American nation. Historian Brian DeLay has also produced scholarship highlighting the role of American Indians in the Mexican-American War challenging the traditional historiography. He argues that the Indians were a means for Mexico and the United States to assess the other; essentially, the manner in which each country dealt with its native population was indicative of that country’s strength, which is an observation that will be explored later in this thesis.¹¹

The war and descent into it infiltrated the everyday lives of contemporary Americans, and its consequences can be found in the political, social, and cultural elements of the time. Although the Mormons attempted to live their lives in a relatively independent community, they were not immune from the frenzy that swept up so many when war was declared against Mexico. Talk of “Manifest Destiny” dominated the social and political spheres, and many people, including the Mormons, found themselves at varying points on the spectrum of agreement, and they ranged from staunchly adhering to or flagrantly disagreeing with certain particulars of that ideology. The Mormons were neither isolated nor ignorant of the implications of war, Manifest Destiny, and territorial expansion. Though they were unsure of what their frontier migration would mean in terms of their future identities as American citizens or independent settlers of a new land, their westward movement was heavily influenced by popular notions of land acquisition, racial superiority, and perceptions of masculinity. These, in turn, were products of a time of war and confusion, when decisions regarding territorial expansion had far-reaching implications for the social structure of the entire nation.

For most of the volunteers in the U.S. military during the Mexican-American War, enlistment was a means of demonstrating patriotism and loyalty to the nation. To be a loyal American meant to set aside personal considerations and, in many ways, put the needs of the country before the needs of oneself. Those who volunteered solidified and reaffirmed their identity as U.S. citizens. But what did enlistment mean for people who were unconcerned with being “American” and were in fact making their way out of the country to establish a politically, economically, and religiously separate community? This is the question the historian faces when analyzing the Mormon Battalion. In many ways, this is unanswerable, because the Mormon Battalion and the entire Mormon Church found themselves back under the jurisdiction of the United States after the war, and despite a desire to operate independently, they were, in reality, quite dependent upon assistance offered by the federal government. The formation of the Mormon Battalion was the federal government’s greatest contribution to the Mormons’ westward movement, and the Mormons’ migration to the west cannot be understood outside of this context. Unfortunately, the Mormons’ tortuous relationship with the federal government hardly clarifies the issue. During its first fifteen years of existence prior to the Mexican-American War, the Mormon Church and its authorities lived a peripatetic lifestyle, trading political votes and loyalties in the hope of receiving protection from anti-Mormon activists. During this time, the federal government refused to offer the Mormons protection from those who sought their destruction. Why the Mormons then agreed to join forces with the U.S. government in its war against Mexico is a question that becomes answerable only after understanding Mormon perceptions of their identities as U.S. citizens. This, in turn, is dependent on understanding the influence of Manifest Destiny not only in popular
American culture, but within the Mormon Community as demonstrated through their attitudes regarding land ownership, racial prejudices, and constructs of masculinity.

This thesis will also explore contemporary perceptions of the Mormon Battalion in relation to those of other military units. The Mormon Battalion never engaged in battle with Mexican forces, so Mormon soldiers were never accorded the status of war heroes within American popular culture. Nevertheless, attitudes toward the Mormons temporarily shifted as public perceptions of humane and dignified behavior evolved as a direct result of the Mexican-American War. The Mormons’ own perception of the Mormon Battalion in regard to its contribution to their westward movement and overtures of patriotism also changed over time, though it took nearly a decade for the battalion to be recognized as a legitimate military endeavor and receive credit for the Mormons’ relocation. Brigham Young, president of the Mormon Church during the Mexican-American War, followed this pattern as well. Immediately after the battalion’s discharge, Young was critical of the veterans for their alleged disobedience and their potential to upset the patriarchal Mormon hierarchy. When he later realized the battalion could be used to assert power and strength against U.S. forces in the 1850s, the battalion suddenly became an esteemed aspect of Mormon history.12

12 Brigham Young’s evolving stance on the Mormon Battalion is not uncharacteristic for the Mormon leader. The scholarship surrounding his leadership skills supports this an image of equivocation and political expediency. See: Kenneth Owens, "Far from Zion: The Frayed Ties between California’s Gold Rush Saints and LDS President Brigham Young," California History 89, no. 4 (2012): 5-23.
CHAPTER 1: THIS LAND IS MY LAND

Anglo-American perceptions of land ownership in the nineteenth century were based on racial prejudices which had been developing since the days of colonialism. By the time the United States declared war against Mexico in 1846, nearly two hundred years’ worth of Anglo superiority on the American continent had justified the action of taking land by asserting the home-grown ideology of Manifest Destiny. Many believed that it was the nation’s Manifest Destiny to overtake the North American continent, even if that meant marginalizing its Native inhabitants and going to war with a foreign nation. Manifest Destiny was buttressed by visual measurements used to assert property claims, including improving the land by building houses, farms, or planting crops. By engaging in such activities, American citizens set a precedent for land ownership that was enforced by the federal government. This ultimately encouraged American aggressive expansionist movements into western lands, most forcefully demonstrated when the United States declared war against Mexico in May 1846.

“The Great Nation of Futurity”

It is easy to say that Americans were motivated to engage in a foreign war and expand U.S. territory because of their belief in Manifest Destiny. Determining exactly what Manifest Destiny entailed is not so simple, as it varied from individual to individual depending on religious beliefs and political affiliations. For nearly two hundred years, Anglos on the American continent had been formulating the meaning and mechanisms of Manifest Destiny. The belief that Anglos were superior not only in their racial origins, but their religious beliefs, economic practices, and political institutions was the foundation on which
Manifest Destiny was built. This sense of superiority was prominently exercised when dealing with land and property. The land that colonists claimed was not uninhabited, yet they asserted their right to settle and spread out wherever they so desired with little serious regard to those already present. Cultural clashes with the Native inhabitants were immanent and frequent, with all participants occasionally resorting to violence. This violence, which often resulted in the displacement of Native peoples, was justified by Anglos as God’s will, and if not that, then the basic natural occurrence of a weaker race submitting to grander people and forces that deserved to spread out wherever they, or God, saw fit. Non-violent efforts to convert Indians to Anglo cultural and religious practices might have been conducted in a spirit of good will, but they still reflected the superiority complex of the European newcomers, who believed that non-whites needed to be delivered from their lawless and savage nature.13

This sense of lawlessness versus civilization and Anglo-settled territory versus the Native-inhabited forest displays the conflicting interpretations of land use that existed between cultures. Legal and binding property ownership and government oversight of land use were well-established features of antebellum America, but they were strikingly absent from Indian American culture. Because land laws in colonial America revolved around not only around the colonists’ spiritual, but physical place in society, the seemingly unorganized and informal nature of land use exhibited within American Indian cultures made them appear uncivilized to the European newcomers.

Expanding the territorial boundaries of the nation represented a triumph of American frontier spirit and offered potential economic growth. Those who would actually carry out the expansion, however, risked settling in unfamiliar territory and wanted to do so for free, while also maintaining the rights available to those who had legally purchased land elsewhere. In many cases, those who had been squatting on unorganized but federally owned property petitioned the government for independent ownership, claiming that they had improved the land through the use of agriculture. This idea became known as preemption, which literally meant “prior right of purchase.” Squatters believed that improving the land made it theirs, regardless of who might otherwise hold the title. This idea followed John Locke’s labor theory of value, and resonated with those eager to settle on land that lay beyond the organized territory of the United States. The first official Preemptive Act was passed by Congress in 1799. It allowed squatters to purchase the land they had been illegally residing upon. The act was originally designed to be a one-time opportunity, but Americans’ desires for private land and the fear of speculators drove Congress to continue or reinstate the law multiple times during the next forty years. The process of venturing out into unknown and undeveloped western lands, then expecting protection and legal transfer of land ownership from the American government, was deemed by many to be a crude exploitation of land rights by calculating squatters. Others, however, saw it as the providential unfolding of Manifest Destiny.\(^\text{14}\)

The phrase “Manifest Destiny” became part of everyday language in 1845, but it was taking form in 1839 with the serious prospect of annexing the Republic of Texas. Between 1836 and 1846, the years that Texas was an independent nation, politicians typically avoided the subject of annexation in an effort to side-step alienating any part of their voter base. The annexation of Texas was synonymous with the extension of slavery, and the irreconcilable opinions voters held regarding its continued practice were slowly creating a rift through the country. Those who did not have their sights set on political careers, however, were willing to address the matter head on. One of the most outspoken sources of opinion was the popular journal *Democratic Review*, edited by John O’Sullivan. The *Democratic Review* appealed to those who were interested in both small-\(d\) democracy and the large-\(D\) Democratic Party, and it offered a lively forum for discussion of American Romanticism. This journal was the vehicle that drove the phrase “Manifest Destiny” from obscurity to popularity between 1839 and 1845.

In 1839, the *Democratic Review* published an article titled “The Great Nation of Futurity,” a piece that tackled the issue of Texan annexation. The article hailed the inherent goodness of both the small-\(d\) and large-\(D\) Democratic nation for being “destined for greater deeds.” An “unparalleled glory” to defend all of humanity, especially that of the more oppressed nations, had been thrust upon the American people. One word in particular was used multiple times throughout the article to emphasize the providential nature of this glory: *destiny*. It was America’s “high destiny” and “glorious destiny” to stand as the nation of human progress. Alluding to the controversial issue of territorial expansion, the article
challenged anyone, or anything, to somehow limit its onward, westward, march. “Providence is with us,” the author quipped, “and no earthly power can.”

The Democratic Review addressed the matter of Texas again during summer of 1845 in an essay titled “Annexation” and resurrected the sentiment and phrases from its 1839 “Great Nation of Futurity” article. As a Democratic journal, support for the acquisition of Texas was to be expected. However, the article effectively argued that it was not merely a political opportunity for a single party to support annexation, but a divine calling upon the entire nation issued from the same providential entity who bestowed the glory written of in the 1839 article. The acquisition of territory was in the “fulfillment of our Manifest Destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”

The idea that territorial expansion was “manifest” capitalized on the rejuvenated sense of God’s presence in Protestant America that swept the nation during the Second Great Awakening. More importantly, the phrase and concept cut across partisan and sectional issues that were sharpening American politics and identity. The issue of slavery was causing a great and almost unbridgeable divide between the industrialists of the north and the agriculturalists of the south. Manifest Destiny had something to offer each side.

15 For more information regarding the Democratic Review as a representation of both small- and large-D Democracy and as a vehicle of American Romanticism, as well as information on the authors who contributed to the journal, see Robert W. Johannsen, “The Meaning of Manifest Destiny,” in Manifest Destiny and Empire, ed. Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris (Arlington: University of Texas at Arlington, 1997), 7-20. Johannsen’s article and may other papers included in this book tout O’Sullivan as an American icon and brilliant mind. More recently, however, Amy Greenberg has claimed that the term Manifest Destiny was in fact coined by a woman named Cora Montgomery, popularly referred to as simply “Montgomery,” who wrote for O’Sullivan and actually penned both “The Great Nation of Futurity” and “Annexation.” See Greenberg, Manifest Manhood, 22. For appearances of the term Manifest Destiny see John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” United States Democratic Review 17, no. 85 (1845): 5-10; and O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” United States Democratic Review 6, no. 23 (November 1839): 426-30. 16 O’Sullivan, “Annexation.”
Territorial expansion would provide opportunities for economic growth and development through trade, potentially improving the overall stability and growth of the entire nation. That national territorial and commercial expansion could potentially heal the wounds inflicted by sectional differences was not a novel idea, having played an important role in the Missouri Crisis of 1820. But in 1845, a perfect storm, driven by divided opinions surrounding slavery, expansionism, and possibly war, brought territorial conquest to the fore of social, political, and even religious discussion. Abolitionists and slave-holders alike were able to find some aspect of Manifest Destiny with which they agreed, whether it be expanding a market economy into new territories or expanding the institution of slavery into new, fertile land.17

Manifest Destiny may have spurred aggressive expansionists into taking land that belonged to others, but attributing group or even individual actions to the fulfilment of Manifest Destiny does not explain the context for how territorial expansion was ultimately accomplished and why. The phrase itself, when applied to American territorial expansion, ultimately obscures more than it clarifies. There were multiple components of what Manifest Destiny meant to Americans in the 1840s, and the implications were as variable as the people who subscribed to that ideology. Manifest Destiny can be understood as an umbrella concept, with the similar but distinct elements of race, religion, and constructs of masculinity falling underneath. Belief that Anglo-Americans were superior in at least one of those areas would have made any particular individual fall in line with the overall message of Manifest Destiny, though not all of those people would have admitted it.

In 1846, U.S. president James K. Polk successfully utilized preemptive land theories and the language and imagery of Manifest Destiny to support aggressive expansion in the west. However, declaring war against Mexico merely to acquire land that did not belonged to a foreign nation would not have been very inspiring for the American people. In order to gain support both popularly and politically, Polk needed to effectively link the goals of aggressive expansion to those embodied in the ideology of Manifest Destiny. By sending American troops into Mexican territories, Polk planned to use the theory of preemption that had been successfully utilized in Texas the decade before.

**Texas and the Descent to War**

By the early 1830s, the population of Texas was dominated by Anglo-Americans, most of whom had immigrated to that territory illegally. In the early 1820s, Mexico endorsed a colonization law that opened Texas for American settlement on the conditions that new residents become Mexican citizens and abide by a very lax version of Mexican law. This was done to promote immigration and boost the Texan economy, which in turn would hopefully boost all of Mexico. The settlers would also provide the added benefit being a barrier between the citizens of central Mexico and the raiding Comanche Indians, who occupied much of western Texas and areas of New Mexico. Many Americans were enticed by Mexico’s offer of colonization, but most migrated to Texas without obtaining the necessary legal requisites and refused to abide by Mexican law. This hindered Mexican migration into that territory, and by 1835, the great majority of settlers in Texas were American illegal immigrants who considered themselves to be under the purview and
protection of the U.S. government. Considering the preemption laws that had been in operation for decades now, this assumption on the part of the Americans in Texas is not entirely far-fetched. In 1835, Texas and Mexico went to war over Texan claims of independence. What ensued was a year-long bloody engagement that included the infamous battle at the Alamo and subsequent massacre of Texan soldiers by the Mexican military leader, Santa Anna. Despite signing a peace treaty in 1836, Mexican leaders reneged on their recognition of an independent Texas, and claimed that only was Texas still a Mexican territory, but that its territorial boundary was marked by the Nueces River. This conflicted with the claims of the newly established Republic of Texas, who claimed its border was marked by the Rio Grande River, which lay a few hundred miles further south.\textsuperscript{18}

The Texas revolt against Mexico was less a rebellion against Mexican tyranny and more an early application of Manifest Destiny. The ensuing negotiations between the Republic and Texas and the United States were an extension of American preemptive land laws, as many Texans still considered themselves to be American citizens and desperately wanted the benefits such an identity might bestow. After the conclusion of the Texas revolution, Texans began to petition the U.S. government for annexation. Mexico

\textsuperscript{18} These settlers invited by the Mexican government were called “empresarios,” and they were exempt from all taxes and paid reduced import duties during their first six years in Mexico. Additionally, heads of families were given nearly 4,500 acres of land to develop, and empresarios received an impressive 66,774 acres for every two hundred immigrants who settled on their land. With these benefits came one stipulation: participation in the slave trade was absolutely prohibited. While slaves that were already owned by the white settlers were allowed to join their masters in Texas, any children born to slaves would be considered free once they reached the age of fourteen. Though they would be colonists, all individuals immigrating to Mexico would be considered Mexican and were expected cast their loyalties with that nation. Stephen F. Austin was one of the first of many empresarios, and was one of the few who agreed to all the stipulations put forth by Mexico. See: Henderson, \textit{A Glorious Defeat}, 30-39. Brian DeLay addresses the idea of settlers as a barrier between Central Mexico and raiding Indians, prominently the Comanche, in his essay: DeLay, “Independent Indians the U.S.-Mexican War.”
responded by threatening that any efforts made toward annexation by the United States would be viewed as an open declaration of war. The threat of a foreign war coupled with the fact that Texas annexation virtually guaranteed the expansion of slavery prevented politicians from pursuing that route. Nevertheless, aggressive expansionists were aching to acquire new territory, and were supported by James K. Polk who was elected president in the fall of 1845. Because of his belief in Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, Polk was unafraid of going to war against Mexico. In fact, because he wanted all of Mexico’s northern territories that extended all the way to California, Polk was eager for war and even provoked it. By the time war was declared in 1846, aggressive expansion in the form of Manifest Destiny seemed to be unstoppable.¹⁹

Knowing that many Whig senators and even some anti-aggressive expansionist Democrats would oppose entering into war with a foreign nation, Polk cleverly tied his war bill of May 1846 to a provision that would send supplies to the troops and provide money for reinforcements. Therefore, anybody who opposed the war and the bill would appear unpatriotic and could be accused of betraying U.S. troops. Similarly, American citizens risked appearing unpatriotic and unsupportive of their nation if they continued to oppose

¹⁹ The claim that the Texas Revolt was not in reaction to Mexican tyranny is put forth by Timothy Henderson. To demonstrate his conclusions, Henderson puts forth this question: If the revolt was in reaction to Mexican tyranny, then what exactly were considered tyrannical actions conducted by the Mexican government? Was it the collection of tariffs, the outlawing of slavery, the institution of a common justice system, and immigration restrictions? It was complaints against these aspects of Texas rule that the Texan settlers used to bolster their revolt, yet those very same elements were all in place in the United States, the very nation that Texas wanted to join. Henderson asserts that the Texans were actually Mexico’s most privileged citizens, and certainly were not under any form of Mexican oppression. Furthermore, most of the rebels were illegal immigrants who arrived after 1830, with another third of showing up in Texas only after the revolt had begun. See: Henderson, Glorious Defeat, 99. For more information about Polk’s rise to power and his utilization of Manifest Destiny in his declaration of war, see Greenberg, Wicked War. For a more in-depth discussion regarding how Polk provoked Mexico into starting a foreign war, see: Henderson, Glorious Defeat.
the war against Mexico. This constant fear of displaying insufficient loyalty proved to be somewhat effective, as demonstrated by the Whigs in Illinois, whose political ideologies otherwise seemed to clash with territorial expansion. Despite their ideological reservations, thousands of Whig men quickly volunteered to join the U.S. Army following the example of their Whig congressman, John Hardin. American citizens seemed unconcerned with why men volunteered; they found it politically and patriotically expedient for them to simply enlist.\(^\text{20}\)

Pushing attitudes aside that conflicted with demands of the U.S. government was precisely what the Mormons did when they were asked to participate in the war in the summer of 1846. However, their enlistment was not motivated by any loyalties they may have had for their country. Instead, the Mormons were inspired by their religious leader, Brigham Young, who urged the Mormons to discard any negative feelings they harbored against the federal government. By doing so, Young encouraged the men of the Mormon Battalion to provide the means for the Mormon community to find a new home in the western territories of northern Mexico, while also securing permission and aid from the U.S. government. Unbeknownst to the Mormon soldiers, the call to war was not a spontaneous decision made by the federal government or simply a means to acquire additional manpower. The Mormon Battalion was actually the fruit of multiple efforts made on the part of Mormon leaders to garner the resources needed for migration into the

\(^{20}\) Only fourteen members of Congress opposed the bill, including former president John Quincy Adams. These men who refused to vote for the bill were all northern Whigs and were nicknamed the “Immortal Fourteen.” Hardin’s involvement in the war, including his political and personal outlooks regarding the conflict and the effect his enlistment had is detailed in Greenberg, *Wicked War.*
western frontier. They knew that, without the help of the U.S. government, none of their land claims in the west would be protected from future settlement by American citizens.
CHAPTER 2: THE MORMON BATTALION

When Congress declared war against Mexico in 1846, the Mormons found themselves at the edge of organized U.S. territory along the Missouri River. Their place on the fringe of American society was both literal and figurative. For nearly a decade, the Mormons had lived like religious refugees, fleeing persecution from anti-Mormon mobs in Missouri and Illinois. The Mormons attempted to stave off persecution by voting for political representatives who offered them protection, or by appealing to various governmental agencies for military reinforcements. Instead of offers for relief, the Mormons were counseled by their political representatives to evacuate the settled regions of the eastern states and pursue a new life on the frontier, which at that time was either the Oregon territory or northern Mexico. The violent persecution that the Mormons experienced while in Missouri and Illinois, coupled with the failure of the government to intervene on their behalf, pushed the Mormons to the brink of their loyalty to the United States and compromised their desire to identify with the Gentiles of that nation. The Mormons eventually came to terms with leaving their homes behind, and in the summer of 1846, they set up a temporary camp along the Missouri River where they planned to gather resources to help them move west.

Yet for all of their hopes of removing themselves from the purview of the federal government, the Mormons, or at least their leader Brigham Young, realized that they would not be able to migrate west and establish a community of their own without receiving sanction to do so from the very entity that had failed to protect them in the states. The power and authority of the U.S. government followed western settlers and squatters, as demonstrated by nearly forty years of preemptive land acts, but that power was only
available to American citizens. The Mormons knew that unless they carried with them official recognition from the federal government, there was a great possibility of being trammeled and forcefully removed by any U.S. settlers who may come after them. Although it is impossible to know exactly what was going through Young’s mind during the summer of 1846, he was likely aware that he could either move his Church west with the help and protection of the U.S. government, or risk meeting the same fate as they had in Missouri and Illinois. Furthermore, in consideration of the turbulent atmosphere surrounding war with Mexico or Great Britain, perhaps Young realized that, should an aggressive expansionist agenda triumph against Mexico, it was better to be on the side of the “winners.” With this in mind, Mormon representatives sent out a series of entreaties to powerful government officials in an effort to secure aid for their migration. One of the petitions was successful enough to capture the attention of the president, James K. Polk, and it was under his guidance that the Mormon Battalion came into existence. The Mormon Battalion was given the task of blazing a path from the eastern states to California. This put them, for the most part, far away from the violence of the war, and the battalion never did engage in battle with enemy forces. Nevertheless, this military unit helped facilitate the western territorial expansion of the United States while also providing the fiscal means for the Mormons to move west as well.

During the Mexican-American War, participation in the military was regarded as a way of demonstrating patriotism and loyalty to the United States. For the Mormons, however, enlistment in the U.S. Army was merely a means to an end. The Mormon soldiers considered the battalion as a religious organization whose purpose was to facilitate the western movement of the Church. Any benefits provided by the Mormon Battalion to the
United States during the war were secondary to those delivered to the Church. By the time the battalion was discharged in the summer of 1847, the Mormon soldiers did not seem to construe their military service as a demonstration of loyalty. Aside from the deaths caused by sickness, not a single soldier was forced to confront their mortality, or the purpose of their contribution to the cause of the United States, while under the duress of enemy fire. Perhaps because the battalion was often isolated during its march from Iowa to California, the soldiers’ time in the military did not necessarily reinvigorate their sense of American identity or patriotism. In fact, some may have even considered the experience so harrowing that it tarnished their view of the U.S. government even further.

“**But we are American Citizens**”

Persecution and ridicule aimed at Mormons and their leaders began the moment the Mormon Church was established in 1830, but it did not prevent the Church from growing exponentially in both influence and membership. Joseph Smith Jr., the founder and first president of the Mormon Church, was called a blasphemer for his production of a new scriptural text that he named the Book of Mormon. Smith claimed to have translated the Book of Mormon from a set of ancient gold plates that contained a record of the ancient inhabitants of the Americas. Smith attracted a substantial number of followers and established a tight-knit religious community that soon came to number in the thousands.

That so many Americans were eager to subscribe to an entirely new doctrine is not surprising, as the Mormon Church came into existence during the tail end of the Second Great Awakening. The religious fervor that accompanied the Second Great Awakening was particularly strong in upstate New York, commonly referred to as the “Burned-Over
District” for the revival sessions that swept through the region. Multiple “new” religions sprang into existence during this time and appealed to people who were eager to discover enlightenment and spiritual freedom, yet perhaps still desired to have larger life decisions made for them. The Mormons, a nickname bestowed upon them in reference to their religious text, were only one of many religious communities at the time founded by idealistic men.\(^1\)

The unique character and identity of members of the Mormon Church quickly became apparent. Mormons did not consider themselves in alignment with the teachings of either American Protestants or Catholics. Likewise, fellow religious organizations were generally quick to dismiss Mormon practices and beliefs as blasphemous and corrupt, and they condemned Joseph Smith as a counterfeiter, liar, and seducer of spirits. The boundary between what was considered magical or superstitious practice in the nineteenth century was paramount to an American Protestant identity, which clashed with both the Catholic traditions of worshipping holy relics and Indian American rituals and beliefs. Many Mormons embraced spiritual practices, including speaking in tongues and healing by faith, and Joseph Smith admitted to have translated the Book of Mormon by peering into a hat and gazing upon a pair of holy stones. Mormons also maintained that they, or at least their

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\(^1\) Two other famous men who spearheaded religious revivalism were Charles Finney and Robert Matthews. Finney’s contribution to and influence during the Second Great Awakening, particularly in Rochester, New York, can be found in Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837 15th-Anniversary ed.* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004). Another work by Johnson details the life and religious influence of Matthews, who proclaimed himself to be the prophet Matthias, and includes a comparison to Joseph Smith and a brief meeting between the two men. See: Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
president and other ecclesiastical leaders, frequently made contact with heavenly beings and other-worldly entities.  

The non-Mormon aversion to these practices and the Mormon community in general can be explained two different ways. The first suggests that while such practices may have been accepted or at least casually dismissed as zealotry in early revival practices of the 1820s, by the 1830s and 40s, such supernatural manifestations came across to Protestants as superstitious and delusory. In an age of growing secularism that aggrandized the superiority of Anglo-Americans, everything that Mormonism espoused provided a foil for Protestants to determine precisely what American religion should not be. However, the Mormons were hardly the only religious community to emerge from the Second Great Awakening with extraordinary spiritual practices. If the Second Great Awakening was an expression of the acceptance of religious freedoms, then what accounts for the Mormons’ persecution, particularly over other unique religions of the time? This leads to the second explanation, wherein the Mormons were targeted not for their spiritual beliefs, but communal economic and social practices. Such cohesiveness dictated by a single religious leader threatened to undermine the influence of American politicians or other government entities.

22 J. Spencer Fluhman has written an excellent survey of anti-Mormonism in America, and he describes the movement as one that “first found Mormonism to be a fake religion, then an alien or foreign religion, and finally merely a false one.” Spencer Fluhman, A Peculiar People: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 9. The Second Great Awakening also brought about a rise in Unitarianism, which supported the spirituality of the individual and questioned the divinity of Jesus Christ. The tension between Mormonism and Protestantism became more apparent after the 1840s once polygamy was publicly recognized by Mormons as not only an accepted, but encouraged lifestyle. For an exhaustive account of anti-Mormonism throughout the ages and up to the twenty-first century, see Fluhman, A Peculiar People.
Anti-Mormon sentiment followed Smith and his dedicated followers wherever they went. By 1845, just fifteen years after the establishment of their faith, the Mormons had relocated first to Ohio, then Missouri, Illinois, and finally Iowa, each time in an attempt to flee persecution. Anti-Mormonism was particularly intense in Jackson County, Missouri, a location that Joseph Smith claimed was the New Jerusalem and literal site of the biblical Garden of Eden. With this proclamation, Smith encouraged all faithful Mormons to settle in Jackson County to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The subsequent influx of Mormons, who were mostly northerners, upset the southern locals. Tensions between the Mormons and Missourians came to a dramatic head when Governor Lilburn Boggs declared that “The Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the state if necessary for the public peace—their outrages are beyond all description.” Known as the “Mormon Extermination Order,” Boggs’s impassioned and violent edict exacerbated hostile actions toward the Mormons. Two days after the order has been issued, a group of approximately two hundred and fifty men, including some local government officials, launched an attack on a Mormon settlement at Haun’s Mill. Most Mormons were able to escape the attack, but a few dozen men stayed behind in an attempt to hinder the mob’s advance. Nineteen Mormons were killed, including a ten year-old boy who was shot in the head and a nine year-old who was shot after he was found hiding in a blacksmith shop. Three of the Missourian
attackers were injured, but there were no fatalities, nor were any tried or punished for this lethal outburst of aggression.  

The attack at Haun’s Mill persuaded the Mormons that if they wanted to preserve their lives, they had to leave Missouri. Joseph Smith led his followers to a swampy and apparently unoccupied area of land, which they soon transformed into a bustling urban center named Nauvoo. It was during the Mormons’ sojourn in Illinois that their political equivocations began to get them into trouble. In October 1843, when the Democratic and Whig parties were beginning to narrow down the list of presidential candidates, the Mormon newspaper *Times and Seasons* attempted to calculate which candidate would best serve the needs of the Mormon people. Speaking for the Mormons, the article declared “we are *American citizens*, and as American citizens we have rights in common with all that live under the folds of the Star Spangled Banner.” Included in these rights, the article argued, was government-offered protection to practice freedom of religion. In order to ensure the Mormons would benefit from these rights due to all American citizens, the article offered a lofty promise of up to one hundred thousand votes in favor of the candidate who was willing to represent the needs of the Mormon community. These votes would be provided not only from the Mormons, but any other American citizens they could rally as well. Again speaking for the entire Mormon community, the article defended this political strategy by claiming, “We do this in order that we may fix

upon the man who will be the most likely to render us assistance in obtaining redress for our grievances.”

The following month, Joseph Smith wrote letters to the five contending candidates for the presidential race. Addressed to John C. Calhoun, Lewis Cass, Richard Johnson, Henry Clay, and Martin Van Buren, the identical letters asked each man “what will be your role of action relative to us as a people?” The letter to Van Buren letter contained an extra amount of scolding for his failure to intervene during the Missouri Mormon war of 1838 and for treating the Mormons with “coldness, indifference, and neglect bordering on contempt.” Of the five candidates, only Cass and Clay responded, though neither expressed much sympathy for the cause of the Saints. Clay’s letter marked the first occasion wherein a federal representative advised the Mormons to abandon their efforts to remain in the states and instead set out for the unorganized Oregon territory for sanctuary.

24 “Who Shall be our next President?” *Times and Seasons*, from the Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter referred to as the Journal History is a day by day history of the Church from 1830-present day taken mostly from newspapers, but also from some minutes and diary entries. The Journal History can be accessed at the Church History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah, or online at history.lds.org.

25 “Smith and the apostles write to the presidential candidates,” Journal History, 4 November 1843. Lewis Cass’s response is not recorded. The portion of Clay’s letter is quoted in Smith’s journal. See “Smith journal entry,” Journal History, 29 January 1845. Being unsatisfied with the presidential candidates, Joseph Smith decided to put himself up for the job. He officially declared his candidacy on January 29, 1844. See: Arnold K. Garr, “Joseph Smith: Campaign for President of the United States,” *Ensign*, February 2009, 48-52. Smith envisioned the federal government under his presidency to be powerful overseeing what he identified as “four pillars of prosperity”: agriculture, manufacturing, navigation, and commerce. All of this would be supported by a “judicious tariff.” Smith had an optimistic ideal of the flow of money, which he envisioned filling a national bank, with branches in every state. Money, he believed, would be easily made not only from the tariff, but from the sale of public land and reduced pay of congressmen. In one of the most interesting aspects of his platform, Smith called for a universal “pardon [for] every convict,” and instead of imprisonment, criminals would be put to work on national improvement projects which would not only ease the cost of such endeavors, but “enlighten” the criminal’s minds and produce hard-working members of American society. This particular treatment of criminals may have stemmed from the fact that Smith himself was considered a criminal and had multiple warrants out for his arrest. This was all outlined in Smith’s political platform. See: “General Smith’s Views of the Powers and Policy of the United States’ Government.” Journal History, 7 February 1844.
In the meantime, and likely in an attempt to prevent another massacre such as the one at Haun’s Mill, Joseph Smith mustered an army of one thousand Mormon civilian men and appointed himself as their commander. Known as the Nauvoo Legion, this unofficial militia was the first organized military unit of the Mormon Church, and it was meant to be a preemptive display of martial strength and aggression to deter violence by outside parties. In a sad turn of events, this civilian military organization that was meant to offer protection to the Mormon people ultimately resulted in additional death and destruction. Though Smith claimed to have received permission from Illinois government officials to assemble the Nauvoo Legion, in June 1844, state officials accused him of committing high treason, with the additional charge of destroying an anti-Mormon printing press in Nauvoo. Governor Ford summoned Smith and a few other Mormon leaders to stand trial for these charges in Carthage, Illinois. While they were being detained in the Carthage jail, mob violence reached a terrifying new level when Smith, along with his brother Hyrum, were murdered by a group of armed civilians known as the Carthage Greys. Some members of the Carthage Greys held high political positions within the Illinois state government, but none were brought to trial for the assassination of Smith.26

The murder of their beloved prophet flamed the fires of discontent within the Mormon community. The continued neglect of the government to intervene on their behalf infuriated many Mormons. Violence continued to break out between anti-Mormon mobs

26 The press that Smith allegedly destroyed was The Nauvoo Expositor, which was operated by a member of the Mormon Church who had gained knowledge about the practice of polygamy. The editor was vocally opposed to the idea of polygamy, and he published an article exposing the practice of polygamy by high-ranking members of the Church, including Smith. Smith’s trial and murder, recognized as martyrdom within the Mormon Church, is recounted in detail in the preface to Concise History. See John Taylor, The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith in Tyler, Concise History, 10-64.
and the Mormon community, and the Mormons persistently bombarded governmental officials with pleas for protection. Finally, Governor Ford realized he could no longer avoid confronting the issue. In a letter to the Mormon community, Ford wrote that “I regret very much that so much excitement and hatred against [the Mormons] should exist in the public mind.” Unfortunately, he continued, there was nothing he could do to mitigate the situation and frankly exclaimed that “it is due to truth to say that the public mind everywhere is so decidedly hostile to them that public opinion is not inclined to do them common justice.” Furthermore, he argued that the state government could not afford to intervene on the Mormons’ behalf every time that they were subject to persecution. Ford continued to explain that while he could not actually force the Mormons to leave, he could implore them to migrate out of the state for their own sakes, as discontent was not likely to be reduced in the foreseeable future. He closed his letter to the Mormons with a recognition that “it is a great hardship on [the Mormons] to remove from their comfortable homes and the property which they have accumulated by years of toil; but is it not better that they should do so voluntarily than to lie in a state of continual war?” Ford’s word eventually proved to be true, as anti-Mormon violence ceased to abate and the Church leadership was forced to accept the reality that staying in Nauvoo was no longer an option. A formal agreement was reached between the leaders of the Mormon Church and the state of Illinois, wherein the state promised to temporarily protect the Mormons in Nauvoo, but only if they promised to be evacuated by spring of 1846.  

Prior to his death, Joseph Smith had not clarified the process of succession for determining future presidents of the Church. Some Mormons argued that the presidency should pass to the next-highest ecclesiastic authority, while others believed that the leadership should remain in the family, making Smith’s eldest son the next prophet. The First Counselor to the former prophet, Brigham Young, gained the support of many Mormons when he stood up and gave an impassioned speech that outlined his plans for the young Church. Many people recorded that, during this speech, the figure of the late Joseph Smith appeared before them, so it looked as if it was Smith speaking to the crowd, rather than Young. Interpreting this transformation as divine revelation, these members wholeheartedly supported the forty three year-old new Mormon president.28

Upon assuming the presidency of the Church, Young continued Smith’s tradition of appealing to government agencies for reprieve. One of his final pleas was sent to the governor of Arkansas, who replied in the same manner as many before him when he iterated that the Mormons were better off migrating out of the United States. Eager to escape the Mormon enemies in the eastern states, Young finally conceded that the Mormons must relocate to the west, and he originally set his sights on Oregon. The Mormons were instructed to begin gathering their belongings and selling their properties in Nauvoo to raise money for what was surely going to be an expensive move out west. Young also encouraged members of the Mormon Church to build or utilize any connections with influential people who could potentially finance the Mormons’ migration. Jesse Little,

28 The “transformation” of Brigham Young into Joseph Smith and the conflict surrounding Smith’s successor is examined in Richard S. VanWagoner, "The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 34, no. 1 (2001): 159-82. Those who believed that Smith’s son should be the next Mormon president eventually broke off from the main branch of the Mormon Church to found the Reorganized LDS Church.
a preacher who remained in Pennsylvania after his conversion to the Mormon faith, not only built connections that extended as high as the executive office, but capitalized on the current perilous political atmosphere. By connecting the plight of the Mormons to potential British influence in the west, Jesse Little successfully captured the attention of aggressive expansionists.29

AN UNDERHANDED THREAT

The winter before the Mormons were supposed to begin their evacuation from Nauvoo, it appeared that they might have found a perfect opportunity to move westward toward Oregon. In his December 1845 Annual Message to Congress, President Polk requested that stockades and blockhouses be built along the Oregon Trail “For the protection of emigrants whilst on their way to Oregon against the attacks of the Indian tribes possessing that country.” He also may have also wanted to encourage American migration to Oregon in order to gain an edge over its joint owner, Britain. Upon getting word of this request, Brigham Young immediately wrote to Polk and tried to persuade him that the Mormons were perfect to complete this task, as they were seeking to move to Oregon anyway. The President did not respond. However, Polk’s growing paranoia over British influence in North America proved to be the most helpful political tool that the Mormons were able to utilize in negotiating government assistance, ultimately resulting in the creation of the Mormon Battalion.30

During the first few months of 1846, Polk was, ironically, consumed by his efforts to avoid war with Great Britain, while attempting to instigate war against Mexico. When Polk delivered his Annual Message to Congress in 1845, America and Britain still jointly owned the Oregon Territory. However, tensions between the two nations were beginning to rise as hundreds of American immigrants began to pour into the area. The British--operated Hudson Bay Company held a title to the Oregon territory, but it was no match for the power of the U.S. government that followed American squatters in the form of preemption. So long as American migrants outnumbered British citizens in Oregon, Polk was confident he could maintain the upper hand. 31

This shaky balance of power threatened to come crashing down when Polk was informed that forty thousand Mormons with British loyalties might not only migrate to the Oregon territory and develop that land for themselves, but would utilize British influence to back up their claims. This threat was instigated by Jesse Little, who unintentionally began this process in the spring of 1846 when one of his sermons in Philadelphia caught the attention of a man named Thomas L. Kane. Kane was the son of a prominent Pennsylvania Democrat, and he had high hopes of his own to move west and make a name for himself. Kane was moved by the plight of the Mormons, and he offered Little his assistance in obtaining an audience with prominent policy makers in Washington. Being

31 The possibility of going to war with Great Britain did not seem far-fetched for many American citizens. Paranoia over British interference in Mexico drove the American media to the brink of hysteria. In many ways, the war against Mexico was spurred by the fear that unless the United States acquired Mexico’s northern territories, Britain would swoop in instead and gain even more influence in North America. This was supported by misplaced American Anglophobia, but it seemed to gain some credibility when the British consul in Mexico attempted to negotiate a private deal regarding the Republic of Texas. For an account of this secret but unsuccessful negotiation, as well as further explanation of American animosity and fear of British interference, see Sam W. Haynes, “But What Will England Say?” in Dueling Eagles: Reinterpreting the U.S.-Mexican War, 1846-1848, ed. Richard V. Francaviglia and Douglas W. Richmond (Fort Worth: Texas University Press, 2000), 19-39.
familiar with politics himself, Kane knew exactly how to press President Polk and perhaps even exploit his weaknesses. Aware of the potential that this relationship could bring in the form of government assistance, Jesse Little began the brief courtship with high policy makers in Washington that eventually led him to the executive office.32

Catching the attention of the American president proved to be no easy task. Little began the process by contacting Amos Kendall, who was the former postmaster general, an influential member of Andrew Jackson’s “kitchen” cabinet, and close friend of President Polk. Kendall’s original plan to help the Mormons was to pursue a real estate contract with Brigham Young, whom Kendall wanted to aid in speculating land in California. However, once war was declared against Mexico in May 1846, Kendall constructed an alternate plan that would help the Mormons move west while simultaneously benefitting the U.S. government. Kendall proposed that the Mormons assemble a military unit and serve in the war, which would provide the soldiers with pay for their service and place them in western lands. on May 23, 1846, Little endorsed the idea, and Kendall approached President Polk just two days later.33

32 Thomas L. Kane is considered to be one of the Mormon Church’s biggest advocates. Kane went to visit Nauvoo after learning of the Mormons’ expulsion from there, and he also followed the Mormon Battalion for some time. Kane maintained his relationship with the Mormons through the decades, and a speech that he delivered at the Pennsylvania Historical Society in March 1850 was included as introductory material in Daniel Tyler’s Concise History. For the letters of introduction sent to Washington policy makers, including Vice President George M. Dallas, see Tyler, Concise History.

33 Amos Kendall is presented differently in accounts of the Mormon Battalion. In Daniel Tyler’s Concise History, Kendall is described as being the one who secured Little an audience with Polk. This is corroborated by letters between Little and Kendall, which are contained in Golder’s March of the Mormon Battalion. Kendall is portrayed quite differently in one of the more recent works regarding the battalion, and Little’s interaction with Kendall is described as one that was “mixed up” and built upon conspiracy. Kane’s involvement formulating the idea for a Mormon military unit and helping Little secure a meeting with the president goes unmentioned. See Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 32.
After a week had gone by with no word from Polk, Little began to get restless. On June 1, he drafted his own plea to the White House in the form of a veiled threat. His letter began innocently enough, as Little professed his loyalty to the United States as a citizen of New Hampshire and the son of Revolutionary soldiers. He proudly claimed that “My father fought in the battles of the revolution for freedom and liberty, and the blood of my fathers courses through my veins and arouses the spirit of patriotism and hatred to oppression which characterizes my noble ancestors.” This piece of information connected the Mormons with the most revered set of patriots the nation had, and alluded to the idea that respect for democracy invariably lead to a hatred of oppression. The Mormons had been oppressed, there could be no doubt about it. Yet for all they had been through, Little encouragingly wrote, they still had faith in their government. If the government was truly a righteous, democratic, and therefore American one, it could not allow the Mormon people to suffer in harsh living conditions any longer.34

In a very strategic move, Jesse Little began to enumerate the membership of the Mormon Church both within the states and abroad, particularly in Britain. He claimed that twelve to fifteen thousand Mormons had already departed Nauvoo for California, and many more were on their way, if not already there. Another forty thousand were said to be living in the British Isles and were expected to arrive in the United States in the coming months before migrating with the Church to the western portion of the continent. Although these immigrants were British, Little made sure to note that their belief in the Mormon faith served as a form of American identity and patriotism. Upon their arrival, the British

34 Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 81.
Mormons would “disdain to receive assistance from a foreign power” when it came to their safety or monetary needs for migration. But assistance was needed, and in a compelling and deliberate move, Little wrote that, should “our government [in America] turn us off in this great crisis and will not help us,” all of the existing Mormons, along with their British brothers and sisters, would be compelled to be foreigners. He made sure to be clear about his intentions, by stating that, “if I cannot get [assistance] in the land of my Fathers I will cross the trackless ocean where I trust I shall find some friends to help.”

This aspect of Little’s letter, though brief in comparison to the rest of the multi-page memo, was likely the one that prompted Polk to take action. The Oregon dispute between the United States and Great Britain had just barely been settled via the Buchanan-Pakenham Treaty, but suspected British involvement in Mexico dominated the media, and Polk knew he had to play his hand carefully. The presence of thousands of loyal British subjects in the Oregon territory could threaten the American settlers and their claims of ownership based on residence and improvement stipulated by preemptive land rights. Jesse Little was surely aware of the situation between Britain and America, and he likely knew that the threat of increased British presence in either Oregon or California would hit a nerve with the president because it could hinder American expansion. The estimation of forty thousand Mormons living in Great Britain was by all accounts wildly inaccurate, but the exaggeration was effective, and Little knew that Polk had no way of checking those numbers.

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35 Jesse C. Little to James K. Polk, 1 June 1846, in Bagley and Bigler, _Army of Israel_, 32-35.
36 In 1838, six Mormon ecclesiastical leaders, including Brigham Young, began missionary efforts in the Britain Isles. Mormon records indicate that by 1842, there were 8,425 members of the Mormon Church across the Atlantic. This number increased to just over 33,000 by 1851, with an additional 11,000 immigrating to the United States by that time. Little’s estimation of British Mormon membership in 1846.
Because of Jesse Little’s letter, the Mormons had finally caught the attention of not only a governmental representative, but the most prominent representative in the United States. Within two days of sending his letter, both Jesse Little and Amos Kendall were invited to meet with Polk, and after some discussion, they all agreed that forming a legitimate Mormon militia was the most appropriate course of action. Polk was ambiguous about when the enlistment of the Mormons would begin, exactly how many would be allowed to participate, and which U.S. officer they would serve under. After assuring Jesse Little that he harbored no hard feelings against the Mormons and espoused nothing but friendship toward them, Polk adjourned the meeting and asked both Little and Kendall to return the following day to finalize plans. There is no doubt that Little left the meeting in high spirits, as he had finally managed to secure what years of pleading by others had failed to do. He had found a way to finance the Mormons’ westward trek while maintaining some form of cordiality with the country they were desperate to leave. Little wrote to Brigham Young that the president had received his letter with interest and that Polk “had confidence in our people as true American citizens.”

In private, Polk’s sentiments were not so forthright. At the time of his first meeting with Little, he had already communicated with Secretary of War William Marcy that the Mormons would not be enlisted until they reached California. Polk was likely operating under the assumption that, with or without U.S. governmental assistance, California was

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was obviously exaggerated, but missionary work in Britain was progressing more quickly than in the United States. By 1851, there were more Mormons living in Britain and Ireland than there were living in the United States (approximately 12,000.) See “British Isles, the Church in,” Encyclopedia of Mormonism: The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure of the Church of Jesus Christus of Latter-Day Saints (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 227-32.

37 Jesse C. Little to Brigham Young, Washington, DC, From Journal History, 6 July 1846. Little’s letter in its entirety is also replicated in Golder, March of the Mormon Battalion, 85.
the intended destination of the Mormon Church. Therefore, deferring enlistment until the Mormons had actually reached California would their loyalty for at least an additional year or so until the threat of British influenced abated. In addition, this course of action would keep them under the jurisdiction of the U.S. military while in California, rather than giving them rights as independent citizens or inhabitants of that territory. Although these potential outcomes and motives are not recorded, Polk’s diary and his public correspondence helps the historian deduce Polk’s reasoning. Should he agree to fund Mormon migration via the Mormon Battalion prior to their arrival in California, Polk risked paying for the Mormons’ migration west without obtaining anything in return. Instead, Polk likely assumed that it was better to obtain their loyalty and dependence once the Mormons were there.38

In his diary, Polk wrote that “The Mormons, if taken into the service, will constitute not more than ¼ of all Col. Kearney’s command.” This specific enumeration possibly hints at his paranoia of too many Mormon soldiers compromising the enlistment of other military personnel, or perhaps that he simply wanted to keep the numbers low in order for them to be easily controlled. However, his letters to Secretary of State William Marcy evoked no sense of suspicion against the Mormons whatsoever and they maintained an entirely professional and business-like tone. Marcy’s letter to General Stephen W. Kearny, commander of the U.S. Army of the West, placed the number of Mormon volunteers at no more than one-third of the entire force. Marcy’s notification to Kearny regarding the

38 Upon examining the discrepancy of the dates for enlistment among Polk, Marcy, Kearny, and Allen, historian Ray Luce argues that the mustering of the Mormon Battalion while it was still located in Iowa was an accident due to miscommunication. Another theory is that either Polk or Marcy purposely changed their minds, and agreed to the early enlistment of the Mormon soldiers in order to ensure their loyalty while marching west, which may have trumped placating the fears of the California settlers. For Luce’s argument, see: Ray W. Luce, “The Mormon Battalion: A Historical Accident?” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 42, no. 1(1974): 27-38.
formation of the Mormon Battalion was actually only a portion of a larger letter in which Marcy informed Kearny that an additional one thousand men were being recruited from Missouri to aid the general in Santa Fe. In addition to these forces, Kearny was to “use all proper means to have a good understanding with [the Mormons], to the end that the United States may have their cooperation in taking possession of, and holding [California.]” Marcy wrote that the Mormons were already on their way to that territory, and he was aware that a large number of Mormons were already settled near the Sacramento River and Sutter’s Mill. These Mormons had arrived in California during the summer of 1846 after sailing from New York.  

President Polk had reason to be concerned about Mormon migration to California for reasons other than the potential loss of their loyalty to the United States. If the Mormons were indeed already on their way to California and planned to join forces with other Mormons there, Mormons likely outnumber any other American citizens. Following the pattern of granted preemptive settlement rights along the western frontier, the Mormons’ early presence would set them up for acquiring substantial influence in California. Should that occur, even if the government refused preemption, evicting the Mormons from that area would be more difficult considering any improvements or developments they made, agriculturally or economically. Given the Mormons’ turbulent history with the U.S.

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39 In 1845, Young commissioned Samuel Brannan, a Mormon editor of a New York paper who had relocated to Washington DC, to petition the Polk administration for assistance in sailing to California. According to Mormon records, Brannan fell in with “questionable” power brokers who offered assistance in return for political favors, wherein the prospective Mormon lands, once stably situated on the west coast, would be utilized for political gain. In February 1846, Brannan managed to scrounge together over two hundred Mormons who were willing to endure a long, arduous sea voyage, and in February 1846, they set sail for San Francisco on the ship Brooklyn. For a brief overview of this event, see Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 20-21.
government, Polk was likely aware that a large Mormon population in California could easily thwart his plans for that territory. The president must have realized how imperative it was for Mormon migration to occur under the jurisdiction of U.S. authority. Furthermore, Polk recorded in his diary that he had instructed General Kearny to set off immediately to California in an attempt to establish his presence before more Mormons arrived. Polk candidly wrote that “if the Mormons reached the country I did not desire to have them the only U.S. forces in the country,” and that he was aware of other Californian settlers expressing alarm in regard to receiving the entire Mormon population. The creation of the Mormon Battalion was necessarily an opportunity to provide the Mormons with the financial means to emigrate, but rather to oversee and control their westward movement and “conciliate them and prevent their becoming the enemies of the U.S.”

Meanwhile, Jesse Little recognized the president’s intentions and deduced from his meeting with Polk that the Mormons may not be offered the opportunity to enlist until after they had reached California. Polk refused to permit Little’s request for an immediate departure to the temporary Church headquarters in Council Bluffs, likely to prevent them from assembling a battalion or planning their arrival in California any sooner that Polk wanted. The president needed General Kearny to be situated in California before the Mormon migrants arrived. Jesse Little and Thomas Kane spent the days following Polk’s approval of a Mormon Battalion trying to alter Polk’s plan. Along with attempting to secure an earlier enlistment, Little also tried to establish business contracts with other government

40 Milo Milton Quaife, ed., The Diary of James K. Polk during his Presidency, 1845-1848, Vol. I (Chicago: McClurg & Co., 1910), 444. For Marcy’s letter to Kearny, see William L. Marcy to Col. S. W. Kearny, 3 June 1846, in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 38-40; Fleek, History May Be Searched in Vain, 78.
officials in the hope they would freight supplies to California to await the arrival of the Mormons.41

“WE MUST RAISE THE BATTALION”

Prior to the Mormon Battalion’s enlistment, Polk had stipulated that the battalion was to be overseen by military-appointed personnel. The battalion’s commander and surgeon were to be appointed from the regular U.S. Army in order to establish dominance and maintain federal oversight of the Mormon Battalion. General Kearny selected a man named Captain James Allen to assemble the Mormon Battalion and bring the soldiers to Fort Leavenworth, where they would begin their enlistment under Allen’s command. Allen was a West Point graduate and had served in the regular U.S. Army before his appointment as an officer in the relatively new Regiment of Dragoons. By the time he was ordered to be captain of the Mormon Battalion, he claimed over fifteen years of military experience. His history with the military made him Kearny’s first choice to lead the Mormon Battalion.

William Marcy’s letter to General Kearny had failed to mention the specifics regarding the enlistment of the Mormon Battalion, and specified neither the location, nor the date on which the Mormons should be mustered into the army. Therefore, when General Kearny wrote to Captain Allen, he ordered the Mormons to be enlisted as soon as Allen was reached the Mormon camp. This meant that the Mormons would join the U.S. Army before their western trek even began. Kearny instructed Allen to raise four to five companies, each

41 Luce, “The Mormon Battalion: A Historical Accident?” 35-36. Ray Luce argues that Polk was eager to utilize the Mormons who were already en route to expedite the movement of U.S. personnel into the California territory, and his only hesitation was due to the reaction of the current American settlers near Sutter’s Mill. Due to the overwhelming enlistment numbers that followed the declaration of war, I hardly suspect that Polk was desperate for soldiers to send to California with Kearny’s western army. The formation of the battalion posed little strategic or militaristic benefit to Polk, other than placating the Mormons and securing their loyalty.
containing seventy to a hundred men. Enlistment in the Mormon Battalion was to last for a period of twelve months, during which time each man would receive pay and rations. They would also be allowed to retain their military-issued arms at the end of their service. Although Captain Allen was to command the battalion as a representative of the regular U.S. army, each company within the battalion would be allowed to elect their own officers and lieutenants.42

Allen’s first destination was Mount Pisgah, Iowa, where many of the Mormons had temporarily settled after their eviction from Illinois. The main body of the Church, including Brigham Young, was a few miles away at Council Bluffs, a small settlement along the Missouri River. Young and a handful of other leaders had learned about the request to create a Mormon Battalion just days prior to Allen’s arrival, but the majority of Mormons had been left in the dark. Understandably, many of them panicked at sight of men in army uniforms riding up to their small camp at Mount Pisgah. The camp leader, William Huntington, approached Allen and asked him his business. After some scrutiny, Allen was given permission to address the camp and relate his purpose for being among the Mormons. Allen then distributed a “Circular to the Mormons” that explained the desire of the government to form a battalion of Mormon men. Allen explained only that the U.S. military was asking for “Mormon men who may be willing to serve their country” in the present war with Mexico, and that they would be enlisted for twelve months. They were to make their way to California, and there they would remain until discharge.

42 Col. Stephen F. Kearny to Cpt. James Allen, Headquarters, Army of the West, Fort Leavenworth, 19 June 1846, in Tyler, Concise History, 113-14; Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 41-42. In all of this correspondence, there is no underhanded tone of disdain or otherwise insulting remarks made in regard to the mustering of the Mormon Battalion.
As means of convincing the Mormons of the benefits of such an endeavor, Allen proclaimed that this offer on behalf of the U.S. government was an “opportunity of sending a portion of their young and intelligent men to the ultimate destination of their whole people, and entirely at the expenses of the United States.” Additionally, the soldiers would have the benefit of paving the way and reserving the land “for their brethren to come after them.” Captain Allen’s message clarified that he was looking for men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five and was willing to accept four laundresses for each of the five companies he hoped to muster. All of this was written in just three brief paragraphs that seemed to contain only the barest of information.43

The conclusion of Allen’s message was met with trepidation and aversion. Upon receipt of the circular, camp leaders dispatched a rider to Brigham Young at Council Bluffs, placing the matter into the hands of their Church’s president. No one enlisted in Allen’s battalion that day at Mount Pisgah. Allen took a cue from the camp leaders and also set out toward Council Bluffs, where Young and other prominent men of the Church agreed to meet with him.

In the time that Allen arrived in Mount Pisgah and finally made his way to Council Bluffs, the camps were set ablaze with rumors of a malicious government plot to destroy the Mormons. Hosea Stout, whose son had died during a mob attack in Nauvoo, stated that he was “glad to hear of war against the United States” and expressed his hope that it would destroy the nation. Others asserted that the war was a manifestation of God’s judgment,

43 James Allen, Circular to the Mormons, Mount Pisgah, 26 June 1846, in Journal History, 26 June 1846. Also see Tyler, Concise History, 114; Golder, March of the Mormon Battalion, 102-3; or Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 43-44.
sent to punish the United States for its abhorrent treatment of the Mormons. Others supported the United States in the war, but refused to dedicate themselves to its cause. Abraham Day adamantly proclaimed that “Here is one man who will not go, dam’um.” These attitudes were prevalent among the Saints, and Allen was unable to enlist a single man despite the surprisingly cordial relationship he was developing with the Mormon community.

The Mormons’ gradual acceptance of Captain Allen may have been due to his previous unfamiliarity with their community, as he had spent the last decade or so traversing the frontier and had no connections with anti-Mormon activities in Missouri and Illinois. Knowing that he had no relationship with the government of Missouri or Illinois perhaps made it easier for the Mormons to let down their guard around him. But establishing mutual respect and affability was only part of the process, and despite the “pleasing manner” in which he made his way around the Mormon camps, “it required something else to raise the battalion.”

It was not until Brigham Young voiced his approval of Mormon enlistment in the U.S. Army that any man volunteered for the battalion. On July 1, after Captain Allen addressed the Mormons at Council Bluffs, Young came forward and gave an impassioned speech articulating the temporal and spiritual merits of enlistment. Sensing the group’s wariness regarding any sort of government-ordered action, Young attempted to distinguish

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44 The quotes from hesitant and even angry Mormons when they first heard news of the Mormon Battalion were taken from soldiers’ journals found in Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion*, 2; Fleek, *History May Be Searched in Vain*, 128; Tyler, *Concise History*, 117. Not much is known about James Allen’s personal life. Other than a few of his military reports on his frontier expeditions and two personal letters to a relative, no primary biographical documents survive. Allen was trained and graduated alongside future Confederate general Robert E. Lee. While Lee graduated second in his class, Allen was thirty-fifth out of a class of forty six.
the difference between their former oppressors in Missouri and Illinois and this action on behalf of the president of the United States. Seeing as though they were still residing within U.S. territory, Young asked if any man felt that it was prudent to volunteer and defend his country. Continuing this vein, he also asked them to consider a different scenario: if the Mormons were indeed able to acquire their own territory in the United States and form a new state, then subsequently fail to gain the respect of the federal government and not be called upon during an international crisis, surely the Mormons would feel neglected. The battalion was an opportunity to demonstrate Mormon patriotism and develop good relations with the U.S. government, which would be necessary if the Mormons found themselves under federal oversight in the future. Better yet, Young asserted, this was an opportunity for the “Mormons [to] be the first to set their feet on the soil of California,” a benefit that would serve the Mormons immensely if they decided to stay there and build a new haven. For all of these reasons, Young exclaimed that “We want to conform to the requisition made upon us, and we will do nothing else till we have accomplished this thing…[W]e must raise the Battalion.” In addition to this rousing speech, Young wrote letters of assurance to the pockets of Mormons who remained in Nauvoo and other small temporary settlements. In each letter and conversation, Young presented the request to form a Mormon Battalion as evidence that the government wanted their friendship and confidence.45

45 Though not verbatim, Young’s speech and his main points are recorded in Journal History, 1 July 1846. It is also referenced in Tyler, *Concise History*, 117, and Bagley and Bigler, *Army of Israel*, 45-46. For a copy of a letter sent by Young to other Church leaders, see Brigham Young to Samuel Bent and Council and the Saints at Garden Grove, Council Bluffs, Journal History, 7 July 1846.
Hearing from their spiritual and temporal leader had an immediate effect on the hearts and minds of the Mormon men. After his speech, Young stood up by Captain Allen and asked that all willing men come forth to enlist. A long line of volunteers formed within minutes. Brigham Young spent the next few days travelling between Council Bluffs and Mount Pisgah recruiting soldiers, producing outstanding results. This change of spirit within the Mormon community is embodied perfectly by the experience of Daniel B. Rawson, who wrote in his journal that “I felt indignant toward the Government that had suffered me to be raided and driven from my home. I made the uncouth remark that ‘I would see them all damned and in Hell.’ I would not enlist.” However, as Rawson was making his way to Council Bluffs, he ran into Young and other Church leaders who “said the salvation of Israel depended upon the raising of the army. When I heard this my mind changed. I felt that it was my duty go.” Even Hosea Stout and Abraham Day, who earlier declared their intentions to never enlist and were unabashed in their desire to watch the United States fall apart, were moved by the words of Young and what they identified as the Holy Spirit. Zadock K. Judd wrote that at first it was difficult to allow himself to fight for the U.S. government, but once “the word comes from the right source [it] seemed to bring a spirit of conviction of its truth.”

James Brown’s manner of enlistment was somewhat similar, although he was not a member of the Mormon Church at the time he first heard news of the battalion. He and his family had followed the Mormons to Council Bluffs after becoming acquainted with their beliefs. When Brown first heard of the call for a Mormon Battalion, he was greatly

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46 These various comments are all recorded in Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion*, 13-14.
surprised that the U.S. government was brazen enough to send recruiters, “as the Mormons had been denied protection against mob violence and forced beyond the borders of civilization.” He was outraged that the military demanded five hundred Mormon men “to go to a foreign land to fight their countries [sic] battles.” However, once Young put forth his support for a battalion and asked for compliance from the members of the Church, Brown declared that “wonders never cease” and the spirit of patriotism “awoke within me.” He reflected on stories he had heard about the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Black Hawk Indian Wars and suddenly “had a desire to serve my country in any legitimate way.” By standing on a box to make himself appear taller, Brown was able to successfully lie about his age and enlist in the battalion. The next day, he was baptized a member of the Mormon Church.47

One variant from this pattern was twenty-two-year-old Jonathan Riser, who was eager to serve in the army from the get-go. He was living in Nauvoo when he first heard about Allen’s call to arms, and immediately set off for Council Bluffs to enlist in the U.S. Army. Unlike other Mormons, he was eager for an opportunity to join the military, not only due to his proclaimed sense of adventure, but because he had “inherited this military ardor from my forefathers” who had served their country while in Germany. In 1847, after his discharge from the battalion, Riser wrote rather nostalgically that, though his enlistment consisted of multiple hardships, he had endured them cheerfully and therefore “became a true soldier.” Riser viewed this opportunity not as one to demonstrate his faith, but rather his strength as a man, soldier, and citizen of the United States.

47 Brown, Life of a Pioneer, 22-23.
Similarly, a Mormon man named Alonzo Raymond recorded that he desperately wanted to enlist in the battalion, but was initially rejected because he suffered from an incurable illness. Dejected, Raymond sat by the side of a road, where Church Apostle Heber C. Kimball came upon him. After learning of Raymond’s situation, Kimball prophesied that if Raymond enlisted, he would be healed from his illness. Raymond was eventually mustered into the battalion and within days of his enlistment recorded that he was perfectly healthy. Raymond would turn out to be one of the few hundred that endured the battalion’s march all the way to California.  

Further muddying the issue of patriotism during the enlistment of the Mormon Battalion is the occasion of one eager but unidentified Mormon recruit hoisting an American flag above the enlistment table at Council Bluffs. This was not a spontaneous event, as two men had furnished a “liberty pole” upon which to place the flag just days earlier. Even though the journals of most Mormon volunteers reveal disdain for the U.S. government, it is clear that they did feel some sort of connection with the idea of patriotism and symbolism of the American flag.

The Mormon men’s willingness to enlist only after being directed by their spiritual leader demonstrates the commitment and faith that Mormons had toward Brigham Young and the belief that he was God’s mouthpiece on earth. Members of the Mormon Church made no distinction between the words of the Mormon president and God’s scriptural commandments. Although the Mormon men enlisted with heavy hearts and expressed great sadness in leaving their families, they believed that it was their divine duty to serve in the

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battalion. They were to be servants of their government, but only because they were in the service of God. They were also comfortable serving under the command of Captain James Allen; even though Allen had an extensive background and deep connection to the U.S. military, his willingness to let Brigham Young take charge of the enlistment, even if in appearance only, placated the Mormons’ fears regarding unfamiliar military personnel.

The manner in which the Mormons were persuaded to form the Mormon Battalion also supports contemporary anti-Mormon charges that Church members were adherents to a theocracy. These charges were certainly true to some extent, and Young planned to instate a theocratic government once the Mormons had moved west and established an independent community. However, the fact that the Mormon men enlisted only after their religious leader had commanded them does not seem to have become known outside of the Mormon community. Captain Allen obviously witnessed the process, but no record exists of his opinion regarding the matter. No mention of the manner of enlistment appears to have been printed in local papers in Illinois, Missouri, or the Iowa territory. News that a battalion had been formed did appear in these locations, as well as many others, and the popular American reaction to the news will be explored in upcoming chapters. However, the fact that the Mormons enlisted because they were inspired by their leader is not an anomaly in the context of the entire Mexican-American War. The hundreds of men who volunteered in Illinois, including anti-expansionist Whigs, only enlisted because their congressman, James Hardin, encouraged them to do so. Whether one supported the war or agreed with the implications that an American victory held, it was enlistment into the U.S. Army that ultimately mattered.
After five companies had been formed, Captain Allen told the men that they needed to elect officers and lieutenants for each company from within their own ranks. The men unanimously decided that Brigham Young should instead appoint the officers. The men that Young selected were, for the most part, those who held prestigious positions in the Church. Though the Mormon Battalion was a government entity, Young attempted to exert influence over whatever aspects of the battalion he could. By placing a few high-ranking men in the leadership positions of the army, Young aimed to retain the organization of the Church and keep some semblance of spiritual hierarchy. Perhaps in an effort to skirt any potential jealousies, Young also counseled the appointed officers to treat the soldiers under their command as equals and employ kindness and empathy toward each other should they encounter struggles along their path.

The morning the battalion set out for Fort Leavenworth was full of tears and sorrow. Wives, mothers, and children were heartbroken to see their husbands, fathers, and sons leave them for a year, unsure of what lay ahead for those who were leaving and those who remained behind. In an effort to console the soldiers, Brigham Young testified that, if the men performed their duties without complaint and consistently prayed in order to keep God in their hearts, every man would return alive. He also promised to support those families whose fathers and brothers had enlisted. Daniel Tyler recalled that Young went so far as to guarantee that if the battalion maintained their righteousness, enemy bullets would fly around their heads without touching a single man. As an additional command, Young
admonished the soldiers to refuse any medical treatment offered by the military doctor and instead rely on faith alone for powers of healing.\textsuperscript{49}

Not everyone who volunteered had to say goodbye to their families, as some brought along their wife (or wives), children, or parents. Upon leaving Council Bluffs, the battalion consisted of 496 men, 31 women, and 44 children. This combination of military and civilian volunteers was unmatched in the American army at the time. However, during the journey from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe when the trail became harsh and sickness and starvation dominated camp life, most of the women and children were ordered back in detachments to either Pueblo or Fort Leavenworth. This purging of the battalion was deemed necessary by the military-appointed commanders in order to preserve the quickly diminishing food rations. By the time the battalion reached California, only 335 of the men were left, accompanied by 4 remaining women.\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{THE PATH OF THE BATTALION}

Once they arrived at Fort Leavenworth and were enlisted as soldiers in the U.S. Army, all the men turned over their pay to a Church representative, who delivered the money to Brigham Young. This collection of money continued to occur on the trail to California, and the lack of grumbling on the part of the soldiers in regard to this matter is a testament of their obedience to their Church and its leadership. Instead of receiving a uniform, they were

\textsuperscript{49} Tyler, \textit{Concise History}, 118; Journal History, 18 July 1846.

\textsuperscript{50} The Mormon Battalion is unmatched in American military history due to the many concessions made by James Allen in regard to the Mormon soldiers’ comforts and demands. Though laundresses were permitted in other military units, Allen allowed entire families to accompany the soldiers. Jefferson Hunt brought along his two wives and their numerous children, plus an elderly couple to assist in caring for his large family. In addition, several teenage boys were allowed to join the battalion as servants. This set-up of an entire camp following was virtually non-existent and without precedent in American military history. See Fleek, \textit{History May Be Searched in Vain}, 136-37.
given a clothing allowance of $43 each, which was also turned over to the leadership of the Church. The soldiers also received other military accoutrements, like camping supplies and weapons. Including the battalion’s first paychecks and clothing allowance, an estimated $2,447.32 was delivered to Brigham Young from the soldiers at Fort Leavenworth.\footnote{Ricketts, \textit{Mormon Battalion}, 70.}

On October 6, 1846, the Mormon Battalion arrived in Santa Fe. The march to Santa Fe was overseen by Lieutenant Andrew Jackson Smith, who had taken the place of Captain Allen after Allen’s untimely death just weeks after the formation of the battalion. The Mormons’ reception in Santa Fe was accompanied by a salute of guns led by the commander of the post, General Alexander Doniphan. Doniphan had been a lawyer in Clay County, Missouri, in 1838 and was present at the court martial of Joseph Smith. The court originally planned to Smith, but Doniphan intervened on his behalf and condemned the plan as “cold-blooded murder.” The salute to the Mormon Battalion in Santa Fe apparently “enraged” Colonel Sterling Price, a Missourian who had arrived three days prior with his command but without the pomp and circumstance that was accorded the Mormons. Daniel Tyler surmised Doniphan’s special welcome was due to Doniphan’s “memory of the wrong which they [the Mormons] had suffered from the Missouri mobocrats which prevented him from extending any courtesies to Col. Price and his disgraceful command on their arrival.”\footnote{Tyler, \textit{Concise History}, 164-65. This event is also recorded in multiple journals: Golder, \textit{March of the Mormon Battalion}, 171; Ricketts, \textit{Mormon Battalion}, 63.}
Upon reaching Santa Fe, the Mormon Battalion changed leadership once again, as Lieutenant Smith had been selected only as a temporary replacement by General Kearny. The change in command was welcomed by the Mormon soldiers, who hated Lieutenant Smith and believed he had purposefully driven the soldiers to the brink of starvation and death. The soldiers also believed he was conspiring with the U.S. appointed army surgeon, George B. Sanderson, who, like Lt. Andrew Jackson Smith, was accused of the attempted and sometimes successful poisoning of the Mormon soldiers.

The new commander, Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, assumed his leadership position in October 1847 while the battalion was in Santa Fe, and was welcomed by the Mormon soldiers. However, Colonel Cooke’s opinion of the Mormon Battalion from a military standpoint was not as enthusiastic. He commented that the battalion “was enlisted too much by families, some were too old, some feeble, and some too young; it was embarrassed by women; it was undisciplined.” To make matters worse, Cooke noticed that, along with being worn out from foot travel, “their clothing was very scant; there was no money to pay them, or clothing to issue; their mules were utterly broken down.” The post quartermaster had run out of funds, and supplies were low in Santa Fe. Where the battalion had hoped to find a reprieve or at least more food and a change of clothing, they found none. After observing the men, Cooke found that eighty-six of them were unfit to continue the journey to California, and he sent them, along with all remaining women and children with the exception of four wives back to Pueblo. Cooke was often frustrated by the un-military-like conduct exhibited by the men, recording that, “though obedient, [they] have little discipline, they exhibit great heedlessness and ignorance, and some obstinacy.” Due to the hasty manner in which the battalion was
formed, none of the men had been able to practice military drills, and they were generally unfamiliar with proper military procedure. The departure from Santa Fe did not start on the best of terms due to the ragged and hungry condition of the soldiers. The men were dispirited by the fact that most of their wives and all of their children had been prohibited from continuing on toward California. The situation quickly deteriorated as the battalion, deprived of food and water and drained of energy, pushed its way over sandy hills and through an unforgiving desert. The men dug wells every night, praying that they might strike upon a small pool of water. The weakest pack animals were slaughtered for food, but their meat provided little nourishment and had the consistency of glue or jelly. Due to the lack of firewood, the meat was cooked over buffalo chips, and even those were difficult to find. In his autobiography, James Brown recalled a night when one of the men in his group came upon a small piece of fat left on a bone, and instead of consuming for himself, the kind man shared it with his comrades. Only a sliver of fat was available for each man, but it was the most sustenance, aside from some watery flour, that some of them had received in days. One afternoon, the battalion came upon a small pond of water that was more buffalo urine than anything else, with a sickly green hue. They drank it anyway, but paid dearly for it when sickness soon overcame them. Every single journal that remains from the Mormon Battalion echoes the misery and pain that threatened to consume the men during this time. After a particularly trying day, when multiple animals collapsed and even more men fell down beside them, Colonel Cooke wrote that “all the vexations and

troubles of any other three days of my life have not equaled those of the last twenty-five hours.” Even the stalwart leader of the battalion was frightened about their dire circumstances, and, when he noticed the failing bodies and spirits of the men, recorded that “[his] doubts seemed converted to the certainty of evil and disaster.”

Finally, after six months of enduring abysmal conditions and emaciated by hunger and exhaustion, Colonel Cooke and his Mormon Battalion arrived in San Diego on January 29, 1847. The sight of the sparkling Pacific Ocean captivated the men, and the lush, fertile land and spring-like weather seemed to heal their broken bodies and spirits. Although it would be another year before the fighting in Mexico City ceased and the war officially ended, by the time the Mormon Battalion arrived in California, the U.S. government had assumed control of that territory. The Mormon Battalion spent their remaining six months practicing military drills and procedure. They organized a debate club for entertainment, and some of the men spent their spare time proselytizing among the inhabitants of San Diego. On April 18, a sailor named Beckworth became the first Mormon convert in the west. Two days later, one of the four women who had made the entire journey with the battalion gave birth to a son, who was allegedly the first child of American parents to be born in California. With no clear objective other than to remain in California and defend the territory, some of the Mormons grew restless and started a petition that called for an early discharge because they felt the war was over and their services no longer needed.\footnote{Brown, \textit{Life of a Pioneer}. 68; Cooke, \textit{Conquest of New Mexico and California}, 100, 176.} \footnote{Ricketts, \textit{Mormon Battalion}, 135.}
At the end of June 1847, Col. Cooke called for volunteers to reenlist in the U.S. Army for an additional six months. The Mormons’ reenlistment would help maintain the United States’ presence in California until the war was officially over, at which time that territory would, hopefully, no longer belong to Mexico. To sweeten the pot, the Mormon Battalion was offered incentives, such as permission to elect their own Mormon lieutenant and the receipt of a full-year’s pay for half the time of enlistment. The general response to this request was negative, as most of the men were eager to return to their families. However, there were a few men who were drawn to Cooke’s proposition. Captain Jesse Hunter of Company B said that he felt it was the Mormons’ duty to reenlist for reasons the benefit of the Mormon Church. Not only had their service in the U.S. Army brought respect for the Mormons, he believed, but reenlistment would mean that a Mormon would be third in command of the whole territory of California. Another man, Lieutenant James Canfield, said that by remaining in the army, they would be able to raise more money to aid in the migration of the Saints. Canfield also demonstrated a degree of loyalty to the United States by calling the men out for their “blind” faith. Canfield argued that although some Mormon soldiers claimed to have survived their trek through the wilderness by living off of faith alone, he believed differently because of his experience in the Mormon Battalion. He had been trying to survive in the wilderness for the past year and, “had it not been for the little food furnished by the U.S. we would have starved to death, with all our faith.”

The significance of Canfield’s comments should not go unrecognized, as they espouse a sentiment that was rare among the Mormons. His feelings contradict the entire

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principle that Brigham Young laid forth before the battalion’s departure: to live by faith alone, be healed by faith alone, and be saved by faith alone. They also highlight the disparity between acting by faith alone, arguably a version of restrained masculinity, and participating in military action. If the Mormon soldiers and members of the Mormon Church were to live by faith alone, was the Mormon Battalion even necessary? Perhaps if Brigham Young lived by faith alone and not depended upon the assistance of the U.S. federal government, the Mormon Battalion would not have been formed, nor would the Mormons have been able to migrate to the Great Basin in the manner and at the pace that they did. Although the soldiers of the Mormon Battalion likely did not have the answer to such existential questions, they surely must have wondered when exactly they were supposed to live by faith alone, and when it was appropriate to take action and ask for tangible assistance. Fortunately for them, determining the proper time and manner of living by faith alone was dictated by their religious leader, Brigham Young, who expertly navigated between dependence on outside assistance and assertions of his own authority and power.

For all of the debate that surrounded reenlistment, only a dozen men decided to remain in California. The rest of them could not have been more eager to return to their families, having only signed up for the battalion in the first place on the encouragement of Brigham Young and not because of support for the U.S. government. It would not be an exaggeration to say that nothing short of another stern request by Young or God himself could force the men to enlist for another six months. On July 4, 1847, the battalion set off for Los Angeles, where they were to be mustered out of the service. Robert Bliss was full of anticipation, he said, for “soon we bid goodbye to Uncle Sam,” who was “the most
exact uncle we ever had.” After some final parting words, the former soldiers gathered their belongings and began their trek back to either the eastern states, where some of their families remained, or to the Salt Lake Valley, where Brigham Young had decided to move the Mormon Church.57

Bliss’s comment likely reflects the attitude that many other Mormon soldiers held in regard to the nation to which they had dedicated the past year of their life. The soldiers had barely survived, and the extremely harsh conditions they encountered in the barren Mexican wilderness claimed the lives of some of their brethren. These deaths may have recalled past situations where loss of life occurred due to the action (or rather, inaction) of the U.S. government. While some men, like Lieutenant Canfield, were appreciative of the government’s efforts to help the Mormons and attributed the battalion’s success to the U.S. military, most others may have deeply resented the fact that they nearly lost their lives in service of a nation which they barely identified with. Some may have even suspected that the harrowing journey was a plot devised by the U.S. government to kill the Mormons under the guise of a military march through a barren desert. Furthermore, the conflicts that erupted between the military personnel and the Mormon soldiers and ensuing tensions between the Mormon soldiers themselves created an unrepairable rift in the battalion and shook the faith of multiple men. How particular soldiers dealt with these trying circumstances reveals the extent to which many adhered to the ideologies of Manifest Destiny and popular American perceptions of masculinity.

57 Ricketts, Mormon Battalion, 138.
CHAPTER 3: MORMONISM’S MANIFEST DESTINY

Just days after the Mormon Battalion set off on its westward march, the president of the Mormon Church, Brigham Young, wrote a confidential letter to the president of the United States, James K. Polk. In this letter, Young thanked Polk for the opportunity to create the battalion and for assisting the Mormons when no one else would. He then continued to outline the plans that he had for the Mormons’ settlement out west. Young declared that he intended to move to the Great Basin, but not California or Oregon, as Polk originally thought. Young then delved into his reasoning for such a decision, which included rumors he heard that Lilburn Boggs, the eternal enemy of the Mormons, was going to be appointed governor of California. Boggs had been the governor of Missouri when the Mormons were still living in Jackson County and had issued the “Mormon Extermination Order” in 1838 that ultimately led to the Mormons’ expulsion from that state. If Boggs was going to be governor of California, Young asserted, the Mormons absolutely could not make that territory their future home. Instead, they would relocate to the Great Basin, as it would be better to retreat to the desert or mountain caves than consent to be ruled by a government official “whose hands are drenched in the blood of innocence and virtue.” The ultimate goal after relocation, however, was to “petition the United States for a territorial Government” under which the Mormons could live in peace, surrounded only by mountains.58

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58 Brigham Young to James K. Polk, 9 August 1846, Mormon Camp near Council Bluffs in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 69-71. It is unknown if Polk responded, though I assume he did not, as it would likely have been recorded in Journal History. There is some truth to the rumor Young claimed to have heard regarding Boggs’s intention for the governorship of California. During the summer of 1846, Boggs had also decided to move himself and his family out of Missouri and into California. It is also likely that he did have his sights set on the governorship, as he remained in politics his whole life and in 1852 was elected to the California State Assembly.
Young’s declaration to make the future home of the Mormon community a territory of the United States is also rather striking, as he had hinted earlier that he desired to go beyond the reach of federal oversight. Perhaps because sensed that Mexico’s northern territories would soon be overtaken by the US, Young attempted to capitalize on the principles of preemption by declaring his motives early on. This assumption is also interesting, because once he had located to the Great Basin, Young made attempts to establish an independent territory which he called Deseret. Another explanation is that he may have tried to arrange a compromise with the president. Polk had assumed that the Mormons were migrating to California, and he had approved the creation of the Mormon Battalion in order to oversee and control their migration and settlement in that territory. In order to avoid upsetting the president or appearing to have duped Polk into providing assistance to the Mormons, Young professed his, and all of the Mormons’ loyalty, to the US, a loyalty he claimed would remain even after they built their new home in what was currently Mexican territory. This move by Brigham Young can be construed as a power play against the president of the US, as he certainly did not want to remain under the oversight of military troops in California. He had subverted Polk’s plans by moving elsewhere, but only after federal assistance to his people had been guaranteed.

The Mormons’ perception and implementation of Manifest Destiny was steeped in racism and a sense of superiority, but not quite on the same scale as other territorial expansionists. By most accounts, the Mormons could be considered adherents of restrained masculinity; they were not interested in brandishing weapons to get their way, and their idea of patriarchal power, male hierarchy, and the responsibilities those entailed set them apart from aggressive and martial expansionists. Instead, the Mormons carved their own
unique Manifest Destiny out of existing notions of land acquisition, Anglo superiority, and restrained masculinity. Their relatively new religion had already been subjected to copious amounts of ridicule, criticism, and violence, all of which were exacerbated by the failure of the U.S. government to intervene on their behalf. With the exception of the call to form the Mormon Battalion, the Mormons’ pleas for help and protection had been ignored by their elected representatives, a rebuff that drastically altered their identity as American citizens and their perceived destiny.

**LAND CLAIMS**

Brigham Young told the Mormons of his decision to migrate to the Great Basin during his farewell speech to the Mormon Battalion. He told the soldiers that upon their discharge, they should return to their families and their Church, which would be located only a few hundred miles from California. It is likely that the Mormons were excited to finally have a permanent home identified, and perhaps the soldiers were also happy that their enlistment would have a specific purpose. They were likely unconcerned about dealing with the Mexican government, despite the fact that the Great Basin was still considered Mexican Territory in 1846. Brigham Young, whom they believed was speaking for God, had told them they should make the Great Basin their new home, and so they would. Of course, as most of them had been raised as U.S. citizens, this line of thought was not exactly out of the ordinary. In fact, it was in perfect accordance with the principles of Manifest Destiny, especially as they were understood in 1846.

Because the majority of the Mormon population was Anglo-American, there were many aspects of Mormonism’s Manifest Destiny that aligned with the traditional American
ideology. Taking whatever land they saw fit was certainly one of those, though the Mormons were neither as aggressive nor martial about doing so in comparison to many of their contemporaries. In many respects, they planned to follow the “Texas method” of land acquisition, wherein they would dominate a certain area by sheer numbers in order to gain political power, and then exert their influence once they were strong enough to declare independence. Being the “first” to occupy, cultivate, and improve the land the Mormons to establish a territory of their own where they would be the majority and none could expel them.

Brigham Young proved his familiarity with and ability to manipulate the pattern of preemption when he negotiated the terms of the Mormon Battalion’s enlistment. He agreed that the Mormons would participate in the war, on the condition that the U.S. government allow them to remain on Indian land while they prepared to move west. Since fleeing Illinois, the Mormons had been squatting on land the government had set aside for the Potawatomi and Omaha Indian tribes. The Indian Intercourse Act of 1834, one of the instruments of Indian removal during the 1830s, stipulated that unorganized territory west of the Missouri River was Indian Country. White Americans were not permitted to settle on those lands without first obtaining a passport from the federal government and explaining how long they intended to stay.59

In the summer of 1846, the Office of Indian Affairs decided to relocate the Omaha and Potawatomi tribes to Kansas. However, the move was not going to be immediate, and the Indian Americans were notified that they would have a few years to prepare for their

migration. The arrival of the Mormons threatened to upset this course of events, as the Saints continued to settle on what was supposed to be Indian Territory along the bank of the Mississippi. The staff of the Office of Indian Affairs grew nervous that the Mormons were either attempting to join forces with the Indian Americans in an attempt to overthrow local U.S. jurisdiction, or that the Mormons were going to set up permanent residence there and thwart the government’s plans for parceling that land. These fears were echoed in a letter written by Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Medill, who wrote that, unless the Mormons were on the brink of starvation, permission for Mormons to settle on Indian land, even temporarily, “should be avoided.”

Brigham Young was surely aware that he was moving onto restricted land, and one of his first stipulations in regard to the formation of the battalion was for Captain James Allen to grant him permission to set up residence on Indian territory. Captain Allen agreed to this request, even though both he and Young knew Allen did not have the power to enforce it. As an additional precaution, Young met with the Omaha Chief, Big Elk, in an effort to ask permission to stay on their land. Young opened the meeting by claiming he had received permission from the U.S. government to settle on Indian Territory, and then, as if he was doing a great favor, asked Big Elk for “the privilege of stopping on your lands this winter or until we can get ready to go on again.” Young offered to build a trading post, a school, and houses for the Omaha Indians, as well as plant crops for the next year’s harvest. Big Elk accepted Young’s offer, hoping that the Mormons would serve as a barrier between the Omaha and their violent Indian neighbors, the Sioux. Young also met with the

60 W. Medill to Major Thomas H. Harvey, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, St. Louis, MO., 2 September 1846, in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 64-65.
Potawatomi leaders and sent transcripts of his negotiations with each tribe to the Office of Indian Affairs.\textsuperscript{61}

Though these overtures appeared to be based on feelings of geniality, Young was in fact following the principles of preemption to obtain credibility for his claims to Indian Territory. This was made blatantly obvious when he came to blows over the issue with the Office of Indian affairs in the fall of 1846. When Thomas H. Harvey, Superintendent of Indian Affairs first learned that the Mormons were setting up camp on the banks of the Missouri, he hesitatingly permitted them to stay on Indian lands so long as it was temporary and the emigrants conducted themselves with “propriety.” Harvey’s fears of Mormon interference with government plans for Indian lands grew when he noticed permanent structures being built on what was supposed to be a temporary camp. Harvey wanted Brigham Young and the Mormons to leave immediately, but ultimately compromised when Young promised to be completely off of Indian lands as soon as winter passed.\textsuperscript{62}

Despite this promise, Young had absolutely no intention of evacuating in the spring of 1847. By winter, the Mormons had established all the signs of a permanent residence, including schools, Churches, and even a water mill. To make matters worse, some of them began to cross the Missouri and build settlements on the western banks, where white settlement was strictly prohibited. Harvey confronted Young about this in November 1846 and accused Young of trespassing on Omaha land. Young retorted by invoking the Mormon Battalion and describing the “promptness of [his] people entering the service of

\textsuperscript{61} The meeting between Young and Big Elk is recorded in the Diary of Hosea Stout, and reproduced in Trennert, “The Mormons and the Office of Indian Affairs,” 386-87.

\textsuperscript{62} The letters between employees at the Office of Indian Affairs and the Mormons are all reproduced in Trennert’s article. See Harvey to Medill, December 3, 1846; Harvey to Cutler, November 5, 1846; Cutler to Harvey, November 6, 1846, in Trennert, “The Mormons and the Office of Indian Affairs,” 388-89.
the United States upon the [request] of the government.” Not only did this justify Mormon settlement on Indian lands, he claimed, it also meant “that they could not go until the return of the volunteers,” which Young said might not occur for another two or three years. Alpheus Cutler, president of the Mormon High Council, reinforced the Mormons’ claims based on the enlistment of the Mormon Battalion. In a letter to Harvey, Culter claimed that the Mormons had only stopped on Indian lands when their journey was interrupted by the U.S. government, which requested the Mormons volunteer for the war. Otherwise, they would have made their way past Indian lands and across the mountains. Therefore, it was the fault of the U.S. government that the Mormons were forced to remain where they were. Specifically, the call for a Mormon Battalion “is what stopped us.” Furthermore, Cutler argued, the Mormons had done an additional service by improving the land and benefitting the Omaha Nation.63

Brigham Young’s utilization of the Mormon Battalion to justify Mormon presence on Indian lands was fitting with the typical American notion of military service. Because the Mormon men had volunteered to aid the United States in its war against Mexico, the Mormon community was then, supposedly, entitled to receive certain benefits from the federal government. What is even more striking about the Mormons’ stay on Indian land is how steeped it was in American perceptions of land ownership. Brigham Young was influenced by the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny and the ideologies it espoused concerning Anglo-American encroachment on Native or foreign territory. By building houses and cultivating the land, Young was protecting himself by following the pattern of preemption.

63 Diary of Hosea Stout, as reproduced in Trennert “The Mormons and the Office of Indian Affairs,” 388.
This was a pattern he intended to continue once the Mormons reached their permanent home in the Great Basin.

**Racial Hierarchies**

The Mormon Battalion volunteers may have enlisted out of religious obedience and a desire to relocate to the west, but they were also agents of the U.S. government carrying out aggressive territorial expansion. The soldiers also participated in other elements of Anglo-American Manifest Destiny, including the expression of racial prejudices. As the war developed, American volunteers became increasingly violent against Mexican soldiers and civilians, which they justified via the belief that non-whites were inferior to Anglo-Americans on a biological level. Additionally, aggressive expansionism generally coincided with the desire to expand slavery. Though not all soldiers in the army wanted to enable the practice of slavery, it was common knowledge that the addition of multiple slave states into the Union was a very real possibility if the United States acquired Mexico’s northern territories. This could not have escaped the minds of the Mormon soldiers as they trudged through the southwest desert, but their justification for participating in a war that ultimately buttressed the institution of slavery was different than many other Americans. Racial hierarchies were beginning to form in the minds of the Mormon soldiers as they interacted with various cultures, particularly Indian American and Mexican, during their journey to California. Although steeped in racist prejudices that were prevalent in Anglo-American culture in the mid-nineteenth century, the particular hierarchy concocted by Mormon migrants was dissimilar to that espoused by other U.S. soldiers. The Mormons’
religious beliefs deeply influenced their perceptions of Indian Americans, resulting in a peculiar bond they believed was shared between persecuted peoples.

Many of the Mormons came from the northern states and were therefore likely adherents to the anti-slavery movement, though perhaps not extreme as the abolitionists. Joseph Smith had outlined his personal stance toward slavery, a practice which he condemned, in his official presidential campaign platform of 1845. “God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the Earth,” Smith had proclaimed, and he pointed out that the Constitution made no mention of the distinction of color among men. Should he assume the presidency, he promised to call for either the immediate abolition of slavery or for it be completed by 1850. Slave owners would be compensated for their freed slaves with money paid by the federal government. Considering that the Mormons typically voted in blocs, and assumed the same political ideologies of their highest leader, it is not much of a stretch to conclude that these sentiments were echoed throughout the Mormon community during Smith’s presidency.64

Upon assuming leadership of the Mormon Church, Brigham Young took quite a different stance regarding slaves and those with dark skin. He based his opinion on scriptural commentary in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. In the Old Testament book of Genesis, Noah placed a curse of dark skin upon his son Canaan and grandson Ham for their wickedness. Many religious people in America believed that the Africans were descendants of Canaan and Ham due to the darkness of their skin and employed the biblical

64 “General Smith’s Views of the Powers and Policy of the United States’ Government,” Journal History, 7 February 1844. The portion of title that contained the words “General Smith’s” was only used when the platform was first distributed. Subsequent publications removed Smith’s name, and the document was merely titled “Views of the Powers and Politics etc.”
curse as a justification for slavery. Young embraced this idea and forbade black male Mormons from receiving the priesthood. Slavery was not a common practice for any of the Mormon members in the 1840s, but soon after they reached Salt Lake, there were between sixty and seventy black slaves in the valley, and a Mormon apostle was one of the most prominent slave owners in the Deseret Territory.65

Indian Americans played a prominent role not only in the Mexican War, but in the conceptualization of Manifest Destiny. By the 1840s, Americans had concocted a Texas creation myth, which claimed that all of Mexico, including Texas, had been completely overrun and subject to the cruel and barbaric ways of the Indians. It was not until the Americans began to settle in the Texas territory that the Indians were overpowered and forced to recede, saving the Mexican inhabitants as well as future American migrants. This outlook helped Americans establish a moral justification not only for Texan independence, but its subsequent annexation. Many U.S. citizens believed Mexico was too weak to protect its own people, who had been the victims of raiding, kidnapping, and enslavement by some Indian tribes, the most prominent being the Comanche. According to many Americans, Mexican leaders’ general inability to control the Native people within their territories was obvious proof that Mexico was neither destined nor capable of keeping its land.66

Alternatively, Mexicans saw the status quo of the disputed Texas territory as a result of how Indian raids were conducted, rather than why. By eschewing the question of “why,” Mexico was able to avoid directly confronting potential political or social faults that facilitated Indian raids and aggressive territorial expansion by foreign nations. Many

Mexicans believed that their suffering at the hands of Indians was not the result of alleged internal weaknesses, but because the Indians were relentlessly ruthless and savage. Furthermore, many Mexicans believed that the United States was utilizing the brutality of the Indians to further an American advance. Although this is partially true, as the Comanche, though unintentionally, enabled American territorial gains, they did not do so out of any sort of diplomatic loyalties and certainly were not purposely paving the way for U.S. expansion. Because the Indian Americans became a means for the U.S. and Mexico to interpret the actions and character of the other, their contribution to the Mexican War is invaluable. Essentially, the Indians became a window through which the warring countries could assess each other.\(^7\)

The Mormons’ relationship to the Indian Americans was much more friendly and steeped in respect and awe, though it was complicated due to their religious beliefs. According to the Book of Mormon, the Indian tribes were descendants of two groups of ancient peoples known as Nephites and Lamanites, who themselves were the descendants of European immigrants who, in 600 B.C.E., left Jerusalem to settle in the New World. Eventually these two groups of people spread over the continent, and became bitter enemies who were continually embroiled in battle. Because of their lust for war, the Lamanites received “a sore cursing...as they were white, and exceedingly fair and

\(^7\)By the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Comanche Indians had created a veritable empire in the American southwest that stretched through much of Texas, with raiding zones extending as far south as Mexico City. By the time war broke out between Mexico and America in 1846, Mexico had exhausted many resources combatting the encroaching Comanche, and they were therefore essentially fighting two wars at once. This effectively stretched Mexican strength beyond its means and ultimately served the Americans as they pummeled their way through the Mexican countryside. An exhaustive account of the Comanche people and their empire can be found in Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*. The description of Indian Americans serving as a window during the Mexico War can be found in DeLay, “Independent Indians the U.S.-Mexican War,” 35-68.
delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.” Much like the Biblical curse that was believed to be present in the dark skin of the African slaves, the dark skin of the Indians was believed to be a remnant of that placed upon the ancient Lamanites.68

While on the trail to Santa Fe, the Mormon Battalion came upon what they believed was an ancient Nephite structure but was actually an abandoned Indian campsite. Nearly all of the soldiers took to their journals to record the miraculous discovery. John D. Lee was particularly excited, writing that the structure had definitely been “erected in a day when art & science was known,” and that only an industrious and advanced people could have constructed such a building. As a side note, he quipped that the passing of centuries had extinguished such a creative and enterprising culture, and all that was left to testify of such ingenuity were these abandoned ruins. He lamented that such ingenuity had ceased to exist and noted that the abilities of the ancient people who had resided on these lands had far surpassed those of its current inhabitants, specifically the Mexicans, whom Lee and the other Mormons called Spaniards. The Indian Americans therefore had a dual role in Mormon culture: they served as a testament to the Book of Mormon, but due to their curse and alleged history of brutal warfare, they were not considered to be quite equal to those with white skin. Additionally, because Mormon beliefs included the idea that the United States was the land upon which God’s chosen people would build up the Church, the

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Mormons were in accordance with many of their fellow Americans when it came to land ownership, no matter who the original occupants were.69

The interaction with Indians while on the trail from Iowa to California was frequent and generally friendly, as the Mormon Battalion consistently traded with tribes they encountered on their path, which included the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, and Pima. The consistency of these interactions likely further influenced the Mormons’ specific perception of Manifest Destiny regarding the frontier, as such frequent Indian contact challenged the notion that the west was empty and available for the taking. The Mormon Battalion often spent its nights among existing Indian camps, and once the soldiers reached the southern territories of New Mexico, they utilized the help of an Apache guide to navigate their route. The journals of the soldiers do not reflect any animosity toward the Indians they encountered; in fact, almost all of the entries that describe interaction with Indian Americans depict scenes of friendly exchange and even respect for the quality of items that the Mormons were able to acquire through trade. One battalion soldier who accidentally shot himself was left in the care of an Arapaho medicine man. This event in particular may offer insight into the respect for Indian traditions and methods carried by the Mormon soldiers, as most were entirely unwilling to place either themselves or their comrades in the care of the battalion’s official doctor. That they would trust their brother into the care of an Indian medicine man over the resident white doctor demonstrates not

69 The Book of Mormon describes the ancient peoples as creators of powerful empires in the Americas, full of large stone buildings and palaces. Therefore, John D. Lee’s assertion that the structure he encountered was built during a time of ingenuity reflects his own (though likely also harbored by the other battalion soldiers) perception of what the Americas were like during the time of Christ. See: John D. Lee, “Diary of the Mormon Battalion,” ed. Juanita Brooks, *New Mexico Historical Review* 42, no. 3 (1967), 165-209; and John D. Lee, *Diary of the Mormon Battalion*, 9 October 1846, in Bagley and Bigler, *Army of Israel*, 133-34.
only their blatant distrust of U.S. Army personnel, but also the faith they had in religious healing, even if it was not specifically of their own religion. Samuel Holister’s laudatory sentiments toward the Indians, which may have been shared by his fellow soldiers, were evident when he wrote that the Indian Americans were among the friendliest people he had encountered and that they seemed “hearty, robust, and intelligent.” For the duration of their cross-country march, the Mormon soldiers had almost no negative encounters with the Indians. A few nights were spent in the fear that an Indian raid might occur in the middle of the night, especially after they had slaughtered numerous buffalo despite being warned that would anger the local tribes. That evening they saw smoke rising from distant Indian camps, but nothing came of it, and the Mormons continued their path through the desert unhindered.70

The Mormon Battalion never did engage in warfare against Mexican soldiers, but there were a handful of times that skirmishes between Indian Americans and the Mormon volunteers erupted. These occasions were dreaded by most of the Mormon soldiers, and Elijah Elmer captured what was surely a shared sentiment amongst the battalion when he remarked that, “I hope that we shall not (see any Indians) for I do not want to fight them at all.” These encounters generally left all participants unscathed, and Lieutenant James Pace wrote after one of his Indian patrols that “All of the Battalion seamed glad that my Indian

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70 The soldier who was shot and then left in the care of the Arapaho Medicine Man is mentioned in several journal entries included in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 48. Also see the Journal of Samuel Holister Rogers, 3 December 1846, in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 155. Frank Yurtinus also comments on the cordial nature of interaction between the Mormon Battalion and the Indian Americans, noting that, despite their existence during an age influenced by Manifest Destiny, the Mormons “held an uncommonly high amount of respect and compassion for the Indians.” This was likely due to the belief that the Indians were the distant remnants of the Lamanites mentioned in the Book of Mormon. See: Yurtinus, “Images of Early California,” 32-34.
hunt passed off as well as it did without shedding there [sic] blood.” Violence nearly erupted when the battalion passed through the Temecula Valley, they were quickly surrounded by a hundred armed Indian Americans. Both groups suspected the other of being aides of the Mexicans, but after their identities were sorted out, the Indians regrouped to form a welcome line, and the Mormons’ passage through the valley went without incident.

Unfortunately, not all encounters were quite as pleasant. A particularly violent exchange occurred after the Mormons reached California, when some of the Mormon soldiers were placed in a scouting group and ordered to patrol the land around Californian ranches in order to prevent Indian raids. The Mormons, under the direction of an American guide, came across a small group of Indians in a cave. This surprise encounter left five Indians dead, and the rest quickly fled for their lives. Though the soldiers did not record their opinions regarding these killings, they were horrified when they learned their guide had returned to the site in order to scalp and remove the ears of the dead Indians. ⁷¹

The Indian Americans may have served as a “window” through which the U.S. and Mexico could assess each other, but for the Mormons, the Indians seemed to be more like a mirror through which the Mormons’ own experience was reflected. The harsh treatment of the native people at the hands of the federal government reminded the Mormons of their own agonies suffered while in the states. United in their persecution, the Mormons believed they had a special relationship with the Indian Americans, viewing the U.S. government as their common enemy. The assumption that the rest of the American Anglos had contaminated the lifestyle of Indian Americans is especially prominent in one soldier’s

journal, who wrote that, while crossing the Arizona desert, they were “introduced to a tribe of Indians unadulterated by the immoralities of the civilized white population where there were drunkards. Here no degrading vulgarity, no pinching poverty, no tippling loafers, no prodigal aristocrats imposing taxes and titles on the communities.” If the Indians were viewed in American popular culture as savage, it was only because the U.S. government and grasping hands of aggressive expansionists had made them so.

Ironically, the Mormons did not view their own encroachment upon Indian Territory as harmful or degrading to the Indian American culture in the west. While the Mormons may have exhibited signs of respect and perhaps admiration for the history and continued perseverance of the Indians, the belief that they were chosen to be God’s elect people trumped any concerns that may have otherwise arisen. They, like so many other Americans, believed that they were destined to one day overtake the land, and that they were the rightful inheritants based on the premise that God so willed it. As people forming an identity in the heyday of American Manifest Destiny, the Mormons were able to overcome a substantial amount of racial prejudice against the Indians, but not entirely. Like African Americans, Indian Americans were not invited to participate in official Church practices such as baptism or the Priesthood.72

Mormon attitudes toward Mexicans, whom they often referred to as Spaniards, was far less kind and strikingly similar to those espoused by a typical Anglo-American Protestants, with one small difference. While popular American thought placed Mexicans

72 Ibid. Yurtinus asserts that the connection between Mormons and Indian Americans developed due to their shared history as a persecuted people. The tribe of Indians referred to in the quote is the Pimas, who made a general favorable impression upon the entire command. From Thomas Morris, 16-22 December 1846, Autobiography and Journal in Bagley and Bigler, *Army of Israel*, 163.
lower on the racial hierarchy because of their inability to control the Indians, the Mormons placed the Mexicans among the lowest of the races because they attempted to subject the Indian Americans to slavery. Aggressive expansionists and war apologists believed that the Mexicans should have exerted greater control over the Indian Americans. Conversely, the fact that the Mexicans had occasionally been able to do so infuriated the Mormons. As a people who had been persecuted, they quickly identified with others they deemed similarly afflicted by a stronger entity. The fact that some of the Mexicans they encountered had enslaved and abused blacks and Indians was particularly repulsive to the Mormons and lowered their opinion of the Mexican people immensely. One Mormon soldier was appalled by the conditions of the Indians Americans under the control of Mexicans, writing that the Indians were “the greatest Slaves I ever Saw here and in the most abject Poverty Occasioned by the Catholic Religion.” Whether this was in comparison to slave conditions in the American south is not clear, but the soldier was sure that “God who is just will bring the Spanish nation to an account for their abuse to the Lamanites.” This particular complaint suggests that because the Indian Americans were descendants of the Lamanites, who were in turn descendants of Israel, their abuse was more abhorrent than that levied against the enslaved blacks. The Mexican treatment of the Indian Americans was not solely responsible for the Mormon bias, however, as the Mormons had certainly been indoctrinated according to the typical racist prejudice of Manifest Destiny. One Mormon Battalion soldier admitted as much, writing that “The Spaniards had been represented to me from my infancy up till now as a very savage and unprincipled people.” His mother had
warned him against falling into Mexican hands, as “they show no quarters whatever. So with all I was quite prejudiced against them.”\footnote{Yurtinus, “Images of Early California,” 33. The reference to the Indian Americans as slaves likely stemmed from their understanding of slavery in the American south. The above quote is attributed to battalion soldier Robert Bliss, who wrote that tirade after he witnessed an Indian get whipped dozens of times and others placed in the stocks. The fact that the whipped man was being punished for the attempted murder of his own mother seemed to not matter to the Mormon soldier. From the Journal of William Coray, in Yurtinus, “A Ram in the Thicket,” 170.}

The Mormons’ first major encounter with the Mexicans was in Santa Fe in the fall of 1846. Upon reaching the city, the Mormons were dismayed at the scene that lay before them. John D. Lee noted that, upon first glance at the town, one would “conclude that there was [not] a room in the Whole city that was fit for a white man to live [in].” William Coray continued his assessment of the Mexicans and wrote that “the Spaniards in Santa Fe are miserly in the extreme and appear much like the lower classes of Germans,” though he noted that there were a handful who seemed to treat the Mormon visitors with civility. Much like their compatriots serving in Mexico, perhaps the Mormons expected to be welcomed by beautiful, exotic, and voluptuous women. At least two of the Mormons were sorely disappointed, and Coray again expressed his distaste for the Mexicans when he wrote that the “ill manners of the females disgusted me whether it be true or false, I was told that nearly all present were prostitutes.” Azariah Smith remarked that although a small number of the ladies appeared to be pretty, the others “looked like destruction.” Even a British soldier in the Mormon Battalion echoed these statements and opined that “the dress of these half-civilized people is curious.”\footnote{John D. Lee, Diary of the Mormon Battalion, 9 October 1846, in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 133. Remarks from William Coray and Azariah Smith were taken from Sherman L. Fleek, “Dr. George B. Sanderson: Nemesis of the Mormon Battalion,” Journal of Mormon History 33, no. 2 (2007): 119-223, esp. 219. The British soldier in reference was not a Mormon convert, but an adventurer who had come to America. In 1846, he happened across the Mormons temporary settlement in Council Bluffs right at the time when Allen was recruiting soldiers. Seeking an exciting opportunity, this man, by the name of Robert W.}
The Mormon Battalion’s views of the Mexicans did not improve until after they had resided in California for a few months. When the Battalion arrived in Los Angeles, their reaction was much the same as it had been in Santa Fe. The rowdiness of the Mexicans contrasted starkly with the (attempted) temperance of the Mormon soldiers. Once a week, the Mexicans and other U.S. soldiers stationed in Los Angeles would hold a fandango, complete with cock fighting, sword fighting, wrestling, drinking, and gambling. Henry Standage was entirely dismayed at the conditions there, and remarked that the Mexicans in California were the “most degraded set of beings I ever was among.” John D. Lee repeated his feelings from his time in Santa Fe, noting that “there is certainly less enterprise, industry, or economy manifested among these beings than any others, who pretend at all to civilization.” When the Mexicans were not indulging in allegedly sinful and debasing activities, some of the Mormon soldiers found them to be friendly, and even wholesome and agreeable. This was only true of the “more civilized” of the Mexicans, wrote young soldier James Brown, as compared to those of “mixed bloods, such as the greasers,” who were “low, degraded, treacherous, and cruel.” This comment in particular perhaps reflects the Mormons aversion to interracial relationships, an attitude that was surely influenced by contemporary American prejudice and fear of racial mixing.”

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Whitworth, eagerly signed up for the Mormon Battalion. That his diary of the Mormon Battalion survives is rather remarkable, as there was almost no mention of anyone other than Mormon soldiers in the other Mormon Battalion diaries. Whitworth’s diary was found in a gutter in San Antonio in 1919. See David B. Gracy and Helen J. H. Rugeley, “From the Mississippi to the Pacific: An Englishman in the Mormon Battalion,” *Arizona & The West* 7, no. 2 (1965).

75 From the journal of Henry Standage in Ricketts, *Mormon Battalion*, 150; Brown, *Life of a Pioneer*, 89. John D. Lee’s sentiments are recorded in Yurtinus, “A Ram in the Thicket,” 167. The particular abhorrence of the “mixed bloods” may be representative of the overall disdain that many Mormons, including Brigham Young, espoused regarding mixed-race relationships, which were looked down upon in the Mormon Church.
Not all experiences with Mexicans were completely appalling for the Mormons; Abner Blackburn, who hated his experience in the Mormon Battalion, “could seek solace in the fringe benefits of New Mexican Culture.” Historian Frank Yurtinus argues that, after the Mormons began learn about and even participate in Mexican culture in Los Angeles and San Diego, the relationships between the Mormons and Mexicans substantially improved. According to Yurtinus, interaction between Mormons and Mexicans demonstrated that, despite their differences, Anglos and California Mexicans could “mutually contribute toward a better society.” During their time spent in California, the Mormons assisted the local Mexican citizens by building Churches and repairing their homes. Some soldiers became so comfortable with the Mexican culture that they incorporated aspects of it into their own lives. Unfortunately, this turned out to be quite detrimental to the Mormon soldiers who returned to the Mormon community after their discharge. Brigham Young and many other Mormons were appalled by the Mexican habits that the soldiers brought with them to their new home in Utah. Because most of the Mormon community had never experienced immersion in a culture beyond their own, the American traits of Manifest Destiny were still prominent within their culture, including a strong sense of racial superiority over the Mexicans.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{76} Yurtinus, “Images of Early California.” Although the Mormons held their own religious services, they were also interested in the religious practices of the Californians. Official stances taken by the Mormon Church in regard to interracial relationships and the allowance of different races to be baptized as Mormons were not developed until later in Church history. By the time of the Mexican-American War, the Mormons had not been exposed to a great deal of racial diversity and therefore had neither the reason nor opportunity to develop doctrine regarding these issues.
“To be as Fathers”

Attitudes and demonstrations of racial superiority, or lack of them, were not the only unique aspects of the Mormon Battalion compared to their American compatriots. The attitudes and expectations that the Mormon soldiers had in regard to their military superiors, as well as their outlook on engaging in physical violence, were quite different from other U.S. military groups and were based on differing notions of masculinity. In the years leading up to the war, especially after the Democratic Review published its 1845 article on Texas’ annexation, Manifest Destiny was becoming strikingly bellicose. This translated into a transformation of masculinity wherein violence and aggression were the preferred methods of exercising power. Manifest Destiny became inextricably tied to a martial form of masculinity embodied by the volunteers of the U.S. Army, who believed, especially during Mexican-American War, that military participation was the most patriotic display of manhood. This contrasted with restrained masculinity, which depended more upon moral influence than physical strength. By 1846, however, it was becoming painfully clear that a non-aggressive and hands-off approach was not going to produce the result that President Polk and other pro-expansionists desired. If Mexico would not willingly rescind its ownership of New Mexico and California, then Polk was ready to assume a martial tone and resort to violence. These were traits that were generally unwelcome in Mormon society, and the Mormon soldiers had difficulty reconciling their restrained version of masculinity with their participation in an aggressive and martial war.
Ultimately, many of the Mormon soldiers were unable to do this, and the results were disastrous for the battalion.\textsuperscript{77}

As already demonstrated, the Mormon volunteers agreed to enlist out of religious obedience rather than patriotic duty. How men who held positions of leadership were supposed to treat those in their care was quite different in Mormon culture, which did endorse patriarchal values, but in the spirit of leading by example and without martial aggressiveness. During the battalion’s march to California, these impressions of masculinity and authority put the soldiers not only at odds with their non-Mormon military leaders, but also with the company officers who had been appointed by Brigham Young. The officers (whose experiences are represented by those of Jefferson Hunt, officer of Company A) found themselves adhering to martial authority as exercised within a military unit. This put the officers at odds with Mormon soldiers, who expected to be treated as equals and guided by spiritual authority, consistent with ideas of restrained masculinity.

Prior to the Mormon Battalion’s departure from Council Bluffs, Brigham Young had given very specific instructions to the members of the battalion in regard to their conduct toward each other. Young proclaimed that, so long as each man behaved honorably, a private soldier was just as noble as any officer. Those who had been selected to hold positions of prominence were instructed “to be as fathers to their companies” and let their decisions be guided “by the power and influence of their Priesthood.” To be a leader in the Mormon Battalion was not an opportunity to exercise supremacy or to

\textsuperscript{77}Greenberg, \textit{Manifest Manhood}. 

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command those in lesser ranks. Instead, it was an opportunity to lead by example and be a caretaker rather than a commander.\textsuperscript{78}

The cultural ties between this admonition and the general Mormon understanding of the Priesthood are easily apparent, as all worthy males were invited to receive and exercise the priesthood, but only after certain conditions of worthiness had been attained. The Priesthood did not place one man above another spiritually, and those bestowed with leadership positions in the Church were supposed to have been called because of their ability to care for all Mormons as equals.\textsuperscript{79} Similarly, Young asked the soldiers to treat each other, despite differences in military rank, as equals and with great civility and brotherhood. This admonition was extended to the US-appointed military leaders as well, and Captain James Allen purportedly acquiesced to this request, no doubt increasing his popularity with the Mormons.

But to act as fathers, the leaders of the Mormon Battalion also needed to receive the complete obedience of their dependents. Young hoped to prevent disobedience and insubordination by selecting the battalion captains himself through revelation, rather than having the soldiers hold an election. This way, disobedience to the captains’ commands would translate into disobedience toward the Mormon president and perhaps even God. This seemingly simple command was therefore quite significant. The Mormons’ sense of patriarchy soon clashed with the rigid structure of military hierarchy.

\textsuperscript{78} From the journal of Willard Richards, in Journal History, 19 July 1846 and in Ricketts, \textit{Mormon Battalion}, 16.

\textsuperscript{79} This was demonstrated by the practice of calling any other Mormon in the community either “Brother” or “Sister.” Mormons referred to each other as “Brother Jones” or “Sister Smith,” reenforcing the belief that they were equals because they were all children of God and were heavenly brothers and sisters in an eternal sense.
Unfortunately, just weeks into the Mormon Battalion’s march across the country, Captain James Allen died at the young age of forty and left the battalion without a commander. While on his death bed, Allen designated Lieutenant Andrew Jackson Smith of the United States 1st Dragoons to assume command. Breaking from formal military procedure, the commanding officer at Fort Leavenworth notified not only General Kearny, who was either on his way to California or already there, but Brigham Young as well. Lieutenant Smith also sent a letter notifying the Mormon Church leadership of the situation in an attempt to preemptively assuage any doubts they may have had about his place in command. Lieutenant Smith’s letter was to no avail; Brigham Young reacted coolly, but was nevertheless aggravated at the situation. He truly saw himself as the supreme leader of the Mormon Battalion, both temporally and spiritually. As such, he felt he had given permission for the former Captain Allen to guide the battalion, and now that Allen was dead, Young believed it was his prerogative to decide who would take his place. Upon hearing the news, Young immediately drafted a letter to the battalion that reminded them that the late Captain Allen had promised that the leadership of the Mormon Battalion would be in Mormon hands, save for himself as their commander. In the case that Captain Allen died or could no longer serve the battalion, Young argued that leadership should fall to the next ranking officer, Jefferson Hunt, who was in command of Company A. Young ended his letter by encouraging the battalion to carry on under the command of Hunt and to recognize only him as their captain, unless the government forced them to do otherwise.  

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80 Brigham Young to Samuel Gully, Quartermaster, and the “Mormon Battalion” [sic], 27 August 1846, in Bagley and Bigler, *Army of Israel*, 96.
Young then wrote to General Kearny, though in this letter he assumed a much more humble voice than in the one addressed to the battalion. Young emphasized the promises that Captain Allen made to the battalion while they were still in Council Bluffs, and described how many soldiers enlisted only because of their faith and devotion to Captain Allen, who had proved himself to be their friend. Now that the captain had died, Young feared the soldiers would falter in their happiness, prosperity, and confidence in their decision to enlist, which could lead to a potential discord. Retaining the Mormon Battalion’s morale, he argued, was Young’s motivation for securing a fellow Mormon in place of the late captain Allen. “We would solicit you,” he plead to General Kearny, “to stretch out to them the same Strong arm of Fatherly Friendship Protection & care” that Allen had once extended to the Mormon Battalion.81

Most of the battalion echoed Young’s sentiments. Captain Allen’s death brought sorrow and depression to the ranks of the Mormon Battalion. William Coray wrote that Allen’s passing caused more lamentation among the soldiers than had any other gentile death. Captain Allen had hardly spent more than a few weeks with the Mormon Battalion, but during that brief time he had managed to entirely secure the confidence and support of the Mormons, despite his strong ties to the military and federal government. He had been willing to capitulate to the demands of the Mormon Battalion, most notably allowing multiple wives and family members to follow the battalion. In addition, Captain Allen had permitted Brigham Young to select the captains of each company, rather than let the

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81 Brigham Young’s claim that the Mormon soldiers enlisted only out of love and respect for the former captain Allen is only partially true; the soldiers had enlisted because Young had asked them to, but the Mormon president had also encouraged them to trust their captain and promised that James Allen would treat them respectfully and as an equal, as discussed in Chapter Two. Brigham Young to Gen. Stephen W. Kearny, 27 August 1846, in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 97-99.
soldiers hold their own election. The mourning of Captain Allen’s death might therefore be construed as sadness over the loss of an ally and the rising fear of losing control over the logistical make-up of the Mormon Battalion. Daniel Tyler captured the feeling of the battalion perfectly, noting that what seemed to be most upsetting for the soldiers was that they had not been consulted in regard to the change of command. The appointment of Lieutenant Andrew Jackson Smith “caused an ill feeling between [the Mormons] and the [military] officers that many hold to this day.” The soldiers believed, and had actually been inculcated with the notion, that the Mormon Battalion was a unique and separate unit from the general U.S. Army, and therefore they believed they had the right to choose who should succeed Allen in command.82

Young’s appeal to General Kearny likely fell on deaf ears, and it is highly unlikely that Kearny ever responded to Young’s letter. The two letters written by the leader of the Mormon Church highlight the disparity of patriarchal duties and concepts of masculinity between the Mormon community and the martial spirit of Manifest Destiny that fueled the American military. Although leadership within the Mormon Church was entirely in the hands of males, the role they then assumed within the religious community was one of fraternal or patriarchal guidance rather than unchecked dominance, save perhaps on the part of the Mormon president himself. Those with legal and ecclesiastic authority in the Mormon Church were responsible for the well-being of those in their charge, both spiritually and temporally. The rigid and seemingly unconcerned manner of leadership

82 Tyler, Concise History, 144. Although James Allen may have agreed to operate the Mormon Battalion under the conditions and terms asked by Brigham Young, he did not formally write down the conditions for enlistment. This has opened the event for historiographical debate and interpretation by all involved parties.
exhibited by the U.S. appointed military leaders was a rude awakening for many of the battalion soldiers and caused an extreme amount of tension that ran up and down the battalion’s ranks. This vertical conflict of leadership and power between the Mormon soldiers and their appointed commanders was the cause of most of the discord and frustration that erupted during the journey to California.

The government and military leaders of the army gave little thought to the complaints lodged by Young and the soldiers of the battalion. Lieutenant Smith assumed command of the battalion with the understanding that once they reached Santa Fe, Colonel Philip St. George Cooke would take over that position. The “feeling of ill-will” that Tyler described permeated the camp the entire journey toward Santa Fe and was exacerbated by the terrible walking conditions, lack of food and water, and subsequent sickness that overwhelmed most of the battalion. Some remarked that Smith had little to no regard for the Mormon soldiers and that he was only concerned with obtaining fame and glory. The Mormons dubbed him “His Excellency” and labeled him as a tyrant, insults that had also been levied against his namesake, former U.S. President Andrew Jackson.

Lieutenant Smith was not the only unpopular U.S. appointed leader. Some of the vilest sentiments were directed toward the camp doctor, George B. Sanderson. Prior to leaving Council Bluffs, Brigham Young had counseled the soldiers regarding sickness. Should any fall ill, he commanded, they were to “live by faith, and let surgeons medicine alone if you want to live.” Failure to follow this guidance, he warned, meant that the men alone would be responsible for the consequences. Keeping this in mind, those debilitated by sickness refused to seek the help of Doctor Sanderson. Most were convinced that Sanderson and Smith had concocted a lethal plot against the Mormon soldiers, wherein the
Lieutenant would march the men all day in order to make them sick and fatigued, preparing them for Sanderson’s deadly dose of calomel. William Hyde remarked that Sanderson was trying to “send as many [Mormons] to hell as he could,” and upon the death of one of their men, Henry Standage was fully convinced that it was the calomel that killed him. To evade death by the evil hand of Doctor Sanderson, the Mormon soldiers either refused to take the calomel or would spit it out after taking it via the doctor’s infamous rusty spoon. Many who were ill tried to ride along in the sick wagon, but once Smith found out that dozens who were in the wagon had refused medical attention from the doctor, he ordered them to get out and march. Smith also became aware of one man among the Mormons who was administering his own medicine and reportedly threatened that, if any other man received medical aid from anyone other than Doctor Sanderson, he would have his throat slit or be left on the prairie.83

The Mormon Battalion’s reaction to the commands of Lieutenant Smith and Doctor Sanderson further demonstrates their notions of leadership and masculinity. In times of sickness and desperation, the Mormons expected kindness and perhaps understanding from their leaders. The healing process often practiced in Mormonism was based on powers of faith, righteousness, and patience, concepts iterated in Young’s commandments to the battalion. In the army, the soldiers saw themselves as nothing more than cattle being driven

83 Calomel is a Mercury(I) chloride compound, a yellowish-white solid that was commonly used as medicine in the nineteenth century. The instructions given by Young to the soldiers were made explicit in a letter Young sent to the battalion: Brigham Young to Capt. Jefferson Hunt, Camp of Israel, Omaha Nation, Cutler’s Park, 19 August 1946 in Tyler, Concise History, 146. The account given by Henry Standage can be found in Golder, March of the Mormon Battalion, 165. A compilation of all the complaints and comments regarding Lt. Smith and Dr. Sanderson can be found in Ricketts, Mormon Battalion, 50.
across a barren landscape. Instead of being treated with a fatherly type of love and care, the men were greeted by a spoonful of calomel.

Setting aside the perceptions of the Mormon soldiers, however, reveals that the treatments offered by Doctor Sanderson and the long marches and enforcement of “military culture” were not particularly harsh by the standards of the time. In fact, both Smith and Sanderson perhaps deserve more credit on their part for being more lenient toward the Mormon soldiers than what could have been expected in any other military unit. The Mormon Battalion may have been extremely fortunate for having Doctor Sanderson as their physician, as the standards for the training required for military medicine practitioners was superior to those required of civilian physicians. Likewise, when Lieutenant Smith forced the sick men who refused the doctor’s treatment to march alongside the wagons instead of allowing them to ride inside, he was enforcing his role as commander in an attempt to maintain order. Although the Mormon soldiers viewed their military leaders as evil, the fact of the matter was that these soldiers were a group of untrained men who had unrealistic expectations of military life. If anything, the efforts of both Smith and Sanderson, who wrote to Brigham Young asking for his permission to lead the soldiers, demonstrate an exemplary effort to acquiesce to the demands set forth by the religious leaders. Nevertheless, it is possible that Lieutenant Smith and Doctor Sanderson conducted their business with an arrogance and brusqueness that was common among military authorities and especially fitting for the martial attitude prevalent in the American army.  

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84 Fleek, “Dr. George B. Sanderson.”
Divisions between the Mormon soldiers themselves began to form at nearly the same time as those between their military leaders, and were also based largely on the chain of command that was challenged after Captain Allen’s death. As already discussed, Young wanted Jefferson Hunt, commanding officer of Company A, to take command. Although Lieutenant Smith ultimately assumed command from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe, Hunt never relinquished his claim to authority that he believed rightfully belonged to him. The battalion officers and soldiers recognized Hunt as their leader among themselves, but agreed that Smith should retain the military control of the unit because he was familiar with military conduct and knew how to fill out the payroll forms properly. Additionally, some of the soldiers had heard a rumor a Missourian and prominent anti-Mormon named Colonel Sterling Price, commander of a nearby battalion, had vowed to attach his unit to the Mormon Battalion if Lieutenant Smith was not chosen as the commander. Keeping these issues in mind, the Mormon officers ultimately agreed that Smith should take command of the Mormon Battalion.\footnote{Christiansen, “Struggle for Power in the Mormon Battalion,” 57-58.}

This infuriated John D. Lee, an adopted son of Brigham Young, who had been charged with picking up the first paychecks issued to the Mormon Battalion. He met up with the battalion on September 6, 1846, which by that time was about halfway to Santa Fe. Lee brought with him letters from Brigham Young that included instructions concerning battalion leadership and an admonition to recognize Hunt as the rightful commander. Lee, who was apprised of the situation, expected the soldiers to revolt against Lieutenant Smith. When that did not happen, Lee was outraged and appointed himself as
the battalion’s new commander under the premise that he was the only one who appeared to care for the soldiers’ well-being.86

The ensuing internal conflict was quite dramatic, and the involvement of multiple men makes the plot rather complex. The Mormon officers of each company decided to stand up against Lee, claiming that their placement within the top leadership of the Church overrode any authority Lee tried to assert. Besides, Brigham Young had told them to recognize Jefferson Hunt as their leader, which they were doing surreptitiously, and not Lee, who was not even formally a member of the Mormon Battalion. A few officers held leadership positions within the Quorum of the Twelve, an ecclesiastic authority group within the Church, and they asserted that they would not revolt against Lieutenant Smith, nor would they recognize Lee as commander. In response, Lee wrote that that their claims were “nonsense, [for] what do the 12 have to do with counseling [sic] this Bat. They may council in spiritual matters at home but with us they have nothing to do.”87

As the battalion pushed toward Santa Fe, it quickly became evident that some soldiers staunchly believed that the men who held higher positions of authority within the Church should also be recognized as authority figures within the battalion. Levi W. Hancock, who held a particularly high position within the Mormon Church leadership and had more ecclesiastic authority than most of the soldiers, had not been offered a position

86 John D. Lee was also a member of a secret Church authority group known as the Council of the Fifty, or within the Church as “The Kingdom of God and his Laws, with the Keys and power thereof, and judgment in the hands of his servants, Ahman Christ.” This group was given the task helping to usher in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ by preparing the earth to become the literal Kingdom of God. John D. Lee may be the most vivid chronicler of the Mormon Battalion, as his journal entries are full of emotion and often dictate entire conversations, though obviously slanted in his favor. See John D. Lee, Diary of the Mormon Battalion, 9 October 1846, in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 108-20.

87 Christiansen, “The Struggle for Power in the Mormon Battalion,” 51-69; John D. Lee, Diary of the Mormon Battalion, 9 October 1846, in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 111.
of authority within the battalion. After having a vivid dream wherein he saw Mormon Battalion soldiers slitting their throats, Hancock was convinced that the current officers were not doing enough to maintain the spiritual and moral conditions required by Brigham Young. Hancock took it upon himself to monitor the behavior of the soldiers and asked permission from Jefferson Hunt to hold weekly meetings regarding spiritual matters. These weekly meetings soon turned into an opportunity for Hancock to exercise his spiritual authority, and soldiers began to seek his advice for both military and spiritual issues, which Hancock stressed were one and the same. This caused a deep rift between Hancock and Hunt, who came to regret allowing Hancock to hold the weekly meetings and establish his place as the most prominent ecclesiastical leader.

The division between the two came to a head when Lieutenant Smith ordered the sick soldiers, along with many of the wives and children, to go back to the nearest military base so as not to hinder the progress of the battalion. This flew in the face of another one of Brigham Young’s admonitions, which had directed the company officers to ensure that under no circumstance was the Mormon Battalion to be separated. The Mormon soldiers looked to Jefferson Hunt to stand up to Lieutenant Smith and prevent the detachment, but Hunt and the other Mormon officers agreed with Smith for logistical purposes. It was in this moment that Hancock asserted his growing power within the battalion and riled up the soldiers to depose Hunt and instate a new officer in his place. Hancock suggested that John D. Lee assume command, likely due to Lee’s position of authority in the Church, which was even higher than the one held by Hancock. In response, Jefferson Hunt canceled Hancock’s weekly meetings, though Hancock continued to hold them in secret. This effectively split the Mormon Battalion into two groups: those who recognized the legal and
military authority of Jefferson Hunt and those who recognized the spiritual authority of Hancock and Lee. This division intensified even further when Lieutenant Smith split the battalion once more, taking the most able men ahead of the main camp in order to arrive at Santa Fe by the deadline required by General Kearny. Just as before, this move was sanctioned by Hunt, and both Hancock and Lee were so outraged that they suggested the battalion be disbanded altogether if new leadership was not instated. This division plagued the battalion all the way to California, despite Smith’s dismissal at Santa Fe and the transfer of command to Colonel Cooke.  

These horizontal divisions reflect the Mormons’ conflicting notions not only of authority, but of the type of masculinity that each form of authority embodied. When either Colonel Cooke or Lieutenant Smith punished a Mormon soldier, Hancock was swift to run to that soldier’s aid to offer spiritual support and administer blessings. He used his ecclesiastical authority as evidence of his patriarchal values, wherein the soldiers were treated as sons, rather than subordinates. His seemingly caring and gentle approach to the soldiers was that of restrained masculinity, where moral conduct defined authority and leadership was exercised through example. Conversely, Jefferson Hunt’s claim to authority was based on his position within a martial entity, and he often supported the manner in which either Cooke or Smith punished wayward soldiers. Hunt sometimes carried out the punishment himself, which included directing men to walk behind wagons, or ordering disobedient soldiers to clean up the camp mess in the morning. Hunt’s masculinity and

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88 Christiansen, “The Struggle for Power in the Mormon Battalion.”
authority were backed by the visible and legal military hierarchy and enacted in a martial spirit.

The ability of Mormon priesthood to serve as an equalizer within the ranks of the Mormon Battalion was negated when Brigham Young assigned military positions of authority to those who held higher ecclesiastical callings within the Mormon Church. His admonition to live by faith alone to preserve their mortal lives also negatively affected the battalion, as the health of men who refused medical treatment by the resident military doctor quickly deteriorated. For the soldiers, however, the consequences of Young’s commands were interpreted as the result of interference by U.S. military personnel in an otherwise religious unit’s affairs. The ensuing vertical and horizontal conflicts among the soldiers and their military leaders became so powerful that they threatened to destroy the entire battalion.
CHAPTER 4: LEGACY OF THE MORMON BATTALION

The personal exhibitions of Manifest Destiny by members of the Mormon Battalion were not the only elements that set the group apart from other U.S. military units. When American soldiers returned to the states after their service in the Mexican-American War, they could generally expect to be received with parades, banquets, and praise. Despite a significant anti-war movement, Americans still supported the individual soldiers while criticizing the situation and government under which they served. No such distinction was made for the soldiers of the Mormon Battalion, however, and the veterans found that they were rebuffed by their religious brothers and sisters for whom they had sacrificed a year of their lives. Likewise, recognition of the battalion outside of the Mormon Church in American contemporary popular culture was virtually non-existent. The Mormon Battalion never did engage in battle with another military unit, and was therefore deprived of an opportunity for heroic action and the lore that accompanied, what was then considered to be the, the ultimate honorable death. The neglect of the Mormon community to openly welcome the Mormon Battalion back within its folds is not so easily explained. The Mormon soldiers interacted with foreign cultures to which the rest of the Church had not been exposed. These interactions influenced their identities and changing perceptions of Manifest Destiny, making the Mormon Battalion soldiers unique not only in the U.S. military, but unique among themselves. Because the Mormon Battalion had been exposed to the worldly elements of both military and foreign cultures, the leadership and general membership of the Mormon Church acted as though the battalion was at odds with their isolated and simplistic lifestyle.
THE POPULAR AMERICAN PRESS

Considering the scrutiny that the Mormon community generally received in popular newspapers not only in Missouri and Illinois, but all over the country, the initial reaction to the formation of the Mormon Battalion was underwhelming. The news surrounding the Mormon Battalion’s entry into the U.S. Army was announced simply as another development in the war. For the most part, media commentary on the Mormon Battalion was either strikingly abrupt or nonexistent. In many national newspapers, information regarding the Mormon Battalion was half-heartedly sandwiched between news stories surrounding the war, with a sentence or two quickly updating the public on the location of the battalion in relation to General Kearny’s forces. Coverage of the Mormons who still remained scattered in Iowa and Illinois was reported separately from any news of the battalion.

The separation of the Mormon Battalion from the Mormon community fell in line with how many Americans, particularly those who were opposed to the war, dealt with the situation in which they found themselves. President Polk set the precedent for a temporary solution to reconcile, even if by force, patriotism with personal morals and political beliefs. By tying monetary support for the U.S. Army to his war bill, Polk effectively demonstrated that even those who did not support the war movement must support those who were fighting. For the first few months of the war, before news of the barbaric conduct of American soldiers toward Mexicans reached the states, the American public was generally fully supportive of the efforts of their volunteer soldiers. The soldiers of the Mormon Battalion were not excluded from this, and if a newspaper had nothing positive to say about
the Mormons or the battalion, then nothing was said at all. Insulting anyone who had volunteered to enlist was much too risky a move for the American press.

Word that a Mormon Battalion had been formed slowly spread westward from the nation’s capital, where those with sources connected to the U.S. military first got wind of the Mormon enlistment. One of the earliest mentions of the Mormon Battalion appeared in July on the very day that the first four companies of the battalion were officially mustered into the army. A paper in Richmond, Virginia, reported succinctly that General Kearny had failed to enlist a sufficient amount of men for his western army and had therefore dispatched Captain Allen to recruit five hundred Mormon soldiers. One week later, a paper in Washington confirmed the news from Virginia, and, after a wordy update on the number of Mormons migrating out of Nauvoo, reported that military officers had indeed arrived at the Mormon camp to enlist soldiers whom they hoped would enlist “without delay.” The article’s tone was rather encouraging, reporting that the Mormon Battalion “will furnish Col. Kearney [sic] with a regiment of well-disciplined soldiers, who are already prepared to march.”

An Ohio paper headlined the news as “Extremely Important!” and excitedly reported that the Mormon Battalion would facilitate the “Prospect of an early removal of the ‘Mormon remnant!!!!’” Included as highlights in the article were the government-granted use of Indian lands to the Mormons, General Kearny’s letter to Captain James Allen giving the command to create a Mormon Battalion, and Allen’s “Circular to the Mormons.” No extraneous commentary was added; the opinion of the paper regarding a
Mormon Battalion or the prospect of an expedited removal of the Mormons was only evidenced by the multiple exclamation points that adorned the headline.  

Approximately two months after the Mormon Battalion had enlisted, nearly every major newspaper in the country was reporting on its addition to Kearny’s Army of the West. Similar to the Ohio paper, the majority of articles abstained from offering commentary and opinion regarding the battalion and instead included either Kearny’s letter to Captain Allen or Allen’s circular. A New York paper was vaguely complimentary, writing that “The commanding officers speak in the highest terms of the conduct and good order of these troops, and say that with time for drilling they will be every way equal to the regular soldiers.” This paper seems to be an exception to the norm, as almost everywhere else, commentary was notably absent. Even Missouri and Illinois, arguably the states most connected to the movement of the Mormons and likely to complain of Mormon cooperation with the government, did not report on the Mormon soldiers until the end of August. When the news did appear, it continued to be accompanied by Allen’s circular, along with nebulous statements that mentioned that Mormons were a fine body of men and easily disciplined.

While the soldiers of the Mormon Battalion were spared criticism, there were some papers that were not afraid to challenge the orders given to the soldiers or to question the significance of the Mormon Battalion’s contribution to the American wartime cause. On August 22, the Augusta Chronicle, a staunch Whig paper and outlet

89 “Mormon Soldiers,” Richmond Whig, Richmond, VA, 14 July 1846; “Late from the Mormon Camp,” Daily National Intelligencer, Washington, DC, 22 July 1846; “Highly Important!” Plain Dealer, Cleveland, OH, 30 July 1846.
90 “From Santa Fe,” Evening Post, New York, NY, 20 November 1846.
for anti-war sentiment, connected the Mormon Battalion with anti-expansionist rhetoric. The formation of a Mormon Battalion, the paper claimed, was proof that Polk was nothing more than a tyrant who sought to steal Mexican land for himself. Why else would the president approach a group of Mormons, ask them to march to California, where they would then be discharged, but still remain in that country with all of their “arms and accoutrements with which they will be fully equipped?” The article asserted that no other conclusion could be drawn from this offer except that “they were inducements held out to those people to aid in taking California from its rightful owners.” The article claimed that the Mormons had been successfully bribed by the Polk administration and duped with the promise of being able to build a new sanctuary. However, the paper was very careful to skirt any language that might directly insult the Mormon soldiers who had volunteered for the war. It was not their actual service that was outrageous, but the manner in which they had been manipulated by a land-grabbing government.91

As anti-war sentiment steadily fomented in the popular media and among politicians, criticism toward the Polk administration became more belligerent. One Washington newspaper dedicated an entire page to printing various anti-war articles from other major papers. Of the three included articles, one pinpointed the existence of the Mormon Battalion as just one of many “unsanctioned” actions Polk took to conquer and subject Mexico to his own militaristic rule. Because the Mormons were “already on their march to a foreign country,” Polk had enlisted them “with the express stipulation that they should not be treated as real American soldiers, but that, at the end of their service, they

should be discharged in *California*, with arms in their hands.” The complaint of the Mormons not being real soldiers had less to do with the Mormons’ religion and everything to do with the president buying soldiers to occupy territories he wanted to subdue. While some papers opined that the Mormons were “deluded” to have acquiesced to such a request, the real issue was with the president and his insatiable hunger for new land and the manner in which he attempted to take it.92

Save for the general updates on the war, the Mormon Battalion’s journey did not receive much coverage in the U.S. popular press until the summer of 1847. Compared with the news coming from Mexico City, where General Taylor and General Winfield Scott were launching land and naval attacks, the march of the Mormon Battalion was not exactly captivating for the national media. The battalion never engaged in combat, and it lacked the luster and romance that was essential to the lure of wartime heroism. However, after the Mormon Battalion’s discharge in the summer of 1847, news began to trickle back to the eastern states about the battalion’s involvement with a dispute over the governance of California. During the spring of 1847, the Mormon soldiers had been ordered by their commander, General Kearny, to help in reclaiming California from John C. Fremont, an American explorer and military officer who had been cultivating political power in that territory since his arrival in December 1845. Both military men claimed control over the newly conquered territory; Fremont because he had arrived prior to the war and helped establish the “Bear Flag Republic,” and Kearny because he had been appointed by the president. This matter was particularly controversial due to the traditional American

approach to land ownership, in which the people who arrived first (excluding the Indian Americans) and improved the land were generally considered to be its owners. This had been reinforced through the Preemption Acts, which proved to be an essential aspect of Manifest Destiny. However, though Fremont had obviously arrived in California prior to General Kearny, Kearny carried with him orders from the U.S. president to assume command of California. It was not only a face-off between two men and what military authority each possessed, but arguably a dispute over the tradition of Anglo-American land acquisition and ownership in the western frontier.

The arrival of the Mormon Battalion in California gave General Kearny additional manpower to stand against the U.S. soldiers who were loyal to Fremont, whom General Kearny and his supporters considered to be in open rebellion against the federal government. In late March 1847, the Mormon Battalion marched to San Luis Rey, just north of San Diego and outside of Los Angeles, where Fremont’s men were stationed. While Kearny and Fremont were facing off in a fight of words and military authority that even led to a challenge for a duel, their soldiers were facing off in a martial display based on sheer numbers. The schism in the ranks of the American volunteers in California due to the feud between Kearny and Fremont became so divisive and belligerent that weapons were brandished and the territory nearly erupted into civil war. Colonel Cooke has perhaps summed up the situation better than anyone else when he wrote that “General Kearny is supreme – somewhere up the coast; Colonel Fremont supreme at Pueblo de los Angeles;
Commodore Stockton is Commander-in-chief at San Diego…and we hold the territory because Mexico is poorest of all."\(^93\)

Although the Mormon Battalion received few details regarding the particulars of the feud between Kearny and Fremont, the soldiers were aware of the root of the matter and were staunchly loyal to Colonel Cooke and General Kearny. That the Mormons would side with the presidential orders given by Polk over the concept of Fremont being on the land “first” is a bit surprising due to their perceptions of land ownership. One of the major benefits of forming the battalion as iterated by Brigham Young was that they would be among the first to arrive in California, asserting their claim to the land and preemptively establishing dominance, should their presence ever be challenged. Perhaps out of personal loyalty to their commanders, or to play it safe and remain in the good graces of the U.S. military, or maybe even for their own self-interest, the Mormon soldiers obeyed their orders from Kearny to stand against Fremont’s soldiers. Upon arriving near Los Angeles, Thomas William wrote in his journal that the battalion was under orders to arrest Fremont by the authority of General Kearny and the U.S. federal government, and that the group of Mormons were, with the exception of Kearny’s dragoons, the “only land forces that could be relied upon, that is in California.”

One aspect of the situation that particularly troubled the Mormons was that Fremont was the son-in-law of Senator Thomas Hart Benton from Missouri, who had worked with Lilburn Boggs to expel the Mormons from Missouri. Some wrote in their journals that they were sure that Fremont’s soldiers were actually the same Missourians who had harassed

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\(^93\) Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California*, 183.
them in Jackson County almost a decade ago. Joseph Standage expressed relief when he wrote in early April 1847 that the battalion had received orders to move a little farther away from Los Angeles, “as we were not altogether safe at this place as the Missouri Vols. had threatened to come down upon us.”

Due to the slow pace at which news traveled from one coast to another, the media did not get wind of the Mormon Battalion’s involvement in the dispute between Kearny and Fremont until late summer 1847, after the battalion had been discharged and Fremont had been arrested and sentenced to a court martial. When the news did arrive, speculation regarding the role of the Mormon Battalion in some sort of uprising or rebellion was blown out of proportion by newspapers trying to capitalize on a sensational rumor. Although no aspersions were cast on the quality of military service the Mormon Battalion had performed, some papers were eager to assume they were on the “wrong” side of the dispute. By late July, a New York newspaper reported that the Mormons had rebelled in California in order to “set up an independent government of their own.” Although the New York paper recognized that this was just a rumor, the claim was dramatized when the article asserted that “there may be some foundation for the rumor” due to the fact that, “prior to the Mexican War, [the Mormons’] had designed to establish an empire in California, and had taken some steps toward the enterprise.” Although no proof was offered to support the rumor, the two short paragraphs of “news” spread like wildfire through major cities like

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94 For a more intricate and detailed history of the conflict between Stockton, Fremont, and Kearny and how the Mormon Battalion participated in that event, see Sherman L. Fleek, “The Kearny/Stockton/Fremont Feud: The Mormon Battalion’s Most Significant Contribution in California,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (2011), 229-57. However, Fleek does not ultimately detail how the Mormon Battalion influenced the outcome of the feud, nor does he include any public reactions regarding Mormon involvement. The reaction of Joseph Standage, likely a relative of Henry Standage, can be found in Fleek, “The Kearny/Stockton/Fremont Feud,” 253.
Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Augusta. Without any credible source to confirm the story, the inaccuracy of the rumor was quickly discovered and retractions appeared within a day or two in each of the papers that had heralded the unfounded news. Some newspapers were more willing to let the issue rest than others, and a handful speculated about what could have happened in California had the Mormons actually rebelled. A paper in Connecticut remarked that, even though this particular rumor was untrue, in time “these Mormons will make trouble, if they have not already done it, there is no doubt. It is not the nature of things for them to remain quiet anywhere.”

The Mormon Battalion’s contribution to the Fremont-Kearny standoff in California was an integral aspect of Fremont’s trial in spring 1848. Once Fremont had capitulated and allowed himself to be placed under arrest, Kearny marched Fremont, escorted by guards from the Mormon Battalion, back to Fort Leavenworth, where Fremont awaited his court martial. During the trial, Kearny’s intentions concerning the use of the Mormon Battalion against Fremont were one of the main focal points of the defense. The defense argued that Kearny had used the battalion to instigate martial and violent action and intended to “crush” Fremont by capitalizing on the force provided by the Mormon soldiers. By focusing on the role of Mormon Battalion, the defense hoped to prove that any martial action on behalf of Fremont was only in response to a perceived Mormon threat, rather than insubordination to General Kearny or President Polk.

95 For the early appearance of this news in New York, see: Commercial Advertiser, New York, NY, 26 July 1847. For an example of media speculation regarding the Mormon Battalion or Mormon revolt in California, see Morning News, New London, CT, 29 July 1847.
When the battalion was first mentioned during the trial, the defense seemed to consider it as strictly a military unit separate from the main body of the Mormon Church and its religious practices. However, once the defense began to call their witnesses to the stand, the tone quickly changed. Each witness was peppered with questions asking their opinion of the Mormons and the Mormon Battalion, and they were asked how the soldiers already stationed in California reacted to the arrival of nearly two hundred Mormon soldiers. The answers were predictably negative. One witness asserted that the arrival of the Mormon Battalion “caused great alarm among the Californians,” due to the reports they had received, which described the Mormons as a “lawless and abandoned set.” The witness further clarified that this bleak picture referred to “the whole tribe of Mormons; not to Colonel Cooke’s command.” This statement is rather confusing, as the battalion soldiers were certainly part of the “whole tribe of Mormons;” however, as the trial was a military court martial, speaking ill of the conduct of U.S. military unit, based solely on its religious tendencies, would not have been appropriate.

Another witness claimed that when the soldiers already stationed in California got wind of the approaching Mormon Battalion, they believed they would have the approval of the U.S. government if they needed to fight and expel the Mormons from the territory. After all, he said, “The people in the United States were fighting them [the Mormons], and they [the Californians] had a right to do so too.” When the relevance of such questions was raised as an objection by the prosecution, the defense argued that such questions helped to explain the existence of Fremont’s alleged illegal army, because they would “ascertain to what extent it was produced by fear of the Mormons.” Essentially, the defense relied completely on the popular animosity exhibited toward the Mormons, not only in that
territory, but the entire nation. Fremont had not, according the defense, ordered his men to form an army in order to engage in civil war with Kearny, but rather to fight off the “lawless” Mormon Battalion making its way to Los Angeles. Furthermore, the defense argued that Fremont had been “virtually constituted a prisoner, under guard of the Mormons,” and underwent additional needless suffering when he was forced, by General Kearny, to march under supervision of a Mormon guard back to Fort Leavenworth. This was meant to be particularly insulting, as military etiquette stipulated that a military officer, like Fremont, should have been under the guard of his own regimental commander.

None of these arguments were met with any credulity, and the trial concluded after Fremont was found guilty of all charges against him, including mutiny and military insubordination. Although President Polk refused to formally recognize the charge of mutiny, Fremont resigned from military service. However, news of the trial, including the involvement of the Mormons, seeped into the popular press and likely exacerbated anti-Mormon animosity.96

As the war with Mexico dragged on, disillusionment among American citizens in regard to the purpose of the war began to foment. During the opening months of the war, the press had largely ignored news of atrocities committed by American soldiers. When reports of robbery, rape, and even murder surfaced in the media, the source was almost always from letters written home by the volunteers in Mexico, and when they were printed, it was generally in abolitionist or anti-slavery papers that had taken a hard stance against

the war since its inception. After one year of warfare, however, stories of American brutality began to creep into newspapers outside of New England. Many Americans, including prominent politicians like Henry Clay and Abraham Lincoln, believed that the war was degrading to the American spirit. Not only were American soldiers needlessly being killed, but they had begun to needlessly and remorselessly kill others. This reflection on basic human civility was not necessarily a call to treat the Mexicans, Indian Americans, or even enslaved black people differently. Rather, it was a critique on the way that Anglo-Americans were conducting themselves; massacres and brutal warfare were reserved for the savage races, not the superior Europeans and especially not the inspirational Americans. Of course, these sentiments were not welcomed among the aggressive expansionists and the southern states. The ideas Clay expressed had been building for years in the social and political arenas of the north, prominently in anti-slavery and abolitionist circles, but his message and the timing of it gave the anti-war movement strength and urgency. This shift was reflected in how the majority of Americans, prominently those in the northern states, began to regard the expelled Mormons, many of whom were still in the process of securing the funds and necessities for their move west.97

In February 1847 at Agua Nueva, a group of Arkansas volunteers employed guerrilla warfare and other tactics learned from the various Indians wars and massacred approximately thirty Mexican men in front of their horrified wives and children. Such inhumane actions had generally been attributed to Indians and Mexicans and had been considered far below the capabilities of any sensible Anglo-American. When the event was

97 For a description of the transition of the American media in regards to their reporting of the war, see Greenberg, Wicked War, 193.
reported throughout the nation and first-hand accounts described the atrocities committed by American volunteers, distinguishing the savage behavior of non-whites from that of Anglo-Americans became problematic, and many blamed the war for the degradation of American behavior. That same month, General Taylor led his troops in the epic battle of Buena Vista, where his small contingent managed to fight off Santa Anna’s army despite being outnumbered four to one. Although Buena Vista was an American victory, the heavy casualty rate weighed heavily on the public’s spirit. As the death toll of American soldiers rose, support for a war that bred barbaric behavior rapidly declined.98

Henry Clay captured the essence of the situation when he gave an impassioned speech in November 1847 in his home state of Kentucky. Clay unabashedly condemned the acquisition of Mexican land and the U.S. president who was willing to sacrifice the lives of American men in order to get it. Furthermore, Clay vocally expressed his opposition to the expansion of slavery and its continued practice in existing territories, although he was himself a slave owner. Clay voiced concern for the manner of men and soldiers that the war had produced. The war was disgraceful and immoral, he claimed, and it threatened to make the entire nation disgraceful and immoral as well.99

Three months after Clay’s speech, Thomas Kane, the Mormon sympathizer who had befriended Jesse Little in 1846, wrote an open letter to the mayor of his hometown,

98 Ibid., 156-57, 193-99.
99 Ibid., 229-38. According to Greenberg, Clay’s speech was particularly important for the influence it had upon Abraham Lincoln, who was in attendance. It was during Clay’s speech, particularly when the issue of slavery was addressed, that persuaded Lincoln of the evils of the Mexican War and the additional peril that the continued practice of slavery and its extension would have upon the nation. These ideas deeply influenced Lincoln during his campaign and subsequent election to the presidency just a decade later. Clay’s speech and the resolutions adopted at the Lexington meeting can be found in: Henry Clay, Speech of Henry Clay, at the Lexington mass meeting, 13 November, 1847: together with the resolutions adopted on that occasion, (New York: Printed by G.F. Nesbitt, 1847).
Philadelphia. Kane called for a meeting in that city with state leaders regarding the
deplorable state of the Mormons who were too destitute to leave their encampments in the
Indian territories. Kane explained that Mormon leaders had made an armistice with the
Illinois government to leave the state with the stipulation that until their departure, the
remaining Mormons not be molested. However, this “treaty or armistice,” according to
Kane, was “broken by the anti-Mormons without ceremony or excuse, and the cripples who
relied upon it were ordered to take up their beds and walk.” If the image of enfeebled Saints
was not enough to arouse sympathy, Kane described “anti-Mormons” assaulting the fleeing
refugees with large guns, which had been stolen from a steamboat. Kane had encountered
these Mormons as they were fleeing for their lives, and he described the grisly scene as he
“looked upon [them] shivering in the sharp night air of autumn, many of who the screening
of a roof might have saved, died looking across the stream upon their comfortable homes,
in which the orthodox bullies of the mob were celebrating their triumph in obscene and
drunken riot.”100

Such imagery, when relayed to the American public, resonated deeply, as it directly
recalled the scenes of violence and massacre inflicted by U.S. soldiers upon their perceived
enemies. The war had already brought about enough senseless suffering, and whether he
knew it or not, Kane successfully capitalized on this notion. He explicitly called for aid in
the form of food or funds to be sent to the starving Mormon camps. Though portions of his

100 Thomas Kane’s letter was printed in full in various newspapers around the country, though one of its
earliest appearances was in the following: Thomas Kane, “Mr. Kane’s Letter to Mr. Quincy Revere
House,” The Boston Daily Atlas, Boston, MA, 16 February 1848. Kane wrote similar letters to other
mayors of prominent American cities, including Boston and Baltimore, and these letters were also reprinted
en masse. Although the wording between these letters is not identical, the overall message was. A copy of
the the Boston letter appears in an Ohio newspaper: “The Mormons – A Horrible Account,” Plain Dealer,
Cleveland, OH, 25 February 1848.
letter were quite hyperbolic, like when he claimed that the Mormon pioneers were attempting to cross a distance that was “over one-fourth the diameter of the world,” he truly believed it was an American duty to help the innocent Mormons recover. Once again emphasizing the dire situation of the Mormons, Kane closed with a plea to help a desperate people who “are dying while we are talking about them.”

The public reaction was immediate. A Boston newspaper pounced on the opportunity to help and published an article titled “A Chance for the Humane,” which labeled the anti-Mormon movement “one of the most flagrant outrages ever committed…It would have disgraced a band of savages.” The article opined that the public had been deceived by angry statesmen who were angered over the voting patterns of the Mormons, and that the resulting Mormon expulsion from the states was not the fault of the Mormons, but their deceptive elected representatives. The article assured that Kane’s call for aid would not fall on deaf ears, even if the Mormons were “ignorant…erring, but still sincere.” It was an opportunity for redemption, and the Boston paper asserted that the public would “save the sufferers from the destitution and wretchedness, to which the rapine and brutality and bigotry of their fellow men have devoted to them.” Days later, a New York paper advertised a meeting to be held on behalf of the Mormons after it was made known “that they are literally starving.” Such cries for assistance were prominent in Massachusetts, New York, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, and multiple meetings were held in Massachusetts and New York. A Vermont newspaper claimed that the meetings in Boston

101 Thomas Kane, “Mr. Kane’s Letter to Mr. Quincy Revere House,” *Boston Daily Atlas*, 16 February 1848.
brought in $400 in aid money, but the article itself mentioned no relief funds being organized in that state, nor its opinion of such activities.”102

News of these meetings made its way into the southern states, where the reception was markedly different. A Virginia newspaper reported on the New York meetings for Mormon assistance and remarked that the Mormon condition appeared to be deplorable, yet no call for aid in Virginia was mentioned or offered. Kane’s letter to the mayor of Philadelphia was reprinted in Texas, though with quite a different tone and twisted information. The Texas paper altered Kane’s language, and though the plea for help and overall image of suffering was still expressed, it was due to the “cupidity of the Iowa Squatters” that they (the Mormons) were in such dire straits. “It is little wonder then,” the forged letter asserted, “that they have fallen by the wayside in the wilderness.”103

“Consistency Though Art a Jewel”

The service of the Mormon Battalion in the American army was never recognized as a particularly redeeming aspect of Mormon culture by non-Mormons in the nineteenth century. Despite the gruesome conduct of some of the American men while in Mexico, the public reaction to both the dead and surviving soldiers was similar to hero worship. Soldiers returning to the states were welcomed home with parades and banquets, adorned with flowers, and escorted by a band singing the volunteers’ praises. These types of receptions contrast starkly with the reception of the Mormon Battalion soldiers after making their way

to the Salt Lake Valley, or trekking all the way back to the Mormon camps on the Missouri River. While the American soldiers had dedicated their lives to serving their country, many Mormons, including Brigham Young, could not quite ascertain what the Mormon Battalion’s enlistment meant in terms of loyalty and patriotism.104

Soldiers who returned sporting Mexican livery or other foreign customs were entirely ostracized. These men had been separated from the Mormon community for a year, during which time they were exposed to worldly and cosmopolitan lifestyles. Such experiences had the potential to erode spirituality, which made the former soldiers veritable pariahs in both a physical and spiritual sense. Returning veterans arrived in the valley poor, weak, and in an unknown land, yet they received no aid from the people for whom they had sacrificed a year of their lives. Granted, those already in the valley had just endured an arduous cross-country trek themselves and had little to contribute from their own meager stockpiles. Nevertheless, the soldiers felt jilted. John Riser, a battalion veteran, wrote in his memoir that the returning soldiers “were despised by those that should have been their friends.” Veterans were regarded as beggars, and town authorities advised young women to steer clear of their company. For the men who had not wanted to enlist to begin with, but were pressured into volunteering in return for some heavenly reward and for the sake of the greater Mormon good, such a reception was astounding. These indigent soldiers had literally sent almost all of their military paychecks back to the Mormon community and

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104 That the returning American soldiers were regarded as Heroes is put forth in Johannsen, To The Halls of the Montezumas, 141-43.
were now ostracized for it. Riser summed up the situation perfectly when he sarcastically quipped, “O Consistency though art a jewel.”

The exclusion of former soldiers from the community likely stemmed from a general distaste for the habits and culturally diverse customs that many soldiers picked up during their enlistment, particularly from the Mexicans. Some veterans returned wearing Mexican livery, complete with sombreros and buckskins. Even their speech had evolved, as words like corral and vaquero were introduced into Mormon culture, albeit unwillingly. One of the most serious offenses appeared to be the “Spanish Rusty,” which was a form of horse-riding wherein a man and woman shared the same horse, with the woman riding in front. This was in flagrant disobedience to proper Mormon etiquette, and the severity of the crime was dramatically manifested when half a dozen young soldiers rode into a party in the Spanish Rusty style and immediately caught the attention of Church authorities. As punishment, each young man was fined an astronomical sum of $25 and excommunicated from the Mormon Church entirely, a punishment that had no equal in spiritual severity.

The punitive treatment of Mormon soldiers by their ecclesiastical authorities might have been a reaction to what they perceived as a threat against the rigid Mormon hierarchy. The former soldiers had experienced military and religious leadership opportunities during their service in the battalion, and at times the clashes between those who held one or the other resulted in open hostility. Though no record exists that suggests the veterans attempted to usurp any form of authority once they arrived in Salt Lake, the internal quarrels that existed during the march of the Mormon Battalion were surely on the minds

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105 From the memoir of John Riser, reproduced in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 426.
106 Ibid., 426-27.
of wary religious leaders. The foreign language, clothing, and even styles of horse riding, all threatened the established order of things on a very superficial level. But underneath the detestation of different cultural habits was the fear that the returned soldiers would glorify an independent and worldly existence outside of the Church community.

As the soldiers poured into the Salt Lake Valley during the fall of 1847, the difficult living conditions under which the veterans were attempting to survive were exacerbated. The Mormons had been in the valley for only weeks, and they were still in the early stages of developing an effective agricultural system. What resources they had were surely limited, and it is likely that the traditional communal spirit that was so effective in the economically established states back east succumbed to an attitude of individual survival. John Hess recorded that all he and his wife had to live off was “the outfit of a discharged soldier,” which included a small tent, a kettle, two tin plates, some silverware, some thread-bare blankets, and ten pounds of flour. Harvesting any grain or other crops was out of the question once more returned soldiers turned their cattle, which they had brought from California, loose upon the open fields. John Steele, another veteran, angrily noted that the unregulated cattle had “devoured all that I had for to live upon through the winter for my family, consisting of four.” The loss of crops led to inflation in an already unstable economy, and Steele spent what money he had left on one hundred pounds of cornmeal in the hopes it would prevent his family from starving during the approaching winter.107

Further aggravating the situation was the fact that Young had asked the veterans for seventy head of U.S. cattle and dozens of private wagons to take to the Mormons who

107 Ibid., 418.
were still living on the banks of the Missouri River. The veterans acquiesced in return for the promise that they would have access to the “wealth of the Church” should they find themselves wanting sustenance. Unfortunately, what little “wealth” that existed in the valley was not distributed among the veterans as Young had claimed it would be. Reaching desperation, Steele and some of the other veterans drafted a petition to the religious government that Young left in place while he was visiting the Mormon encampments back east. Steele presented this petition on November 2, 1847 and offered up two or three heads of cattle that the veterans still possessed in return for money or food. This favor, he stipulated, was “as nothing compared with what we have done,” and he noted that none of the Mormons would have even been able to come to the valley “had our Battalion not went and [stood] as their saviours.” The petition clearly stated that the veterans were not looking for charitable aid, but were rather asking for what was rightfully theirs given their service and fiscal contribution to the Mormons’ migration. The Church authorities considered the petition, but no offer of assistance came to fruition. Steele and countless other veterans barely survived their first winter in the valley by eating weeds and chewing on animal hides.  

Even if Brigham Young had been present, it is unlikely that the soldiers would have found themselves in a more favorable position. While the Mormon Battalion was still making its way to California, Young’s adopted son, John D. Lee, who had tried to wrest control of the battalion from its established leaders, reported to Young all of the internal

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108 Ibid., 418; for the petition, see: John Steele, S. Shelton, James Brown, 2nd, D.B. Huntington, &c &c &c “Petition to the Stake High Council, Great Salt Lake City,” 2 November 1847 in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 418.
conflicts that had plagued and divided the loyalties of the Mormon soldiers during their stint in the army. The soldiers had failed to oust Lieutenant Smith after the death of Captain Allen, and though there was likely not much the Mormon soldiers could have done to prevent that, it remained a sore issue for Brigham Young, who felt that his commands had been flagrantly disobeyed. Young had also specifically prohibited any physical division of the Mormon Battalion, so the fact that the Mormon officers had neglected to prevent the sick and family detachments from being sent away was another instance of the soldiers’ alleged insubordination to their religious leader.

It is likely for these reasons that the harshest critic of the Mormon Battalion was Brigham Young himself, the man who had originally encouraged the men to enlist and without whom the unit would not have existed. While visiting Winter Quarters in 1848, Young intervened in a dispute between Lee and a man who had allegedly received Lee’s soldier income while he was still enlisted. Lee demanded that the man repay his debts, though once the matter reached the ecclesiastical court, Lee agreed to drop the issue. Although he was not directly involved in the settlement, Young demanded that Lee receive payment due to his service for the Church. According to Lee, however, Young then suddenly launched into a tirade wherein he exclaimed that “the lowest scrapings of Hell were in that Bot [battalion,]” and that the soldiers’ wives had done nothing but plague Young and other Church leaders with lies and “Tatle[s]” in order to squeeze money from the families who had benefitted from the soldier’s sacrificed military paychecks. Young reportedly complained that the veterans had “become Idol, Lazy, and indolent and with very few exceptions are dissipated, indulging in vice and wickedness.” Lee also recorded that Young reproached the former soldiers for corrupting the morals of the young females,
perhaps in reference to the risqué Spanish Rusty and the young women’s romantic enthusiasm for men they might have considered to be war heroes.\textsuperscript{109}

The questionable manner in which the battalion’s earnings were disposed and the care, or lack of it, provided for the wives and children of soldiers was an enduring controversy within the Mormon community. Veteran Sergeant Alexander McCord wrote in his affidavit that Young had failed to uphold the promises he made to the soldiers’ families, and when the wives appealed to Young for assistance, Young had “laughed, mimicked, and made fun of them on the public stand; showing how they cried and whined.”\textsuperscript{110}

Young’s resentment toward the veterans and their families might have been due to the unending questioning and complaints Young received in regard to his treatment of the soldiers and their families both during and after the war. The anger exhibited by the veterans was largely driven by concern over the money they sent back during their service, but there was also frustration over the promises that Young made back in 1846. Everyone remembered, especially the veterans and their families, whom Young had promised that if

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 422-23. It is very likely that Young was willing to side with John D. Lee because of his position in the Council of the Fifty and their adopted relationship, rather than because Young actually agreed with his claim. Young’s complaints of the soldiers’ wives is likely due more to his blatant sexism rather than the fact that they were connected to the battalion veterans. In the same tirade wherein Young launched his complaints against the battalion, he also made it clear what he thought of the complaints lodged against him by the soldiers’ wives when he quipped “Great God! Could women Tramel me in this manner? NO! All their council & wisdom (although there are many good women) don’t weigh as much with me as the weight of a Fly Tird…It is not a woman’s place to council her Husband & the moment a man follows a woman he is led astray & will go down to Hell unless he retracts his stepts,” Ibid., 423.

\textsuperscript{110} Alexander McCord, Affidavit, 4 May 1864, U.S. Superior Court, Utah, quoted in Bagley and Bigler, \textit{Army of Israel}, 422. It has been said that the only money that existed in the Salt Lake Valley during this time was in Brown’s hands, and Young then used that money, which totaled approximately $2,000 to buy a parcel of land called “Goodyear Property” as a Mexican land grant. Mormon Battalion veteran Sgt. Alexander McCord swore that Young failed to live up to his promises to support the battalion and their families and use their pay to take the families west. This caused a lot of contention, as discharged soldiers had to march back to Iowa to be with their families, despite Young’s guarantee that they would be waiting for them in Utah.
they hearkened to God’s commandments and maintained their faith, that none of the soldiers would perish. When dozens of men ended up meeting their death during their time with the battalion, an explanation was demanded by some of those who had been left behind. A divine explanation of the role and purpose of the Mormon Battalion was asked of Young by those who bore the heavy burden of war and its residual effects.

Margaret Scott, whose brother James had died before the battalion reached California, wrote an emotional letter to Young that clearly stated the reason for her distress. James had been a young man, she wrote, who was exemplary in his faith, education, and personal conduct. These were traits that had been affirmed by his comrades, and she encouraged Young to speak to them should he want verification of James’s behavior. He had not wanted to go; she claimed that her brother’s desire had been to stay with his only sister. Like so many other hesitant men, James had agreed to volunteer, “But not until he had consulted you privately” and was swayed when Young’s advice “publicly and privately was go.” Both James and Margaret felt confident in the decision only because Young had promised that should the volunteers go in faith, not one of them would die. Yet James had died and left her alone, and she repeatedly mourned “Why O why has he fallen?” Rather pointedly, Margaret demanded of Young “that you will not, you can not, refuse me your teachings on the probable cause of his death.” Understanding her brother’s untimely passing was the only way to console the bleeding heart, Margaret cried. She pondered in her letter “What course will the Church pursue relative to the memory of those that had fallen.” No record exists of any reply by Brigham Young to James’ grieving sister, but he later remarked that, “as true as the almighty lives; if the Battalion had done as I told them in every particular, there would not have fallen one man in that service.” Such words surely
could not have comforted the soldiers or their grieving families. However, that was all the Young agreed to say concerning the matter, and if he, speaking as God’s representative, claimed that the deaths were due to the soldiers’ lack of faith, then what other explanation was there?¹¹¹

Such derision toward the former soldiers was turbulent while it lasted, but it did not retain its potency forever. On many occasions, Young’s temper was not directed at the soldiers, but rather at the government that had ordered their enlistment. When the first sick detachment reached Salt Lake on July 29, 1847, just days after Young had arrived in the valley, the Mormon president greeted them and thanked the returned soldiers for saving the people. Had the battalion not been formed, he surmised, Missouri would have sent three thousand men to wipe the Saints out of existence. Apparently, Young had given this some thought, because the day before the detachment arrived, he had decried the battalion as nothing more than a tyrannical attempt by Polk to lure the men away from the Mormon community in order to destroy the remaining women and children.

Conveniently forgotten was the fact that Young had been searching for such an opportunity for years. When he was approached by Captain Allen at Council Bluffs back in 1846, Young had wholeheartedly supported the organization of the Mormon military unit. When he wrote letters of assurance to the other pockets of Mormon refugees fleeing

¹¹¹ Margaret L. Scott to Brigham Young, 17 September 1848, in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 424-25; Young is quoted in Tyler, Concise History, 353. The implications of a Mormon Battalion soldier’s death while on the journey to California were profound, for if they had truly died due to disobedience, their eternal salvation would be compromised in the afterlife. This consequence extended beyond just the soldier, as any relatives, either alive or already passed on, would be separated from the wayward spirit of the soldier. This would have been particularly troubling to widows, as the salvation of Mormon women was dependent upon that of their husbands. Should he fail to obtain the highest glory in the Kingdom of Heaven, she would as well, unless she remarried during her earthly life.
Illinois that summer, he guaranteed that the government was genuinely attempting a form of friendship, and that “the President wants us to do good, and secure our confidence.” It is possible that even in the early days of the battalion’s formation that Young was wary of these governmental overtures of geniality, as he did present the call for volunteers as an idea formulated by the government and not by the Church. He iterated that the Mormon Battalion was a means of conforming to an order issued by the government, and a necessary one if the Mormons wished to worship freely and without fear of persecution. Mormon enlistment in the U.S. Army was something that must be done, rather than should.112

Over the years, Brigham Young’s paranoia of governmental plots waxed and waned according to the political and cultural atmosphere, especially during the 1850s, when the federal government and territorial government of Utah came to blows over the issue of polygamy. In 1848, Young embellished the plot when he told the veterans that, although President Polk had been inclined to help the Mormons, “those around him who felt vindictive toward us…thought themselves wise enough to lay plans to accomplish our destruction.” Young laid the bulk of the blame upon Missouri Senator Thomas H. Benton, whom Young accused of lashing out in order to fulfill a vendetta that Benton had supposedly harbored since the mid-1830s. Though perhaps not entirely without merit, Young’s fears and assumptions were misplaced and became more distorted over time.

Nearly ten years after the Mormon Battalion had been organized, the federal government and Utah’s territorial leaders came to blows over cultural differences. This conflict, known as the Utah War, was allegedly an attempt to force the Mormons to

112 Brigham Young to Samuel Bent and Council and the Saints at Garden Grove, Council Bluffs, in Journal History, 7 July 1846; Tyler, Concise History, 117.
abandon their practice of polygamy. The U.S. government resumed its role as an enemy of the Mormon Church, and during this time Young was more convinced than ever that angry Missourians, under the guidance of Senator Benton, had been the ones spearheading the Mormon enlistment the entire time. Benton’s ill-devised plot, Young surmised, was for Polk to command the Mormons to volunteer for the army in the hopes none would actually enlist. The Mormons’ refusal to adhere to an order issued by the president would have provided Benton and the Missourians a perfect opportunity “to call upon the militia of Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri to wipe this people out of existence” on the charge of treason. Under these circumstances, Young declared, the beleaguered Mormons had no alternative but “to comply with the unjust demand upon us for troops.” At some point, Young claimed that this story had been verified by Thomas L. Kane, who had supposedly had an argument with the Missouri senator over this very issue. Ultimately, Benton and Polk failed at their “tyrannical requisition” and plans for committing a large-scale Mormon massacre, Young recognized, but only because he had the foresight to uncover the plot and “beat them at their own game.”

For nearly a decade after the Mormon Battalion’s discharge, the Mormon president and the battalion veterans co-existed on shaky ground. Then, in 1855, Brigham Young once again found a way to harness the symbolism and manpower of the Mormon Battalion for his and, arguably, the community’s benefit. In the summer of 1854, approximately three hundred U.S. soldiers under the direction of Colonel Edward J. Steptoe were sent to survey a military road in the Utah territory. Steptoe had also been offered an appointment as

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113 Tyler, *Concise History*, 352. The quote “beat them at their own game” was spoken during the first Mormon Battalion reunion in 1855.
territorial governor of Utah, so his presence in Salt Lake was rather unsettling for the Mormon community. Territorial governments were appointed by the federal government, and should Young’s governorship be given to Steptoe, the Mormons would essentially lose control of their territory and fall under the tyranny of a Gentile. The cold interactions between the U.S. military personnel and the Mormons did little to improve the relationship between Mormons and Gentiles in that region or elsewhere. Although Steptoe declined the appointment in Utah, his presence caused many, particularly Brigham Young, to consider the military situation of the Mormon community. Should tensions have escalated between the U.S. soldiers and the people of Utah, the latter would have been virtually defenseless. With that in mind, Young took it upon himself to immediately remedy his relationship with the closest available entity he had to a trained and functioning military unit: the Mormon Battalion veterans. Though these soldiers had never engaged in combat with another organized military unit, they were familiar with military procedure and had retained all of the weapons provided to them during their enlistment.

As soon as Young realized that he had trained military veterans at his disposal, acted swiftly to obtain their good graces by holding a reunion for the Mormon Battalion soldiers. This lavish party was held before Steptoe and his men departed the territory, and was an opportunity for Young to showcase his military strength in a way that would be obvious to Steptoe, but not openly threatening or malicious. The celebration lasted two full days, and on February 6 and 7, 1855, hundreds feasted, danced, sang, and reveled in memories that honored the Mormon Battalion. On the evening of the first night, Young gave a blunt but impassioned speech that called attention to the discord that existed between himself and the veterans. “Perhaps,” he said, “there may have been remarks made”
that were not particularly tasteful, and surely there will still some soldiers who felt belittled or their service only lightly esteemed. All of this, he said, was just a misunderstanding. After once again telling the story of how Senator Benton and President Polk had failed to destroy the Mormons, Young finally offered praise to the battalion, albeit conditionally. The men who volunteered, he said, did so with good intentions and out of a righteous obedience. However, he could not resist adding that his knowledge of the behavior of many soldiers during their enlistment was “not justified before the Lord,” an observation he claimed caused him to weep. “But,” he added, “perhaps no other set of men, under the same circumstances, would have done better.” It was the most cordial praise Young had offered the veterans in a decade.\footnote{Brigham Young’s changing opinion of the Mormon Battalion and his speech delivered at the 1855 reunion is found in Bagley and Bigler, *Army of Israel*, 428-31.}

The festivities were a smashing success, and it was decided that a reunion should be held every year. The animosities that had once existed between the Mormon community and former soldiers seemed to have melted away, replaced by romantic notions of sacrifice and heroism. Soldiers began to mingle among each other once again, reminiscing about their former comrades and military escapades. James Brown swore that the battalion’s legacy was to avenge the injustices the Mormons had endured, and that none should rest until this was accomplished. After many more toasts, the battalion offered their final tribute to their leader Brigham Young, “The bumper of bumpers. May he ever bump his enemies and bumper his friends, and the Mormon Battalion will help him.” Though Young maintained his paranoia over the origins of the unit, the battalion veterans were no longer the objects of his anger. He conceded in 1862 that the men of the battalion had all served
faithfully, and he could “never think of that little company of men without the next thoughts being, ‘God bless them for ever and for ever.’”

As repulsed as he would be with the comparison, the president of the Mormon Church had much in common with the president of the United States. Both were social and political opportunists and knew how to appeal to those who did not agree with their line of thinking. Both Young and Polk did this particularly well in regard to the formation of the Mormon Battalion. Though the battalion had not been his own idea, Polk presented it to the Mormons’ advocate Jesse Little as an opportunity for the Mormons to move west, though really it was a way for the federal government to monitor their movement and ensure their loyalty. Young, who also had to endorse an idea that was not his, presented the call for enlistment as an offer of friendship from the government and a way to demonstrate the Mormons’ loyalty to their country and Church. In reality, Young was banking on the battalion as an opportunity to do exactly what Polk had mentioned on a superficial level: move the Mormons west, but out of reach of U.S. authoritarian oversight. The lure of the west appealed to both men, and they both manufactured justifications for taking land by making it seem culturally and politically expedient to do so. Neither was spared from the Anglo-American racial superiority complex that permeated American nationalism in the nineteenth century, particularly during the Mexican-American War. Both Brigham Young and James K. Polk were acting on precedents that had been in the

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115 Ibid., 431. Young’s final sentiments regarding the Mormon Battalion were recorded by him in Brigham Young, “The Persecution of the Saints,” Journal of Discourses, 8 March 1863, reproduced in Bagley and Bigler, Army of Israel, 439.
making since the days of American colonialism and were embodied in the American notion of Manifest Destiny.
CONCLUSION

Each summer, Mormon youth groups from various locations across the United States don pioneer garb and pull handcarts for dozens of miles in remote areas of the country. The purpose of this activity, referred to as “Trek” within the Mormon Community, is to experience and pay homage to the Mormon pioneers of the nineteenth century. One of the highlighted events of this excursion is the Women’s Pull, wherein the female participants pull the handcarts while the male participants learn military etiquette and the history of the Mormon Battalion. After a brief introduction, the boys flank either side of the handcart path while the girls manage the rocky and irregular road on their own. In an online YouTube video, some of these faithful youth members describe this particular experience as the most challenging but rewarding aspect of Trek. The Women’s Pull is meant to recreate the situation that many Mormons found themselves in during the Mexican War: without their strongest men, and they were left to cross the western deserts on their own.116

The elements emphasized in the Women’s Pull go beyond an appreciation for the sacrifice and strength required of the Mormons during the Mexican-American War. Mormon youth are encouraged to contemplate the enduring patriotism exhibited by the Mormon Battalion and the soldiers who loved their country so much that they were willing to abandon their families. The belief that some faithful Mormons were overcome

with a desire to serve their country in 1846 is reinforced by the Mormon Trek experience, but not entirely grounded in historical accuracy. Without question, the participants in Trek might be familiar with military service and displays of patriotism, and perhaps the notion of leaving family and friends in order to join the U.S. military is not one that is completely foreign to them. But for the Mormons of 1846, being asked to abandon their families in order to serve a nation that had failed to assist in their time of need was, at least initially, undeniably absurd. Nevertheless, five hundred Mormon men ultimately agreed to enlist in the U.S. Army and slowly made their way toward California. By doing so, they were aiding President James K. Polk and many other aggressive expansionists in their fulfilment of an American Manifest Destiny.

Perceptions of the Mormon Battalion’s experience and legacy at the time of its formation as compared to ten years later are strikingly different. The Mormon Battalion reunion of 1856 was not the last time historical memory would be molded to accommodate personal and political agendas. The legacy, purpose, and memory of the Mormon Battalion was continually reassessed up through the twenty-first century by Mormon and civic leaders alike. The memorials of the Mormon Battalion in New Mexico and California weave a picture of patriotism and religious and secular cooperation, an image that is reinforced in the Mormon youth Trek. Tracing the changing collective memory of the battalion would be a challenging project, but one that would positively influence the historiography of the Mormon Battalion.

Also briefly mentioned in this thesis but deserving of greater recognition are the women and children who accompanied the Mormon Battalion on its continental journey. The role of women in the Mormon Church in general sheds light on perceptions of
gender roles and masculinity that go beyond the experience of the Mormon Battalion, and they were doubtless rooted in ideologies espoused by other nineteenth century Americans. The practice of polygamy is perhaps the most telling of Mormon gender roles, constructs of masculinity, and the influence of a patriarchal leadership. Examining the ways that masculinity and patriarchal roles were enforced in the Mormon Church in comparison to popular American culture might show that Manifest Destiny influenced the practice of polygamy. Polygamy was certainly an exertion of individual desires, and the idea of women being akin to property and the stipulations for “ownership” of either would certainly provoke an interesting discussion.  

The ideology behind Manifest Destiny when understood in the broader context of American history may seem archaic and incompatible with twenty-first century notions of patriotism. But if the events of the Mexican-American War and the Mormon Battalion tell us anything, it is that Manifest Destiny was a fluid notion. It was, and perhaps still is, capable of adapting to the cultural and political demands of the moment, and can accommodate a wide variety of definitions. A careful study of the participants of the Mormon Battalion and the war in which they served reveal that Manifest Destiny is embedded within American culture. Though it may evolve over time and become a vehicle for new ideologies, it continues to be harnessed by those who have the ability to shape its power and legacy for their own benefit.

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