

RESPECTABLE ASSASSINS: A COLLECTIVE
BIOGRAPHY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC
STUDY OF THE CARTHAGE MOB

by

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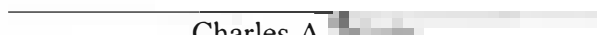
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ABSTRACT

This study disputes the general belief that the men in the Carthage mob were rabble-rousers from the lowest socio-economic ranks of society. Although this characterization may accurately describe a small number of the participants, the mob overwhelmingly consisted of men who ranked amongst the middle and upper societal classes. In fact, a defining number were professionals, leading businessmen, and/or politicians in Hancock County.

This study also disputes the notion that those responsible for the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith suffered horrific fates. Collectively speaking, the mob participants lived normal life spans during which they prospered economically. Moreover, many enjoyed successful careers and held political office after their participation at Carthage.

These findings create a new and more accurate portrait of the Carthage mob, one that closely conforms to that of other antebellum mobs. A lack of adequate law enforcement, widely held notions regarding popular sovereignty, and residual post-Revolutionary War fervor combined to create an era in which vigilante mobs were common and largely supported by the general antebellum populous. Additional factors, such as widespread anti-Mormon ideologies and local power struggles, also influenced the Carthage mob.

This thesis is dedicated to my children who are a constant reminder that being a mother is the best thing I will ever do in my life, my parents who instilled within me a love of God and a belief in His ability to work miracles, and my husband who has made all my dreams come true.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| ABSTRACT..... | iv |
| LIST OF TABLES..... | vii |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| MORMON CHURCH HISTORY..... | 7 |
| HANCOCK COUNTY HISTORY..... | 15 |
| IDENTIFYING MEMBERS OF THE CARTHAGE MOB..... | 21 |
| A COLLECTIVE PORTRAIT OF THE MOB..... | 31 |
| THE MOB AFTER CARTHAGE..... | 45 |
| LUNDWALL..... | 51 |
| WHY?..... | 54 |
| SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS..... | 67 |
| SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 69 |

LIST OF TABLES

| <u>Table</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| 1. Comparison of William Clayton and Willard Richards' Lists..... | 23 |
| 2. Men Named by Backenstos | 30 |
| 3. Known Geographic Origins of Mob..... | 34 |
| 4. Known Occupations of Mob..... | 36 |
| 5. Public Offices Held by Carthage Mob Participants 1834-1856..... | 39 |
| 6. Public Offices Sought but Lost by Mob Participants 1834-1856..... | 41 |

INTRODUCTION

On June 27, 1844, in the Carthage, Illinois, jailhouse, the lives of Joseph Smith, Jr. (founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) and his brother Hyrum came to a violent end. The Smith brothers were in prison awaiting trial for treason, having surrendered to local authorities three days earlier. The initial charge was rioting; however, when bail for the rioting charge was quickly posted, the brothers were charged with treason and, consequently, imprisoned without bail. Thus, they were forced to remain in Carthage despite the fact that local hostility towards the Smiths was at a boiling point, and numerous threats had been made on their lives. On the fateful afternoon, shortly after 5:00 p.m., the prison guards offered virtually no resistance as a mob, over two hundred men strong, stormed the jail.¹ In the jailhouse with the prisoners were friends John Taylor and Willard Richards. Taylor was severely wounded in the attack, but

¹ Eyewitnesses state the mob consisted of anywhere from thirty to four hundred men. Since the mob was comprised of six local militia units, each consisting of thirty to sixty men, “over two hundred” is the most credible figure. See: Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2005), 393; Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister, *Junius and Joseph: Presidential Politics and the Assassination of the First Mormon Prophet* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005), 196; O. H. Browning Notes, Carthage, Illinois, October, 1844, P13, f41; Nelson Bates Journal, 1834-1879, P26-1, f1; Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B.H. Roberts, 2d ed. Rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 6 vols. Published 1902-12, Vol. 7 published 1932; 1980 printing), 7:142-45, hereafter cited as Smith, *History of the Church*; Dallin H. Oaks, Transcription of Thomas C. Sharp’s Documents Relating to the Mormans [sic], Dallin H. Oaks Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, MS 5260 1, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, comps., *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1995), 229.

Richards escaped with minor injuries. Both Smith brothers were shot and killed.²

The murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith occurred amid a national wave of mob violence. According to historian Michael Feldberg, “The 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s were . . . marked by a higher *frequency* and variety of . . . collective violence and disorder among private groups than was any equivalent period of time in the nation’s past.”³ This violence had no geographic bounds; it infiltrated northern, southern, eastern, western, urban, rural, and frontier America. Or, as prominent newspaper editor and writer Hezekiah Niles commented in 1835, “a spirit of riot . . . prevails in every quarter.”⁴ Two years later Abraham Lincoln expressed a similar opinion when he stated that mobs “have pervaded the country from New England to Louisiana. . . . Alike they spring up among the pleasure-hunting masters of southern slaves, and the order-loving citizens of the land of steady habits.”⁵ In terms of numbers, historian David A. Grimsted found evidence of over 1,261 riots between 1828 and 1861.⁶ Victims of this violence were burned at the stake, castrated, scalped, tarred and feathered, and killed. Mormon church

² Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:97-112; Joseph L. Lyon and David W. Lyon, “Physical Evidence at Carthage Jail and What It Reveals about the Assassination of Joseph and Hyrum Smith,” *BYU Studies* 47, no. 4 (2008), 5-50; O. H. Browning Notes, Carthage, Illinois, October, 1844, P13, f41, Community of Christ Library-Archives; Nelson Bates Journal, 1834-1879, P26-1, f1, Community of Christ Library-Archives; Thomas L. Barnes, [Account of Mormons in Illinois and Killing of Joseph Smith] 1 November 1897, Ukiah, California, holograph original, Huntington Library, San Marino California; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 549-50; Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 393-98.

³ Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 5-6.

⁴ Hezekiah Niles, ed., *Niles’ Weekly Register* 48 (August 22, 1835): 439

⁵ Paul M. Angle and Earl Schenck Miers, comps., *The Living Lincoln: The Man and His Times, in His Own Words* (New Brunswick, NJ: The Trustees of Rutgers College, 1955), 21.

⁶ David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), viii.

members were objects of mob violence on a number of occasions. In addition to the murders at Carthage Jail, Joseph Smith and his followers were driven from Ohio, Missouri, and eventually Illinois.

Antebellum violence received little scholarly attention until after Watts and other riots of the 1960s.⁷ Since then, several publications on the subject have appeared. The most significant of these is Leonard L. Richards' "*Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*." Richards studied 239 men involved in the Utica and Cincinnati anti-abolitionist riots. He found that while men of lesser social rank, "the rabble" and "the reprobates," often participated in anti-abolitionist activity, they seldom initiated it.⁸ Instead, it was "gentlemen of property and standing" who were the leaders and organizers of anti-abolitionist activity, and who constituted three-quarters of mob participants.

Although subsequent studies demonstrated that there were some labor, inner city, and other rioting cohorts that do not fit Richards' profile, most antebellum mobs did. This holds particularly true for vigilante mobs, or those extralegal groups who combined to take the law into their own hands. One such example is the infamous San Francisco vigilance committee of 1856 that was led by "the most eminent local community leaders."⁹ In fact, virtually all vigilante mobs fit Richards' profile because, as historian Richard Maxwell Brown explains, it was "the elite group of leading businessmen, planters, and professionals" in each

⁷ David Grimsted, "Making Violence Relevant," review of *Strain of Violence and Vigilantism*, by Richard Maxwell Brown, *Reviews in American History* 4 (Sep 1976): 331.

⁸ Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 132.

⁹ Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 97.

community that had “the greatest stake in [retaining] the social status quo.”¹⁰

In regard to the mob that killed the Smith brothers, only one publication has considered it in depth — N. B. Lundwall’s 1952 book, *Fate of the Persecutors of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. The basic theme of *Fate of the Persecutors* is that Joseph Smith was truly a prophet and those who persecuted and killed him were punished by God. Through sworn affidavits, letters, diaries, published histories, and other records, Lundwall tells the fate of thirty-one Carthage mob members, some of which were eaten alive by worms; had their bones devoured by wild beasts; or, died penniless, homeless, and alone.¹¹

Lundwall’s book has been quite popular in Mormon culture. It was first published in 1952, and was reprinted for nearly thirty years. Over twenty thousand copies were sold, and virtually every major library in Utah currently owns at least one copy.¹² The Salt Lake City Library system is the exception, having had all of its copies stolen. This is not surprising since each copy of *Fate of the Persecutors* is now worth between thirty and one hundred dollars.¹³ Despite its collectible status, the book is still widely read in the Mormon community. In fact, Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library has seven copies, six of which were

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹¹ N. B. Lundwall, *Fate of the Persecutors of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1952), 294, 297, 303, 305, 311, 314, 315, 328, 334, 335.

¹² Marvin Wallin (former co-owner and manager of Bookcraft Publishers, Salt Lake City, Utah), in discussion with the author, April 11, 2006.

¹³ Book purchaser (Sam Weller’s Zion Book Store, Salt Lake City, Utah), in discussion with the author, April 19, 2006.

checked out in the spring of 2006.¹⁴

Regardless of its popularity among laymen, historians regard *Fate of the Persecutors* as inaccurate and sensational. Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill's *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* specifically discredits it, noting that contrary to "Utah myth" the five men who were tried (and acquitted) for the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and three other men proven to be leaders in the murder plot, would enjoy successful careers.¹⁵ Yet, Oaks and Hill scrutinize only eight members of the mob, just 4 percent of the more than two hundred men who stormed the jail and murdered the Smith brothers. In the absence of evidence, *Fate of the Persecutors* still commands respect among the LDS faithful. This study seeks to evaluate N.B. Lundwall's conclusions in light of Leonard Richard's findings about the respectability of the antebellum mob members he studied. Were the Smith brothers' persecutors mere frontier rabble that died horrible deaths, seemingly cursed for their bloody deeds or, as Richards found with his anti-abolition mobs, were they men of prominence who enjoyed positions of status within their communities despite (or perhaps because of) their participation in mob activities? Moving the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith from its narrow Mormon context to a position within the broader framework of antebellum

¹⁴ Circulation Desk Librarian (Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah), in discussion with the author, April 19, 2006.

¹⁵ Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 217, 219. A second publication debunking Lundwall's claims is Robert E. Poulsen's "Fate of the Persecutors of Joseph Smith: Transmutations of an American Myth," published in *Dialogue Magazine* 11, no. 4 (winter 1978): 63-70. Poulsen argues only that Lundwall's book is "probably not historically authentic" and then focuses the bulk of his article on other topics he describes as Mormon myths and legends. The only evidences he cites for his claims against Lundwall are *Carthage Conspiracy* and some legends of severe suffering from Mormon and American folklore.

American violence will bring the answers to these questions into sharper focus and simultaneously imbue the event with new meaning.

This study will focus on the Carthage mob and construct a collective biography of its known participants. Census records, local histories, court records, and church records reveal important details about occupation, socio-economic status, marital status, age, and place of birth of mob members. This information will then serve as a base line to ascertain if these men's lives were dramatically altered after participating in Smith's murder. Because no scholarly in-depth analysis of the Carthage mob has been published, this paper serves a dual purpose. It places the mob within a broader context of ante-bellum violence and then tests it not only against popular Mormon perceptions, but also against established mob scholarship.

MORMON CHURCH HISTORY

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was officially organized on April 6, 1830, in Fayette, Seneca County, New York.¹⁶ Joseph Smith, Jr., founder and first President of the Church, was born on December 23, 1805, in Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont. The fifth of eleven children born to Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph, Jr., spent most of his childhood near Palmyra, New York, working on the small Smith family farm or hiring out to help his struggling family survive economically.¹⁷ This relatively simple and obscure life ended, however, when he proclaimed to the world that he had received heavenly visitations and translated a book of ancient scripture, The Book of Mormon, from gold plates given to him by an angel. Smith subsequently became the target of intense persecution from ministers, those seeking to steal the gold plates, and countless others. Nevertheless, a substantial number of people believed his proclamations and assisted Smith in officially organizing what would later become widely known as the Mormon Church.¹⁸

In 1831 Smith established the Church's main headquarters in Kirtland, Ohio, and also created a branch in Missouri. Members and converts were encouraged to

¹⁶ Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:75-79.

¹⁷ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 32-33.

¹⁸ Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:64; Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 109.

relocate to one of these two areas. Joseph Smith and his family settled in Kirtland where, for the next several years, the Church experienced limited but measurable success. Mormons built the Kirtland Temple, organized a “School of the Prophets,” and church membership grew to approximately two thousand.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the Church faced a multitude of challenges in Ohio. Very few local Ohioans joined, and many saw The Book of Mormon and Smith’s other theological claims as heretical. Moreover, the Church’s frequent support of Democratic Party candidates ignited the furor of Whig supporters. Years of simmering local conflict finally erupted in 1837 when the Kirtland Safety Society, a financial organization originally established by church leaders, collapsed. Angry creditors, hostile locals, and several prominent church members (many of whom had dissented after losing significant amounts of money in the Kirtland Bank failure) became a serious threat to Smith’s life. As a result, in January 1838 he was forced to flee Kirtland.²⁰ The main body of the Kirtland Saints followed later that year.

From Kirtland, Smith and the main body of the church moved to northern Missouri. The Church had originally created its Missouri settlement in and around Jackson County; however, due to fast rising local hostilities the sojourn there was short. In only a matter of months Jackson County residents deemed the rapidly growing population of Saints a threat to their community. Mormon merchants and

¹⁹ Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Causes of Mormon Non-Mormon Conflict in Hancock County, Illinois, 1839-1846" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1967), 6; Milton V. Backman, Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830-1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983), 140. The School of the Prophets was an educational institution created to provide doctrinal teachings to a select group of church leaders.

²⁰ Godfrey, "Causes of Mormon Non-Mormon Conflict in Hancock County, Illinois, 1839-1846," 6-9; Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 336-42.

tradesmen taking away business from established settlers was one factor in the conflict. Another factor was the potential political power of the large Mormon population, which, by July of 1833, consisted of about twelve hundred persons or nearly one-third the county population.²¹ Of particular concern was the fact that the Saints were largely anti-slavery and Missouri was a slave state. And lastly, church theology, was again, another source of conflict. As in Ohio, LDS doctrine clashed with traditional Protestant beliefs. Missouri locals were particularly concerned about the Mormons' belief that they would soon rule over a millennial world, "under the King of kings," from a central location soon to be built in Jackson County.²² To county residents, "the Saints seemed to be religious aliens threatening political domination."²³

Jackson County violence first erupted in the summer of 1833 when an angry mob attacked the Mormon printing office, store, and blacksmith shop; tarred and feathered two church members; and forced several church leaders to sign agreements to leave Missouri. The church sought legal protection, but to no avail.²⁴ On October 31, 1833, a mob of fifty attacked a Mormon settlement on the Big Blue River, brutally whipping several men and unroofing thirteen houses. Similar attacks occurred in other Mormon townships on the following two nights. With only a brief respite from the violence on Sunday November 3rd, the mob attacked again on

²¹ James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd Edition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 93.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

Monday November 4th, capturing a Mormon ferry on the Big Blue River. This incident sparked an armed confrontation in a cornfield between thirty or forty men from each side of the hostilities. One Mormon was killed, but this time so were two Missourians. The locals were enraged over the deaths of two of their own. They secured the assistance of the militia and spent the entire night gathering arms and ammunition for a general massacre of the Mormons. The Saints, however, avoided more bloodshed by agreeing to surrender their arms and leave the county within ten days.²⁵

Most of the Missouri Saints found refuge in Clay County, Missouri. The local population in Clay County was initially more tolerant of the Mormons than that of Jackson County, but their hospitality quickly waned. In June of 1836 concerned locals met to discuss their issues with the Mormons. Citing concerns similar to those of their Jackson County neighbors, they made it clear Mormons were no longer welcome in Clay County.²⁶ This time, however, a mutually agreed upon solution prevented violence—with the help of Clay County residents, Mormon Church members would relocate to a relatively uninhabited region north and east of their current location.²⁷ This agreement saw fruition, and by the end of 1836 the Missouri Saints had relocated and were already successful at establishing two counties, Caldwell and Daviess, in their new area.²⁸

²⁵ Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:433-36.

²⁶ Stephen C. LeSuer, "Missouri's Failed Compromise: The Creation of Caldwell County for the Mormons," *The Journal of Mormon History* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 117-118.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

Again, the church members began quickly building up their new residence and within a short time there were several bustling, rapidly growing communities. Far West, the most prosperous LDS settlement, had 150 homes, “4 dry good stores, 3 family grocery stores, half-a-dozen blacksmith shops, 2 hotels,” a printing shop, and a large schoolhouse that doubled as a church and courthouse.²⁹ Saints flocked to the new gathering place and within two years there were over 4,900 Mormons living in Caldwell County, alongside approximately 100 non-Mormons.³⁰

In March of 1838 Joseph Smith and other refugees from Kirtland began arriving in Caldwell and Daviess Counties. Their respite in Missouri was short lived, however, since a pattern of events, now familiar to Mormon Church members, was already taking shape. Church member Parley P. Pratt, who arrived in Far West in May 1838, described the situation thus:

War clouds began again to lower with dark and threatening aspect. Those who had combined against the laws in the adjoining counties, had long watched our increasing power and prosperity with jealousy, and with greedy and avaricious eyes. It was a common boast that, as soon as we had completed our extensive improvements, and made a plentiful crop, they would drive us from the State, and once more enrich themselves with the spoils.³¹

²⁸ John Hamer, “Mapping Mormon Settlement in Caldwell County, Missouri,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 9 (Spring 2008): 15-40; Stephen C. LeSuer, “Missouri’s Failed Compromise: The Creation of Caldwell County for the Mormons,” 134; Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:27-28; *The Handybook for Genealogists, United States of America*, 8th Ed. (Logan, UT: Everton Publishers, Inc., 1997), 143-4.

²⁹ *History of Caldwell and Livingston Counties, Missouri: Including a History of Their Townships, Towns, and Villages, Together with a Condensed History of Missouri . . . Biographical Sketches of Prominent Citizens; General and Local Statistics . . . Incidents and Reminiscences* (St. Louis: National Historical Co., 1886), 121.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

³¹ Parley P. Pratt, ed., *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1975), 174.

Hostilities with local residents were compounded by the fact that several highly respected Missouri Mormon leaders had become disaffected from the Church and had, subsequently, turned their attentions to filing lawsuits, condemning current leaders, and generally harassing the Saints. As tensions mounted many Church members became determined to use whatever means necessary to ensure that they would not be driven from their homes yet again. Even some Church leaders, who had discouraged any type of retaliation against persecution in the past, now openly called for violent responses to attacks. Particularly significant is Sidney Rigdon's July 4, 1838, speech given to a large congregation of Saints at Far West. Rigdon, then First Counselor to President Joseph Smith,³² told listeners that

We will bear it no more, our rights shall no more be trampled on with impunity. The man or the set of men, who attempts it, does it at the expense of their lives. And that mob that comes on us to disturb us; it shall be between us and them a war of extermination; for we will follow them, till the last drop of their blood is spilled, . . . We will never be the aggressors, we will infringe on the rights of no people; but shall stand for our own until death. . . . And we pledge this day to one another, our fortunes, our lives, and our sacred honors, to be delivered from the persecutions which we have had to endure, for the last nine years, or nearly that. Neither will we indulge any man, or set of men, in instituting vexatious law suits against us, to cheat us out of our just rights, if they attempt it we say wo unto them.³³

This type of rhetoric did little to protect the Mormon community. Instead, it further angered their Missouri enemies and led to increased violence. Over the next few months several of the Mormon settlements were attacked by mobs, and the residents were forced to flee. The Saints did attempt to defend themselves, albeit

³² *Church News* Editorial Staff with the Family and Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, eds., *2008 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Morning News, 2008), 68.

³³ Peter Crawley, "Two Rare Missouri Documents," *BYU Studies* 14 (Summer 1974): 527.

unsuccessfully. For example, David W. Patten, Mormon apostle and Missouri militia Captain, led a small band of soldiers in an effort to rescue three church members being held prisoner. The detachment ended up facing another Missouri militia in a battle that resulted in the death of one Missourian and two Mormons, one of which was Patten himself.³⁴ During this period some Mormons turned to vigilantism as a means of defense. The violent vigilante group they formed, commonly referred to as the Danites, sought to exact revenge against the Church's enemies by any means necessary; however, their aggressive activities did little to protect the Saints, and only served to increase hostilities.³⁵ Ultimately, the Saints were no match against the deep and government backed resources of the Missourians.

One particularly damaging blow came on October 27, 1838, when Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs issued his infamous "Order of Extermination." Reacting to one-sided reports that the Mormons were making "open war" upon the people of Missouri, Boggs decreed: "The Mormons must be treated as enemies and *must be exterminated* or driven from the state, if necessary for the public good."³⁶ In spite of Boggs' decree, the next day a small community of about thirty Mormon families on Shoal Creek made a peace treaty with militia leaders.³⁷ Only two days later, however, between two hundred and three hundred militiamen attacked the settlement

³⁴ Stephen C. LeSuer, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 125, 138-42.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁶ Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:175; Alexander L. Baugh, *A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense of Northern Missouri*, Dissertations in LDS History (Provo: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History and BYU Studies, 2000), 109.

³⁷ Alexander L. Baugh, *A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense of Northern Missouri*, 117.

and killed eighteen, including sixty-two-year-old Thomas McBride who was hacked to death with a corn cutter, and ten-year-old Sardius Smith who was discovered “cowering and trembling” beneath the furnace bellows of a blacksmith shop and was subsequently shot to death at point blank range while pleading for his life.³⁸

Although this massacre likely occurred without knowledge of Boggs’ extermination order, the Mormons in Far West viewed it as evidence of how far the Missourians were willing to go to bring about their removal, and, hoping to avoid the loss of more lives, essentially surrendered.³⁹ On November 1st the state militia rode into Far West and took custody of Joseph Smith and four other church leaders. Residents were then forced to give up their arms and watch as the militia ravaged both their town and some of their women.⁴⁰ Moreover, several hundred were compelled to sign away rights to their land. The Missourians quick purchase of this property suggests that one of their primary motivations in expelling the Mormons was to purchase improved land at public sale prices.⁴¹ Mob violence continued through early 1839 and by April nearly all of the LDS community had sought refuge in and around Quincy, Illinois.

³⁸ Ibid., 121-123.

³⁹ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 154-156, 158.

⁴¹ Ibid., 156.

HANCOCK COUNTY HISTORY

When the Saints arrived in western Illinois, they found themselves in an area whose history was very much a story of competing interest groups. Until 1815, when Congress set it aside as military bounty land for veterans of the War of 1812, Native Americans were virtually the sole inhabitants of the territory now known as Hancock County. After 1815 the area began attracting both southern and northern U.S. immigrants. In addition to competing amongst themselves for resources, these early settlers had to deal with large numbers of Blackhawk Indians who did not appreciate the steady stream of new settlers taking up residence in what they considered to be their territory. The Blackhawks fought fiercely to retain control of the area, but in September 1833 they were forced to concede their Illinois lands and subsequently left the state. Once the Indian Wars were over, immigration increased dramatically. In 1820 there was approximately 1 settler per square mile, which grew to 2.8 settlers per square mile in 1830, and by 1840 there were 8.5 settlers per square mile.⁴²

With the influx of immigrants came increasing power struggles. Due to the lack of adequate frontier law enforcement, bands of marauders were amongst the first to exert a measure of control over the area. Besides stealing horses and other items, these groups generally harassed the local population and even murdered when it suited

⁴² Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, First Paperback Edition, 1975), 16.

their purposes. They also had significant control over the court system and the few law enforcement officials. In fact, in 1841 when several marauders were finally jailed for infractions, others of their band burned the jailhouse to the ground in order to free them.⁴³ Weary and concerned for their own well-being amongst the rampant lawlessness, settlers saw no alternative but to arm themselves and form vigilante groups.

The area also faced economic troubles as it struggled to emerge from its frontier stage. The state of Illinois had invested heavily in a system of interrelated railroads and canals. However, soaring land prices and the economic panics of 1837 and 1839 put an end to the endeavor and left the state on the brink of bankruptcy. It was widely believed that large-scale immigration was the only way Illinois as a whole could save itself from ruin.⁴⁴ So, when the Mormons began to arrive in Hancock County in the late 1830s, they were given “a cordial, even enthusiastic welcome.”⁴⁵

There were also political reasons for welcoming the Mormon community to Hancock County. Due to the population and economic growth of the 1840s, Illinois, and the entire Midwest, acquired national political significance. Consequently, the region became “a kind of storm center for national politics.”⁴⁶ Hancock County was no exception to this political fervor. Several volatile issues such as slavery divided the Whig and Democratic agendas and encouraged impassioned alliances. In the late

⁴³ Thomas Ford, *History of Illinois* (Chicago: S.C. Griggs & Co., 1854), 231.

⁴⁴ Flanders, *Nauvoo*, 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 212.

1830s Hancock County voted Whig, but they did so against a statewide Democratic trend. Hancock's Whig supporters hoped to maintain their political power within the county and also sought to make alliances that would improve their position within the state. Conversely, Hancock County Democrats hoped to overturn Whig control of the area. It was during this critical political period that Mormon immigration to Hancock County began.

The Mormons, principally Democratic supporters in Missouri, had turned against the party after two bitter experiences. The first was Democratic Missouri Governor Lillburn Bogg's 1838 extermination order.⁴⁷ The second was Democratic President Martin Van Buren's refusal, in February 1840, to assist the Saints in seeking redress for their losses in Missouri. After these two events the Mormons shifted their support to the Whig Party. Hancock County Whigs, eager to expand their voting power, initially welcomed the powerful Mormon-voting bloc.⁴⁸

When the Mormons began arriving in the late 1830s, about 9,000 people lived in Hancock County.⁴⁹ Warsaw was one of the county's most prosperous towns, had a population of about eight hundred, and commanded most of the area business. The growing city had

2 steam saw mills, one steam merchant flouring mill of the first order, capable of manufacturing 80 to 100 barrels of superfine flour per day, one newspaper and job printing office, 12 stores, 3 hotels, 2 gunsmiths, 3 blacksmiths, 4 coopers, 2 cabinet makers, 1 tannery, 3 tailors, 1 bakery, 2 boot and shoe makers, 2 plasterers, and 2 wagons makers . . . 1 silver

⁴⁷ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 365.

⁴⁸ Hallwas and Launius, *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois*, 21.

⁴⁹ Hallwas and Launius, *Cultures in Conflict*, 18.

smith; 1 tin, cooper, and sheet iron manufactory, besides a great number of other mechanics, such as house carpenters and joiners, brick and stone masons, &c., 3 physicians, and the necessary complement of lawyers.⁵⁰

Mormon leaders purchased large tracts of land on both sides of the Mississippi and called on faithful Saints worldwide to gather to their new and prospering city of Nauvoo. By 1841 Nauvoo accounted for nearly half of the 22,559 residents of Hancock County. Adding in the rural population, the total number of Mormons in Hancock County was an estimated 15,000.⁵¹ The industrious Saints put their energies towards building up their new home, and Nauvoo, once uninhabitable swampland, rapidly became a beautiful and prosperous city.⁵² The local newspaper, the *Nauvoo Wasp*, boasted that the town had, amongst other industries, a match factory, a leather manufactory, a tanyard, several brickyards, a glove and strawbonnet shop, a brewery, a bakery and confectionery, a spinning-wheel maker, a cabinet maker, a printing office and book bindery, several tailors, weavers, cobblers, cordwainers, and wagoners.⁵³ Church leaders encouraged cultural arts and Nauvoo soon had brass bands, vocalists, and instrumentalists as well as a theater company providing regular performances.⁵⁴ In addition to craftsmen and artists, the Mormon community included doctors,

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁵¹ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 179.

⁵² Hallwas and Launius, *Cultures in Conflict*, 42-43.

⁵³ Flanders, *Nauvoo*, 154.

⁵⁴ Richard L. Jensen, "Transplanted to Zion: The Impact of British Latter-day Saint Immigration upon Nauvoo," *BYU Studies* 31, no. 1 (1991): 4; Nola Diane Smith, "Reading Across the Lines: Mormon Theatrical Formations in Nineteenth Century Nauvoo, Illinois" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 2001), 3.

midwives, dentists, lawyers, barbers, and undertakers;⁵⁵ and, educators immigrating to area made it possible to establish the University of the City of Nauvoo.⁵⁶

In sum, Nauvoo very quickly grew to be the largest city in the area, and it did not take long for this growth to arouse jealousies among residents of the rest of Hancock County.⁵⁷ In addition to feeling their own towns' successes diminished by that of Nauvoo's, many area residents also felt threatened economically.⁵⁸ Nauvoo was essentially a booming Mississippi River town and was economically "outpacing" other cities similarly located.⁵⁹ In fact, by 1842 farmers from as far as one hundred miles used Nauvoo's three gristmills exclusively.⁶⁰ Warsaw's citizens, in particular, "felt their town's loss of status and feared Nauvoo's rise would imperil their ambition to become an important Mississippi river port."⁶¹

Before long, several of the forces that had long been contenders for power in Hancock County united against a common enemy – the Mormons. The marauders who still inhabited the area cast blame upon the Mormons for many of their offenses.⁶² After

⁵⁵ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 160.

⁵⁶ Flanders, *Nauvoo*, 52; Hallwas and Launius, *Cultures in Conflict*, 26-27.

⁵⁷ Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*, 11; Kenneth H. Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 160.

⁵⁸ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 160; Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith The Mormon Prophet*, 2nd Edition (New York: Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc., 1995), 258-259; Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, 160.

⁵⁹ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 160.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, 160.

the Saints voted in the election of 1840 for candidates sympathetic to their cause, irrespective of party affiliation, both the Whigs and the Democrats became convinced that the Mormon vote was “potentially greater than their own” and, consequently, joined together to form an anti-Mormon political party in early 1841.⁶³ The “old citizens” of the county blamed the continuing economic problems on the Mormons who, from their point of view, had tried to build a community with too little capital and brought large numbers of unskilled immigrants into the area thereby placing too much stress on the local economy.⁶⁴ County newspapers, which had initially sympathized over the Mormon plight, now declared Joseph Smith to be a rogue dictator who exerted complete psychological control over his church members and sought to destroy all that was good and right in America.⁶⁵

The Mormons reacted to the growing resentment by, amongst other actions, destroying a press that was being used to print anti-Mormon literature and calling Nauvoo’s militia into action. These events only further infuriated Hancock County residents. Tensions mounted so high that even the 1844 murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith did little to assuage them. It was not until virtually all the Mormons were forcibly removed from the state in 1846 that Hancock County residents became mollified.⁶⁶

⁶² Kenneth W. Godfrey, “Crime and Punishment in Modern Nauvoo, 1839-1846,” *BYU Studies* 32, no. 1-2 (1991): 1-2.

⁶³ Flanders, *Nauvoo*, 221.

⁶⁴ Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, 159.

⁶⁵ *Warsaw Signal*, May 19, 1841, and June 9, 1841; *Alton Telegraph*, July 2, 1842, and July 23, 1842.

IDENTIFYING MEMBERS OF THE CARTHAGE MOB

The first step in studying those men who participated in the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith is, obviously, to identify them. This, however, is not an easy task. There are several lists of participants, not equally credible or confirming. Two very similar lists were created by Mormon Church members William Clayton and Willard Richards. As a close associate of Joseph Smith, who often acted as his scribe, Clayton was well informed of the public, and more private, happenings of the church. Nevertheless, it is unclear how he obtained the names of the twenty-nine people recorded in his journal, especially since he was in Nauvoo, not Carthage, when the murders occurred.⁶⁷ Early in the spring of 1844, church leaders became aware that a group of ex-Mormons led by William Law were plotting to take Joseph Smith's life.⁶⁸ Although it appears that most of the William Law group was not in Carthage when the mob attacked, the names of the men and women who were part of that plot appear on Clayton's list.⁶⁹ Clayton may have simply assumed these known conspirators were involved in the Carthage attack. Or, perhaps he failed to distinguish between those he

⁶⁷ William Clayton, "Journal," 28 June 1844, http://www.helpingmormons.org/TLC_Manti/RefLibraryFolder/Historical%20Documents/HistClaytonJournal/HistClayton1844-1.html (accessed 20 April 2005).

⁶⁸ Junius F. Wells, ed., "The Nauvoo Conspiracy," *Contributor* 5 (1884): 250.

⁶⁹ William Clayton, "Journal," 28 June 1844; Lyndon W. Cook, *William Law* (Grandin Publishing Co., 1994), 60.

believed to be instigators of the attack and the perpetrators. It is interesting, though, that Clayton specifically labels five men on his list “mobocrats” (none of whom was involved in the William Law plot). The names of these five men appear on other lists. They are: “Alexander Sympson, Thos. C. Sharp, Colonel Williams, Walter Bagby, and O.C. Skinner.”⁷⁰

Although William Clayton was not in Carthage when the Smith brothers were murdered, Willard Richards was. In fact, Richards was in the same room with the Smiths when the mob attacked. He was the only one to survive the incident relatively unharmed. However, his eyewitness accusation of the perpetrators is flawed, too similar to Clayton’s list not to suggest contamination. Table 1 shows both lists side by side. Richards’ list appears to be a shortened version of Clayton’s; particularly telling is the fact that all but one of the names appear in the same apparently random order.⁷¹ Possibly, the two collaborated on the list, or one created it and provided a copy for the other.⁷² Determining what actually happened, however, is complicated by the fact that the list attributed to Richards, available in the *History of the Church*, is not dated, thereby making it impossible to determine if it was created before or after the one attributed to Clayton.⁷³ Consequently, the true authorship of these two lists is unknown. They may very well have originated with Clayton, who was not an

⁷⁰ Clayton, “Journal,” 28 June 1844.

⁷¹ Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:145- 46.

⁷² There are, in reality, numerous possibilities regarding the similarities of these lists. One is that the compilers of the *History of the Church* made an error. Perhaps Willard Richards never compiled a list and the list credited to him was actually the one recorded by William Clayton in his journal.

⁷³ Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:145- 46.

Table 1

Comparison of William Clayton and Willard Richards' Lists

| William Clayton's List: | Willard Richards' List: |
|---|--------------------------------|
| William Law | William Law |
| Wilson Law | Wilson Law |
| Robert D. Foster | Robert D. Foster |
| Charles A. Foster | Charles A. Foster |
| Francis M. Higbee | Francis M. Higbee |
| Chancey L. Higbee | Chauncey L. Higbee |
| Austin Cowles | Joseph H. Jackson |
| Joseph H. Jackson | John M. Finch |
| John M. Finch | Wm. A. Rollason |
| Wm. A. Rollason | Wm. H. J. Marr |
| Wm. H. J. Marr | S. M. Marr |
| Sylvester Emmons. | Sylvester Emmons. |
| Alexander Sympton | Alexander Sympton |
| S. M. Marr | John Eagle |
| John Eagle | Henry O. Norton |
| Henry O. Norton | Augustine Spencer |
| Augustine Spencer | Charles Ivins and family |
| Charles Ivins and family | P. T. Rolfe |
| P. T. Rolfe | N.J. Higbee |
| N.J. Higbee | William Cook |
| William Cook | Sarah (wife of William Cook) |
| Sarah (wife of William Cook) | |
| James Blakeslee | |
| A band of mobocrats scattered through the country: | |
| Alexander Sympton | |
| Thos. C. Sharp | |
| Colonel Williams | |
| Walter Bagby | |
| O. C. Skinner | |

eyewitness to the murders and, therefore, obtained the names from an unknown source. There also remains the problem mentioned earlier—there are people on the list who were not in Carthage when the mob attacked. Thus, the Clayton/Richards list cannot be relied upon as a credible source.

Another list, of sorts, was created by John Taylor who was also in the room with the Smiths when the mob attacked. Although he was seriously wounded in the attack, Taylor survived and later wrote an account of the murders. Taylor's story is focused on the four Mormons in the jail; however, he does specifically state that "Captain Smith of the 'Carthage Greys' . . . assisted in the murder." Taylor also signed an affidavit before Justice of the Peace Aaron Johnson on September 21, 1844, that named Levy [sic] Williams and Thomas C. Sharp as participants in the murders.⁷⁴ The fact that Taylor was an eyewitness makes his account credible. Plus, the men he names were eventually tried for the murders.

The trial is another source of information on the Carthage mob. Five men were formally tried for the Smith brothers' murders: William N. Grover, Jacob C. Davis, Mark Aldrich, Thomas C. Sharp, and Levi Williams. John Wills or Wells, William Voras or Vorhees, and two men known only as Gallaher and Allen, were also charged with the murders; however, they fled and were never brought to trial.⁷⁵ Although the five men tried were clearly guilty, the anti-Mormon jury accepted the

⁷⁴ Oath in support of "Writ for Murder," dated September 21, 1844, in case file, *People v. Levi Williams*, Hancock County Courthouse, Carthage, IL, quoted in Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*, 38.

⁷⁵ Minutes of trial of members of mob who helped kill Joseph Smith 1844-1845, MS 264, carbon copy of typescript, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*, 51.

defense's argument that "no one individual could be responsible for deaths accomplished to satisfy the will of the people."⁷⁶ Consequently, all five were acquitted.⁷⁷

Still another list was created by Hancock County Sheriff Jacob Backenstos. Backenstos' list is the most extensive by far, containing the names of eighty-nine men. Lundwall included a copy of Backenstos' list in *Fate of the Persecutors*; however, it erroneously appears in the form of a letter addressed to Brigham Young and is dated June 29, 1844.⁷⁸ Because the list also contains notations regarding events occurring as late as November 1845, the earlier date is problematic and has led historians Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister to question its credibility.⁷⁹ Wicks and Foister's concerns are unwarranted, however, since the Lundwall version is inaccurate—the actual letter itself is undated. In fact, it was probably written in the spring of 1846 at the request of Willard Richards, who recorded in his journal on March 10, 1846, that he had sought such an item from Backenstos.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 415.

⁷⁷ Minutes of trial of members of mob who helped kill Joseph Smith 1844-1845. Mormons were deliberately excluded from the jury. See Thomas Ford, "Mormon Difficulties. Report of the governor in relation to the difficulties in Hancock County. Senate, Dec. 10, 1846," Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah Special Collections, Salt Lake City; Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 552.

⁷⁸ Lundwall, *Fate of the Persecutors*, 269-71. Lundwall's list, as well as a number of other secondary sources, contains two errors that originated in Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:142-144: John Maith should read John Marsh, and Nickerson Wright should read Hickerson Wright.

⁷⁹ Lundwall, *Fate of the Persecutors*, 269-70; Wicks and Foister, *Junius and Joseph*, 219, footnote 11.

⁸⁰ Jacob Backenstos letter to Willard Richards, Spring 1846, unprocessed document, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City [hereafter cited as Backenstos letter]; Ron Barney (Manager, Historical

Although dated nearly two years after the incident, Sheriff Backenstos' list appears to be highly credible for a number of reasons. First of all, Backenstos appears to have been fair and unbiased in regard to his duties as sheriff.⁸¹ He tried to protect Joseph Smith and the Mormon community from the extralegal activities of the mob, but he also arrested Mormons when necessary. In fact, one of his last actions as sheriff was to arrest Orrin Porter Rockwell for harassing "one of Joseph Smith's old enemies, Chauncy Higbee, while he conducted business in Nauvoo." When Rockwell pulled a gun on Backenstos, he turned to his deputy and stated, "'When he shoots me, kill him.' Faced with Backenstos' willingness to die doing his duty, Rockwell conceded: 'I will go with you.'"⁸² There is no reason to suppose Backenstos did not create the list of mob participants with the same even-handedness with which he carried out his law enforcement responsibilities, thereby enhancing the credibility of his list.

Other factors bolster the Backenstos' list. Most importantly, he seems to have had access to militia lists that no longer exist. Specifically, he states that his list includes the "*Roll of the Carthage Greys and Officers June 27th. A.D. 1844*,"⁸³ and that the militia companies of Captains Weir, J.C. Davis, Wm N. Grover, and Mark Aldrich were also active in the massacre at Carthage.⁸⁴ It should be noted that trial testimony

Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), e-mail message to David B. Marsh, April 27, 2006.

⁸¹ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 528; Omer (Greg) W. Whitman and James L. Varner, "Sheriff Jacob B. Backenstos: Defender of the Saints," *Journal of Mormon History* 29 (Spring 2003): 157.

⁸² Whitman and Varner, "Sheriff Backentos," 165.

⁸³ Italics added for emphasis.

clearly indicates at least portions of the aforementioned military units were present during the attack on Carthage Jail, and therefore serves to support Backenstos.

Backenstos' list also suggests that he was careful about whom he incriminated. Although he lists four military units by the name of their captain only, he notes that ten specific gentlemen, presumably regulars in one company, did not participate in the Carthage attack. Backenstos' list also leaves William Law and most of his conspirators off the list. He additionally notes that, "there are others of the smaller fry which I deem unworthy of notice, inasmuch as they were led on through the influence of the leaders, and whiskey."⁸⁵

Furthermore, Backenstos' list is remarkably thorough. All of the men tried for the murders appear on his list, as do the five "mobocrats" on the Clayton/Richards list. He also took the time to note the occupation and residence of most of the men he listed.⁸⁶

Backenstos' list has, so far, stood up to the scrutiny of independent corroboration. Besides substantiating that various military units were at the Carthage

⁸⁴ Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:142. Illinois Governor Thomas Ford had assigned the Carthage Greys the task of guarding the jail. Professed enemies of the Smith brothers, they feigned resistance when the mob arrived and then purportedly joined in on the assault. The other militia units were camped outside of Carthage when an order came from Governor Ford to disband. Although formally disbanded, the majority of these men then marched to the jail where the Smith brothers were being held. See Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 393; Minutes of trial of members of mob who helped kill Joseph Smith, 1844-1845.

⁸⁵ Backenstos Letter, 5.

⁸⁶ Backenstos did not include the names of the four men who were indicted but not tried for the murders—John Wills or Wells, William Voras or Vorhees, Gallaher, and Allen. The trial testimony indicates these men were relatively unknown to the other mob participants and quickly left the area after the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Backenstos may have not been familiar with these men, or they may have fallen into the category of men whom he considered "smaller fry . . . unworthy of notice inasmuch as they were led on through the influence of the leaders and whiskey." See Backenstos Letter.

jail, trial testimony confirms sixteen of the names on Backenstos' list, and biographical sketches in Hancock County histories, obituaries, and family histories verify an additional five.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the occupations he listed for mob members were compared to those available in the 1850 U.S. Federal Census and found to be accurate.⁸⁸

Backenstos' list also gains credibility from the fact that Willard Richards, who was present at Carthage Jail, wrote to him asking for a list of mob participants. Richards must have believed Backenstos capable of creating an accurate list. Moreover, professional historians such as Richard Bushman and Glen Leonard generally accept it as accurate.⁸⁹

Lundwall is another source for information about mob participants. He does not, however, provide anything of real value. Chapter One of *Fate of the Persecutors*, entitled "The Identity and Trial of the Murderers," includes a portion of trial testimony from a witness who named a number of mob members. This particular witness was, however, largely discredited under cross-examination.⁹⁰ Lundwall also includes Willard Richards' questionable list of mob participants and Backenstos' list, although

⁸⁷ Minutes of trial of members of mob who helped kill Joseph Smith 1844-1845; Thomas Gregg, *History of Hancock County, Illinois* (Chicago: Chas. C. Chapman & Co., 1880), 728, 858; Wilma Brunenn, *Pioneers of the Prairie* (Astoria, IL: Stevens Publishing, n.d.), 379; Robert M. Cochran, et al., *History of Hancock County, Illinois*, Illinois Sesquicentennial Edition (Hancock County: Hancock Board of Supervisors, 1968); Obituary of Thomas Box Griffiths, *The Carthage Republican*, January 25, 1911:4, <http://homepages.rootsweb.com/~laura/thomas.html> (accessed April 20, 2006); Kristi Hamilton (descendent of John McAuley), e-mail message to author, May 1, 2006.

⁸⁸ The 1850 census did include the occupations of certain men Backenstos noted as being engaged in "no business." These instances were not considered discrepancies.

⁸⁹ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 552; Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 413.

⁹⁰ Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*, 157.

Lundwall's version of the Sheriff's list does contain the errors mentioned above. Lundwall additionally lists twenty-five men whose names do not appear on any other lists. Unfortunately, virtually all of the evidence for these men is largely hearsay, rumor, and second and third hand accounts of people who "were acquainted" with someone who "was acquainted" with a mob member.⁹¹ For two of these twenty-five alleged mob participants, Brown and McCarty (no first names are given), Lundwall does proffer supposedly signed testimony from a witness who claims to have heard them confess to participation in the murders.⁹² However, the unreliability of Lundwall's other evidence and the absence of any confirming data make these final two names, and all of the twenty-five that do not appear on any other list, suspect.

Backenstos provides names for eighty-nine, or roughly 45 percent, of the over two hundred men in the mob, certainly enough to enable a study of the mob participants. To date, the names of the remaining 55 percent of the mob are either unknown or unsubstantiated. Since Backenstos' list seems to be the most thorough and credible of those available, the names thereon have been used to compile the collective biography of the Carthage mob. Table 2 lists the names of these eighty-nine men.

⁹¹ Some of these names may be accurate even though the supporting evidence is weak.

⁹² Lundwall, *Fate of the Persecutors*, 303, 317.

Table 2

Men Named by Backenstos⁹³

| | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Abernathy, William D. | Cole, Calvin | Hosford, Trueman | Smith, Robert F. |
| Aldrich, Mark | Dale, Richard | Jones, Edward | Stephens, Henry |
| Athey, J.W. | Dale, Thomas | Loring, Frederick | Stevenson, Lewis C. |
| Austin, Erastus S. | Davis, Jacob C. | Marsh, John W. | Street, Levi |
| Austin [Probably Francis B.] | Doolittle, LeGrand | Mathews, David W. | Sympson, Alexander |
| Backman, George | Douglass, William | Matthews, James B. | Thatcher, George W. |
| Bagby, Walter | Dunn, James E. | McAuley, John | Thompson, Albert |
| Baldwin, Edwin | Elliot, John C. | McClaughry, Matthews | Waggoner, George C. |
| Baldwin, William | Finch, John M. | Mellen, John D. | Warren, Calvin A. |
| Barkman, Anthony [or Backman] | Fleming, Samuel | Montague, John | Warren, W.B. |
| Barnes, James D. | Freeman, Elam Shaw | Morrison, Thomas | Wier, Captain |
| Barnes, Michael, Jr. | Garnett, Henry | Moss or Morse | Williams, Eli Hughes |
| Barnes, Thomas L. | Gettis, Thomas [or Geddis] | Prentiss, Lyman | Williams, Levi |
| Bartlett, Franklin J. | Gould, Emerson W. | Rand, Ebenezer | Williams, Samuel O. |
| Bartlett, Sylvester | Graves, Reuben | Reckard, Michael | Wilson, Clabourn |
| Beck, Jacob | Gregg, James | Reckard, Noah M. | Wilson, Crocket |
| Brattle, James W. | Griffits, Thomas Box | Rhodes, Franklin | Wilson, Harmon T. |
| Catlin, Joel | Grover, William N. | Rockwell, George | Wilson, John |
| Chiple, William B. | Hamilton, Marvin | Rollason, William H. | Wilson, Valentine |
| Four of the Chittendens [Most likely candidates: Abraham, Edward, George, Henry, William] | Hawley, Joseph | Sharp, Thomas Coke | Wood, James Henry |
| | Hay, Charles | Sherman, Jason H. | Worrell, Franklin A. |
| | Higbee, Francis M. | Skinner, Onias C. | Wright, Hickerson |

⁹³ More complete names were used where possible. See also footnote 27.

A COLLECTIVE PORTRAIT OF THE MOB

A common perception of mob violence is that it is perpetrated by “the rabble” or “the tail of society.” This same characterization is generally applied to the Carthage mob. In the introduction to the *History of the Church*, volume six, B.H. Roberts wrote the following about western Illinois mobs:

... it was largely the criminal element among the ‘old citizens’ that was arrayed against the Saints (with unprincipled politicians and a few bigoted and jealous religious leaders added), so was it the conservative and law-abiding portion of the community among whom they had many friends; and nearly all of whom were at least so far friendly with the Saints that they could not be induced to oppose them, much less join in acts of mob violence to the injury of their persons or property.⁹⁴

In *Carthage Conspiracy*, Oaks and Hill state that the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith were committed by a “respectable set of men;” however, their relatively limited focus on those who were put on trial does little to diminish the popular Mormon belief that the Carthage mob was composed of rabble and ruffians.⁹⁵ Yet, violence scholars contend that vigilante groups, like the Carthage mob, largely consisted of “gentlemen of property and standing” in their communities.⁹⁶

So, the question remains, what kind of men killed the Smith brothers? In order to answer that question, this study offers a socio-economic analysis of the

⁹⁴ Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:xxvii.

⁹⁵ Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*, 22; Gary Cook, *Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration*, dir. T.C. Christensen (Provo, UT: LDS Motion Picture Studio, 2005).

⁹⁶ Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*.

Carthage mob. Research uncovered at least some statistical information for seventy-six of the known mob participants. No additional information, besides that provided by Backenstos, could be found for thirteen. What emerges from the census, marriage, newspaper, and genealogical records is a clearer portrait of who the mob participants were and their positions within Hancock County political, social, and economic circles.

In regards to age, fifteen-year-old Marvin Hamilton, son of “Carthage Hotel” proprietor Artois Hamilton, was the youngest member of the mob;⁹⁷ fifty-eight year old Reuben Graves was the oldest;⁹⁸ and the average age of mob members was thirty-four.⁹⁹ To put their collective age in perspective, in 1840, when the federal decennial census was taken, 75 percent of Hancock County’s males were under thirty.¹⁰⁰ The mob’s average age in 1840 would have been thirty; therefore, the mob, as a collective cohort, was older than 75 percent of the males in their community. (The 1840 federal census was taken four years prior to the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith;

⁹⁷ Artoise Hamilton household, Hancock County, Illinois, 1850 U.S. Federal Census, stamped page no. 73, dwelling no. 45, family no. 45; “The Cholera Epidemic in Carthage 1851,” *The Carthage Republican*, September 11, 1878, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~bryant/obits/cholera.html>.

⁹⁸ Reuben Graves household, Hancock County, Illinois, 1850 U.S. Federal Census, stamped page no. 282, dwelling no. 181, family no. 181.

⁹⁹ Average age was calculated from approximate birth years found for seventy-six, or 85 percent, of the eighty-nine mob participants. Birth information was found in the following sources: *1840 U.S. Federal Census*, Hancock County, Illinois, population schedules; *1850 U.S. Federal Census*, Hancock County, Illinois, population schedules; Wicks and Foister, *Junius and Joseph*; Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*; Thomas Gregg, *History of Hancock County, Illinois* (Chicago: Chas. C. Chapman & Co., 1880); Wilma Brunenn, *Pioneers of the Prairie* (Astoria, IL: Stevens Publishing, n.d.); Robert M. Cochran, et al., *History of Hancock County, Illinois*, Illinois Sesquicentennial Edition (Hancock County: Hancock Board of Supervisors, 1968).

¹⁰⁰ *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, as obtained at the Department of State, from the Returns of the Sixth Census* (Washington: Thomas Allen, 1841), 84.

however, non-Mormon immigration into the county had virtually ceased between 1840 and 1844, so it serves as a good comparative model.)¹⁰¹ Calculated a different way, the median age in 1840 for Hancock County males falls somewhere within the census category of “fifteen to under twenty.”¹⁰² The median age of the mob was thirty in 1844, and therefore would have been twenty-six in 1840, or six to eleven years older than the county’s median age. In both instances, the collective Carthage mob was older than the typical Hancock County male. As demonstrated, there were men in their teens and early twenties that participated in the murders of the Smith brothers, but there were also a defining number who were much older.

In addition to the mob’s average age, at least 62 percent of the eighty-nine known mob members were (or had been) married when they stormed the Carthage Jail,¹⁰³ and all were born in the United States with the exception of John W. Marsh who was Canadian.¹⁰⁴ (See Table 3 for the distribution among states.) Ten percent of the mob was born in the mid-west; 53 percent were New England emigrants; and 37

¹⁰¹ Flanders, *Nauvoo*, 16.

¹⁰² *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, as obtained at the Department of State, from the Returns of the Sixth Census*, 84.

¹⁰³ There may be additional marriages among mob members that were not recorded in early Illinois records or that occurred outside of Illinois. Marriage information was found in the following sources: Illinois State Archives, *Illinois Statewide Marriage Index, 1763–1900*, available online at <http://www.ilsos.gov/GenealogyMWeb/marrsrch.html>, (last accessed July 2007); *1840 U.S. Federal Census*, Hancock County, Illinois, population schedules; *1850 U.S. Federal Census*, Hancock County, Illinois, population schedules; Thomas Gregg, *History of Hancock County, Illinois*; Wilma Brunenn, *Pioneers of the Prairie*; Robert M. Cochran, et al., *History of Hancock County, Illinois*.

¹⁰⁴ Location of birth was found for seventy of the eighty-nine mob participants in the following sources: *1850 U.S. Federal Census*, Hancock County, Illinois, population schedules; *1860 U.S. Federal Census*, Hancock County, Illinois, population schedules; Wicks and Foister, *Junius and Joseph*; Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*; Thomas Gregg, *History of Hancock County, Illinois*; Wilma Brunenn, *Pioneers of the Prairie*; Robert M. Cochran, et al., *History of Hancock County, Illinois*.

Table 3

Known Geographic Origins of Mob

| STATE | NUMBER BORN THERE |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| New York | 13 |
| Virginia | 13 |
| Kentucky | 7 |
| Connecticut | 6 |
| Ohio | 5 |
| Massachusetts | 4 |
| North Carolina | 3 |
| New Hampshire | 3 |
| Pennsylvania | 3 |
| Maine | 2 |
| New Jersey | 2 |
| Tennessee | 2 |
| Vermont | 2 |
| Delaware | 1 |
| Illinois | 1 |
| Indiana | 1 |
| Maryland | 1 |
| South Carolina | 1 |

percent claim southern roots. In this respect the mob was no different from the area populous, which had few foreign-born residents prior to 1840.¹⁰⁵

It was also possible to identify occupations for sixty-six mob members. Fourteen were farmers who owned their own land, twelve were lawyers, and seven were merchants. The others were engaged in a variety of agricultural, commercial, skilled, and professional occupations.¹⁰⁶ (See Table 4.) An analysis of these occupations shows some clear differences between the mob and Hancock County residents in general. One major difference pertains to the number engaged in agriculture. In 1840 approximately 78 percent of Hancock County males were employed in agriculture, but only about 30 percent of the mob was when they stormed the Carthage Jail.¹⁰⁷ Another major difference is the number of “learned professionals” in the mob. According to the census, only thirty-four “learned

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Gregg, *History of Hancock County, Illinois*, 638.

¹⁰⁶ Occupations were found for sixty-six of the eighty-nine mob participants. Occupations were determined from the following sources: Backenstos letter; *1850 U.S. Federal Census*, Hancock County, Illinois, population schedules; *1860 U.S. Federal Census*, Hancock County, Illinois, population schedules; Wicks and Foister, *Junius and Joseph*; Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*; Thomas Gregg, *History of Hancock County, Illinois*; Wilma Brunenn, *Pioneers of the Prairie*; Robert M. Cochran, et al., *History of Hancock County, Illinois*, Illinois Sesquicentennial Edition; *The Wasp*; *Warsaw Signal*, June 14, 1844; *Portrait and Biographical Record of Hancock, McDonough and Henderson Counties, Illinois: Containing Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens of the County* (Chicago: Lake City Pub. Co., 1894); *Biographical Review of Hancock County, Illinois, containing Biographical and Genealogical Sketches of Many of the Prominent Citizens of Today and Also of the Past* (Chicago: Hobart Publishing, Co., 1907); Eli Hughes Williams Obituary, *The Republican*, October 16, 1895; Kenneth V. Crossley, “The Old Pioneer Cemetery of Green Plainsville, Illinois” (n.p., 2003). If the only available source did not specify precisely when the mob member engaged in a particular occupation, a judgment called was made, i.e., if they were old enough to have been in that occupation in 1844, it was assumed they were. This, however, occurred in a limited number of cases.

¹⁰⁷ *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, as obtained at the Department of State, from the Returns of the Sixth Census*, 87. The percentage for the mob was calculated from the total known occupations.

Table 4

Known Occupations of Mob¹⁰⁸

| OCCUPATION | NUMBER |
|-------------------------------|--------|
| Farmer (who owned own land) | 14 |
| Lawyer | 12 |
| Merchant | 7 |
| Farmer (who did not own land) | 6 |
| Constable | 3 |
| Physician | 3 |
| Tavern Keeper | 3 |
| Blacksmith | 2 |
| Land investor | 2 |
| Newspaper editor | 2 |
| Druggist | 1 |
| Cabinetmaker | 1 |
| Carpenter | 1 |
| Hotel Keeper | 1 |
| Illinois Supreme Court Clerk | 1 |
| Miller | 1 |
| Nurseryman | 1 |
| Schoolmaster | 1 |
| Shoemaker | 1 |

¹⁰⁸ Some of the mob engaged in more than one profession.

professionals and engineers” lived in Hancock County in 1840.¹⁰⁹ Although categorization was subject to the interpretation of the individual census taker, lawyers, physicians, and schoolmasters seem to have been commonly counted amongst the “learned professions.” It is therefore likely that editors and druggists, or anyone engaged in a profession that necessitated a relatively advanced degree of literacy, would also qualify. Accordingly, the collective mob was comprised of at least nineteen “learned professionals” or twelve lawyers (one of whom was also an Illinois State Supreme Court Clerk), three physicians, two newspaper editors, a druggist, and a schoolmaster. In total, less than 1 percent of the 1840 adult male population of Hancock County engaged in a learned profession, while over 28 percent of the mob did.¹¹⁰ The mob clearly included a relatively high number of professional and educated men.

At least thirty-one mob members owned property in 1844.¹¹¹ Some of these were local businessmen. There were at least thirteen businessmen (seven merchants, three Tavern Keepers, two land investors, and one Hotel Keeper) in the mob. Since educated professionals and businessmen are usually part of a community’s leading citizenry, we can conclude that at least 48 percent of the mob was amongst Hancock County’s elite.¹¹² It is also possible that some or all of the farmers who owned their

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ The percentage for the mob was calculated from the total known occupations.

¹¹¹ Illinois State Archives, Illinois Public Domain Land Tract Sales Database, available online at http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/data_lan.html; Hancock County, Illinois, Recorder of Deeds, General Index 1817-1850 (Salt Lake City: Filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1974, 1984), FHL US/CAN microfilm no. 954183.

own land were amongst the county's elite, which could raise the percentage of prominent citizens in the mob to as much as 70 percent.

The mob also included a significant number of politically active men, some of whom made politics a career. Between the years of 1839 and 1844, sixteen ran for political office, and ten won positions such as: State Representative, County Commissioner, School Commissioner, State Senator, and United States Representative.¹¹³ (See Table 5 for complete list. Also see Table 6 for a list of those offices sought for but not won.) For two of the men who held political office no other occupation prior to 1844 has yet been identified, and two were farmers who did not own their own land. Adding them to the number of elite mob members would increase that percentage even farther – to 54 percent, when excluding farmers who owned their land.

While it is difficult to know where most of the farmers who did not own their own land fit into Hancock County's social structure, at least two later purchased land and were, therefore, probably amongst the county's middle-class when they stormed the Carthage Jail.¹¹⁴ The blacksmith, carpenter, shoemaker, and other skilled laborers all likely held respected middle-class positions in the community as well.¹¹⁵ Considered together, the middle-class constituted somewhere between eighteen and 44 percent of the mob.

¹¹² Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*, 132-33.

¹¹³ Gregg, *History of Hancock County*, 447-49.

¹¹⁴ In this instance the middle-class is defined as the group of people who are not amongst the upper or elite societal class but still retain a respectable position in society.

¹¹⁵ Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*, 132-33.

Table 5

Public Offices Held by Carthage Mob Participants 1834-1856

| Mob Participant | Position | Location | Year |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Abernethy, William | Sheriff | Hancock, IL | 1840 |
| Aldrich, Mark | First Postmaster | Warsaw, IL | 1834 |
| | Illinois Legislature | | 1836 |
| | Illinois Legislature | | 1838 |
| | Postmaster | Tucson, AZ | |
| | Judge | Tucson, AZ | |
| | Mayor | Tucson, AZ | |
| | AZ Legislature | Arizona | 3 terms |
| Bagby, Walter | Treasurer | Hancock, IL | 1834-37 |
| | School Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1840-41 |
| Bartlett, Franklin J. | School Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1842 |
| Brattle, James W. | Treasurer and Assessor | Hancock, IL | 1846 |
| Chittenden, Edward F. | Treasurer | Hancock, IL | 1837 |
| Davis, Jacob C. | State Senator | Illinois | 1842 |
| | State Senator | Illinois | 1846 |
| | State Senator | Illinois | 1850 |
| | State Senator | Illinois | 1854 |
| | U.S. Congress | Illinois | 1856 |
| Marsh, John W. | Circuit Judge | Hancock, IL. | 1855 |
| McAuley, John | County Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1838 |
| | County Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1839 |
| Morrison, Thomas | State Legislature | Illinois | 1846 |
| Rickard, Michael | County Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1836 |
| | School Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1847 |
| | School Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1849 |
| Sharp, Thomas | Delegate to State Cons. Convention | Hancock, IL. | 1847 |
| | Justice of the Peace | Hancock, IL | 1851 |
| | Mayor | Warsaw | 1853 |

Table 5 (continued)

| Mob Participant | Position | Location | Year |
|------------------------|--|-----------------|-------------|
| Skinner, Onias C. | Judge 15 th Judicial District | Hancock, IL | 1851 |
| | Supreme Judge | Hancock, IL. | 1855 |
| Smith, Robert F. | Recorder | Hancock, IL | 1846 |
| Thatcher, Geo. W. | County Clerk | Hancock, IL | 1843 |
| | Clerk of Commissioner Ct. | Hancock, IL | 1847 |
| Warren, Calvin A. | State's Attorney | Hancock, IL. | 1852 |
| | Master in Chauncery | Hancock, IL. | ? |
| Williams, Levi | Postmaster | Green Plains, | ? |
| Wilson, Harmon T. | Coroner | Hancock, IL | 1840 |
| Wilson, Claiborne | County Clerk | Hancock, IL. | 1853 |

Table 6

Public Offices Sought but Lost by Mob Participants 1834 – 1856

| Mob Participant | Office | Location | Year |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Abernethy, Wm. D. | School Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1842 |
| | Clerk of Commissioner Ct. | Hancock, IL | 1847 |
| Aldrich, Mark | Sheriff | Hancock, IL | 1846 |
| Bagby, Walter | Recorder | Hancock, IL | 1835 |
| | Treasurer | Hancock, IL | 1837 |
| | School Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1841 |
| Barnes, Michael | Treasurer and Assessor | Hancock, IL | 1849 |
| Bartlett, Franklin J. | County Clerk | Hancock, IL | 1843 |
| | County Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1844 |
| Brattle, James W. | Treasurer | Hancock, IL | 1843 |
| | Treasurer | Hancock, IL | 1847 |
| Catlin, Joel | County Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1836 |
| | State Legislature | Hancock, IL | 1844 |
| Chittenden, Abram I. | County Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1839 |
| Chittenden, George A. | Sheriff | Hancock, IL | 1842 |
| Chittenden, Henry R. | Clerk of Commissioner Ct. | Hancock, IL | 1847 |
| Cole, Calvin | County Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1848 |
| | Associate Justice | Hancock, IL | 1849 |
| Davis, Jacob C. | Delegate to Cons. Conv. | Hancock, IL | 1847 |
| | Congress | Illinois | 1858 |
| Geddes, Thomas | Delegate to Cons. Conv. | Hancock, IL | 1847 |
| Grover, Wm. N. | Representative | Hancock, IL. | 1852 |

Table 6 (continued)

| Mob Participant | Office | Location | Year |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Mathews, David W. | State Legislature | Illinois | 1836 |
| | State Legislature | Illinois | 1842 |
| Rand, Ebenezer | Probate Judge | Hancock, IL | 1843 |
| | Surveyor | Hancock, IL | 1843 |
| | School Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1851 |
| Sharp, Thomas C. | Recorder | Hancock, IL | 1846 |
| | Delegate to Const. Conv. | Hancock, IL | 1847 |
| | Circuit Clerk | Hancock, IL. | 1852 |
| | Congress (Rep. candidate) | Illinois | 1856 |
| Sherman, Jason H. | School Commissioner | Hancock, IL | 1847 |
| Skinner, Onias C. | State Legislature | Hancock, IL | 1844 |
| Smith, Robert F. | Recorder | Hancock, IL | 1847 |
| | Treasurer and Assessor | Hancock, IL | 1849 |
| | Treasurer | Hancock, IL | 1851 |
| Stephens, Henry | Senator | Illinois | 1850 |
| Thatcher, Geo. W. | County Clerk | Hancock, IL | 1849 |
| Wilson, Claybourne | Clerk of Commissioner Ct. | Hancock, IL | 1847 |
| Wilson, Harmon T. | Sheriff | Hancock, IL | 1838 |
| Wilson, John | County Clerk | Hancock, IL. | 1853 |
| Wilson, Valentine | State Legislature | Illinois | 1836 |

Some of the four non-land owning farmers may have been squatters, day laborers, or other types who fit into the lower ranks of society. Regardless, they constituted a small portion of the mob, 6 percent or less.

In sum, while there was a great diversity of occupations amongst the mob members, they collectively differed significantly from Hancock County in general. There were considerably fewer mob members engaged in agriculture and many more learned professionals. There were also an appreciable number of businessmen and politicians who, when combined with the learned professionals, constituted over half of the mob. Land-owning farmers, non-land-owning farmers, and middle class laborers constituted most the remainder of the mob. All in all, the mob was largely comprised of men from the middle and elite classes of Hancock County society who were native born, married, and roughly six to eleven years older than the median Hancock County male.

The Carthage mob was, essentially, a very typical antebellum mob. According to violence historian Richard Maxwell Brown, a typical vigilante mob most often included “leading business men, planters, and professionals.”¹¹⁶ These “elite” citizens served as the mob leaders while the “middle level [of the community] supplied the rank-and-file.”¹¹⁷ While some less socially acceptable men sometimes participated in mob activity, they rarely started it.¹¹⁸

A comparable socio-economic study completed by historian Leonard L.

¹¹⁶ Brown, *Strain of Violence*, 93. See also: Gordon S. Wood, *Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), 321.

¹¹⁷ Brown, *Strain of Violence*, 105.

¹¹⁸ Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*, 132-33.

Richards further illustrates the similarity between the Carthage and other antebellum mobs. In his book entitled *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*, Richards demonstrates that a majority of the participants in both the abolitionist and anti-abolitionist riots in Jacksonian Ohio and New York were “commercial and professional” men, as was the case with the Carthage mob.¹¹⁹ In regards to age, the northeastern rioters had a median age of thirty-seven compared to thirty for the Carthage mob. Regardless of the seven-year difference, both calculations reveal that the respective mob actions were the “responses of mature men.”¹²⁰ Richards also discovered that about 85 percent of the anti-abolitionists rioters were native-born Americans, as were virtually all of the Carthage participants. And, 31 percent of Richards’ sample had held one or more political offices. Again, statistical findings very similar to that of the Carthage mob.

Thus, the Carthage mob shares many commonalities with other antebellum mobs. It may have included a very small number of men who could be considered the “rabble” or “the tail of society,” but it also included a defining number of men who were amongst the middle and upper societal classes. Overall, it was comprised of very respectable people who shared a common concern about the growing presence of Mormons in their community.

¹¹⁹ Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*, 136.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

THE MOB AFTER CARTHAGE

The Mormon community was in shock and mourning after the death of their beloved leader Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. They experienced further turmoil as various individuals tried to take control of the Church. Most Church members came to believe that, in the months before his death, Joseph Smith had given the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles the necessary power to lead in his absence. Others, including prominent church members Sidney Rigdon and William Smith (Joseph and Hyrum's brother), disagreed. Rigdon claimed to have received a revelation telling him that he was to succeed Joseph Smith. When he was not able to convince the Quorum of the Twelve to let him lead the church, he started his own congregation¹²¹ William Smith first supported the revelatory claims of James J. Strang and moved to Wisconsin with the "Strangite" dissenters. Later, however, he began promoting himself as the appropriate successor to his brother Joseph.¹²² Ultimately, as many as fifteen such schismatic groups emerged in the aftermath of the Smith brothers' deaths.¹²³

This splintering was precisely what the Hancock County anti-Mormons had

¹²¹ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 446, 449-50.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 453-4.

¹²³ Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, "Introduction: Mormonism and the Dynamics of Dissent," in *Differing Visions* (Champaign, IL : University of Illinois Press, 1998), 11.

hoped for.¹²⁴ However, it did not go deep enough to arrest the collective Mormon influence in Illinois. Under the leadership of Brigham Young, President of the Twelve Apostles, the majority of Mormons remained in the Nauvoo vicinity and tenaciously continued to protect their interests much as they had when Joseph Smith was alive. In 1845 Church members tried to get the county seat relocated to Nauvoo. Although they presented the state legislature with a petition and the requisite amount of signatures, the legislature simply failed to act. Brigham Young also made an attempt to invite Saints living in the Eastern United States to move to Nauvoo and “buyout the anti-Mormons in Hancock County.” State officials in Springfield quickly stifled these plans and urged the Saints to “cease to gather in one place.”¹²⁵ As a result of these and other efforts Church members once again found themselves under attack from hostile locals who now felt the only way to remove the Mormon influence from Illinois was to remove the Mormons.

In September of 1845 bands of marauders, which included many Carthage mob members, began attacking Mormon settlements, burning buildings, and driving church members from their homes. Under increasing pressure from local hostilities and government officials, in January of 1846 the Saints began the long slow exodus out of Illinois. By 1847 the Hancock County anti-Mormons had effectively succeeded at ridding their state of Mormon influence.

So, what happened to the Carthage mob, many of who also participated in the violent expulsion of the Saints from Nauvoo? Did an unseen hand execute vengeance

¹²⁴ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 445.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 510.

upon these individuals for their murderous mob activities? The answer is, quite simply, no. Instead, most of these individuals seem to have lived normal life spans in which they prospered.

The average Carthage mob member lived to be nearly sixty-six years old.¹²⁶ Between 1840 and 1849, the average United States male who had lived to the age of thirty (the median age of the mob cohort) could expect to live approximately another thirty-five years.¹²⁷ Thus, rather than dying early, the collective mob lived slightly longer than most American males. There was, of course, a spectrum of ages at death. Frank Worrell, a guard at the Carthage Jail, was shot and killed in September 1845 while pursuing Hancock County Sheriff Jacob Backenstos with a loaded gun.¹²⁸ He was twenty-five at the time. Others lived much longer, like Thomas Box Griffitts who lived to be nearly eighty-five.¹²⁹

Length of life does not necessarily translate into good fortune. However, if financial well-being is any indicator of the quality of one's life, the collective Carthage mob lived well. In 1850 the average value of their collective property was \$2,140; already well above the national average of \$1,050. By 1860, however, when the national average was \$1,540, the average value of the mob's real estate had risen

¹²⁶ Death information was derived from the following sources: Wicks and Foister, *Junius and Joseph*; Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*; Thomas Gregg, *History of Hancock County, Illinois*; Wilma Brunenn, *Pioneers of the Prairie*; Robert M. Cochran, et al., *History of Hancock County, Illinois*, Illinois Sesquicentennial Edition.

¹²⁷ Clayne L. Pope, "Adult Mortality in America Before 1900," in *Strategic Factors in Nineteenth Century American Economic History, A Volume to Honor Robert W. Fogel*, ed. Claudia Goldin and Hugh Rockoff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 282.

¹²⁸ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 529.

¹²⁹ Passing of a Pioneer, *The Carthage Republican*, Wednesday, January 25, 1911.

249 percent, to \$7,842 — a figure well over five times the national average.¹³⁰ A few of the mob members, such as Mark Aldrich, proved especially ambitious and moved to California during the gold rush. Dissatisfied with the gold fields, Aldrich later settled in Tucson, Arizona, where he became a successful merchant with an 1860 personal estate valued at \$50,000.¹³¹ Another merchant, Emerson Gould, moved to St. Louis and also amassed a personal estate valued at \$50,000 in 1860.¹³²

Many of the Carthage mob members continued to run for and hold public office in the decades following the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. (See Table 5.) Specifically, Carthage mob participants won twenty-four public offices between the years 1844 and 1856. The most illustrious politician of the group was Jacob C. Davis, one of the five who were actually tried for the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. He was elected to the Illinois State Senate for four consecutive terms and in 1856 to the U.S. Congress.¹³³

All in all, there is no real evidence to support the notion that those who murdered Joseph and Hyrum Smith experienced great suffering and died horrible deaths as punishment for their bloody deed. In fact, the opposite may have occurred.

¹³⁰ Real estate values were gathered from the *1850 and 1860 U.S. Federal Census* population schedules wherein data was found for fifty-eight and forty-two mob participants respectively. General U.S. statistics were found in “Wealth and Its Distribution,” available online at <http://www.answers.com/topic/wealth-and-its-distribution>. Some of the mob members moved out of Hancock County, so the comparison with the United States is more accurate than with Hancock County alone.

¹³¹ Mark Aldrich household, Tucson, Arizona Territory, 1860 U.S. Federal Census, page no. 18, dwelling no. 168, and family no. 174.

¹³² E.W. Gould household, St. Louis County, Missouri, 1860 U.S. Federal Census, 2nd Ward City of St. Louis, page 341, dwelling no. 1456, family no 3153.

¹³³ Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*, 217.

As with many other antebellum mobs, those who took part in the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith reportedly felt they “would not only be protected, but honored” for murdering the Smith brothers.¹³⁴ These expectations came in part from the fact that many of the mob members believed they were performing a service for their community. Warsaw druggist George Rockwell, just a few days before the murders, expressed his feelings thus:

I have been called on by the citizens of Warsaw to take an active and responsible part in [these] proceedings [against the Mormons] and I can assure you that I take much pleasure in lending my humble aid to expel a band of citizens from the State, the leaders of whom are deserving a thousand deaths. I have been constantly engaged for the last two weeks trying to accomplish it, and now take pleasure in saying that I have no doubt as to our ultimate success. Since I enlisted myself in this cause, I have . . . traveled on horseback more than 300 miles in various directions to raise men and means to accomplish our ends, knowing that our cause was just.¹³⁵

The subsequent acquittal of the five men tried for the murders provides evidence that the mob’s expectation of being protected was accurate, and there are several indications that so was their expectation of being honored. First, mob members still ran for and won political offices after storming Carthage Jail. Second, even several decades later a number of mob members were still proudly proclaiming their involvement in the murders and forced removal of the Mormons. In fact, in the *History of Hancock County*, published in 1880, several of the mob members’ biographical sketches list participation in the “Mormon difficulties” as one of their

¹³⁴ *Warsaw Signal*, July 10, 1844. See also: Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*, 84 and Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 321.

¹³⁵ Wicks and Foister, *Junius and Joseph*, 152.

notable achievements in life.¹³⁶ For example, with an obvious feeling of pride and accomplishment, George Waggoner's biographical sketch states that he was an active operator in the Mormon difficulties, not one of those who did the shooting, but the man who hauled the ammunition for those who did. He was first into the jail when the Smiths were killed, and picking up the revolver, which Smith had emptied, presented it to the authorities when called on.¹³⁷ Even the obituary of mob-member Eli Williams mentions his participation. Specifically, it states that: "In 1844 Mr. Williams was a member of the Carthage Grays, and was present at the killing of Joseph Smith. . . . He said the killing of Smith was pre-arranged between the so-called mob and the guards."¹³⁸ Thus, rather than expressing remorse, these men remained proud of their mob involvement.

To summarize, the Carthage mob members lived normal life spans during which they prospered financially. They ran for and won political offices, and, they generally appear to have been protected and honored by their fellow citizens for their participation in the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and the forcible removal of the Mormons from Hancock County.

¹³⁶ Gregg, *History of Hancock County*, 728, 748-755, 808, 858.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 858.

¹³⁸ Death of a Pioneer, *The Carthage Republican*, October 16, 1895.

LUNDWALL

The fact that the mob members did not meet with horrific deaths largely discredits *Fate of the Persecutors of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Lundwall's downfall seems to have been his inability to distinguish between credible and noncredible sources. His documents and papers are available at the LDS Church Archives, and they make it clear he tried to be meticulous and careful in his research. He had the stories people recounted to him written out and even notarized. However, this meticulousness did not change the fact that nearly all of these stories were second and third hand accounts. Even the information he did get right is tinged with inaccuracies due to erroneous sources or interpolation.

Levi Williams' and Thomas Sharp's stories provide good examples of how Lundwall mixed the accurate and inaccurate. Lundwall correctly states that Levi Williams died in 1858; however, he also asserts that "Col. Williams . . . died enjoying the respect of no one."¹³⁹ In addition to the fact that this last statement was reportedly taken from an article in an 1870 edition of *The Deseret News* written twelve years after Williams' death, it is credited to a Mr. Riter who obtained the information from a friend still living in Nauvoo (clearly not first hand information). It is difficult to believe Williams, a member of the Warsaw Masonic Lodge, died enjoying the respect

¹³⁹ Lundwall, *Fate of the Persecutors*, 323.

of no one.¹⁴⁰

The same newspaper article that mentions Williams also states that Thomas Sharp's "nose lengthens as he grows in years," and that none of the Carthage mob, or any of the Mormon persecutors, "ever enjoyed any social respect afterwards—nay more, they were despised by their neighbors and former friends."¹⁴¹ In truth, after participating in the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Sharp was elected to serve as a justice of the peace, a Hancock County judge, and, on three separate occasions, the mayor of Warsaw.¹⁴²

The same informant who provided the above information about Williams and Sharp also stated that "Francis Higbee died in New York," and that

John McAuley . . . died a most miserable death about the year 1872. While lying on his death bed, suffering the most excruciating pains, he [said] that if he could only blot out five years of his life (referring to the time he fought the Mormons), he could die a happy man.¹⁴³

Although no specific evidence to substantiate or refute the statements about Higbee and McAuley has been found, his other accounts make this informant unreliable at best.

So it is with nearly all of *Fate of the Persecutors*. It includes numerous stories of the horrific suffering of mob members. Yet, the vast majority are from second- and third-hand sources. Even those few that appear to be from first-hand sources are tinged with error or difficult to believe due to the overall

¹⁴⁰ Wicks and Foister, *Junius and Joseph*, 291.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Oaks and Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy*, 218.

¹⁴³ Lundwall, *Fate of the Persecutors*, 315.

incredibility of the rest.

In sum, Lundwall does not present an accurate picture of the Carthage mob. It is nevertheless the inaccuracies — the gruesome and sensational fates befalling mob members — that made it so popular among the Mormon community. It is human nature to believe in sensational events that either validate their spiritual beliefs or provide assurance that an unseen hand is meting out justice in the world.

WHY?

From our twenty-first century vantage point it is easy to believe that a group of “ne-r do well” reprobates, spurred on perhaps by drunkenness, stormed the Carthage Jail and murdered the Smith brothers. It is much more difficult to believe that a group of respectable men committed such a violent and illegal act. Nevertheless, they did. So, the question that naturally follows is why? Why would a group of respectable citizens, many of whom had families, owned businesses, or held public office, storm a jailhouse and kill two individuals? The answer is complex. Even more so because it is unlikely a group of over two hundred men shared a single motive. However, by placing the mob within the larger backdrop of national and local history some of its actions begin to make sense.

The Mormon sojourn in Hancock County occurred during the Jacksonian era, a time of extraordinary national expansion and material progress. The dynamic advancements brought on by the industrial, market, and transportation revolutions created an overriding sense of optimism during this era, and fueled the sense that America was destined for further greatness. Many attributed the nation’s progress to a providential hand that was bestowing blessings on America for establishing itself on righteous principles of liberty, and likewise believed that continued blessings and prosperity were dependent on American citizens remaining free.¹⁴⁴ Largely defining

¹⁴⁴ David Brion Davis, “Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 2 (Sep.,

and protecting that freedom was the concept of popular sovereignty, or the premise that “all power whatever is vested in, and immediately derived from, the people only.”¹⁴⁵ What Jacksonian Americans knew and feared was that popular sovereignty also held within it the power to destroy their freedom should it be the will of the people. Hope for a secure and free future therefore rested on the belief that “when each individual was left free to pursue happiness in his own way, unhampered by the tyranny of custom or special privilege, justice and well-being would inevitably emerge.”¹⁴⁶

Into these reigning philosophies emerged the Mormons, who in many respects embodied the antitheses of Jacksonian American ideals. Contrary to the idealized image of Jacksonian Democracy, the Mormons put loyalty to one man, their Prophet Joseph Smith, above that of their nation. Moreover, this loyalty to Joseph Smith often resulted in collective voting according to his instructions. Many saw this as evidence that the Mormons had given away their freedom in submission to a tyrannical leader—precisely opposite of what was seen as necessary for a secure and free future. Mormon collectiveness and secret rituals only accentuated this negative image. The general sentiment was: “In a virtuous republic why should anyone fear publicity or desire to conceal activities, unless those activities were somehow contrary to the public interest?”¹⁴⁷

Thus, the broad perception was that Mormons were a threat to the freedom and the future of America. Mormons were not the only group to be thus categorized.

1960): 205-224.

¹⁴⁵ Brown, *Strain of Violence*, 61.

¹⁴⁶ Davis, “Some Themes of Counter-Subversion,” 209.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

Masons, Catholics, and others were similarly regarded. Collectively, the leaders of these groups, including Joseph Smith, were seen as “unscrupulous leaders plotting to subvert the American social order . . . because control of America meant control of the world’s destiny.”¹⁴⁸

Though [the] rank-and-file members were not [seen as] individually evil, they [were viewed] as blinded and corrupted by a persuasive ideology that justified treason and gross immorality in the interest of the subversive group. Trapped in the meshes of a machine-like organization, deluded by a false sense of loyalty and moral obligation, these dupes followed orders like professional soldiers and labored unknowingly to abolish free society, to enslave their fellow men, and to overthrow divine principles of law and justice.¹⁴⁹

One result of these general sentiments was an increase in organizations and literature devoted to counter-subversion. Treatises like Lyman Beecher’s *A Plea for the West*, published in 1835, in which he predicted an evil religion would grow to great power in the west, were both popular and influential.¹⁵⁰ Another result was widespread persecution and dislike of these groups deemed subversive.

Several statements made by mob members clearly indicate they were influenced by these prevalent anti-Mormon attitudes. One vigilante, George Rockwell, stated that if the Mormons were allowed to increase and prosper they would “sap the very foundation of [the national] government.”¹⁵¹ Another mob member, Thomas Sharp, expressed his thoughts this way:

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 208. Also see: Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 509; Hill, *Joseph Smith*, 371.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 208.

¹⁵⁰ Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West* (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1835), 11, 128.

¹⁵¹ Wicks and Foister, *Junius and Joseph*, 165.

Whatever may be thought of [the Mormon's] present strength, it is certain, that if not checked in another year, they will have the decided majority in this county. Yes! men who have no minds of their own, but move, act and think at the bidding of one man, are to be our rulers. . . . If it comes to this, that Joe Smith is to control the majority of votes in our county, are we not in effect, the subjects of a despot? -- might we not as well be serfs to the Autocrat of Russia? What need have we of the elective franchise, when a church can rise up in our midst, controlled by the [mind] of one man, to dispense political favors.¹⁵²

Of course, members of the Mormon Church vehemently denied any subversive motives or actions. They furthermore declared that, instead of Joseph Smith, it was the federal government that was tyrannical, especially as it denied them their due rights and privileges to worship as they chose.¹⁵³

Those who believed the Church to be plotting to overthrow the government of the United States found ample evidence to back up their assertions. In every circumstance, however, the Church had an entirely different point of view on the matter. For example, the Mormons rejoiced when the Illinois State Legislature granted Nauvoo a strong city charter believing “that beneficent legislators had empowered them to protect their own civil and religious rights and to defend themselves against opponents.”¹⁵⁴ However, when the charter was used to “defend Joseph Smith and his colleagues against legal attacks and vigilante threats,”¹⁵⁵ locals interpreted it as anti-American and evidence that that “the Mormons were about to set

¹⁵² *Warsaw Signal*, June 9, 1841.

¹⁵³ Winn, *Exiles*, 159; Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:499.

¹⁵⁴ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 102-3.

¹⁵⁵ Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 103.

up a separate government for themselves in defiance of the laws of the State."¹⁵⁶

These polar interpretations also occurred in reference to statements made by church leaders. For example, in April of 1844, apostle John Taylor gave a public conference speech in which he stated that the founding fathers “were engaged in founding kingdoms and empires that were destined to dissolution and decay. . . . [But that the Saints were] laying the foundation of a kingdom that shall last forever—that shall bloom in time and blossom in eternity.” And, at that same conference, Sidney Rigdon taught that: “When God sets up a system of salvation, He sets up a system of government. When I speak of a government, I mean what I say. I mean a government that shall rule over temporal and spiritual affairs.”¹⁵⁷ Of course, many non-Mormons interpreted these statements as proof the Mormons were intent on overthrowing the United States.

Joseph Smith tried to clarify some of these statements in a May 1844 speech in which he explained that what the Saints were to build was the kingdom of God, that this kingdom would be built through conversion, and that their efforts in no way threatened the sovereignty of the United States. Specifically, he stated that

I calculate to be one of the instruments of setting up the kingdom of Daniel by the word of the Lord and intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world. . . . It will not be by sword or by gun that this kingdom will roll on: the power of truth is such that all nations will be under the necessity of obeying the Gospel.¹⁵⁸

Few Hancock County residents believed Smith, and most continued to interpret

¹⁵⁶ Ford, *History of Illinois*, 320.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:292-3.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6:365.

Mormon activities through the lens of suspicion.

Ultimately, whether the Mormons were actually planning and implementing subversive activities is not as important as the perception that they were, and clearly at least some Hancock County locals believed this to be the case. It was very dangerous in Jacksonian America to be categorized thus since subversive organizations were seen as “so menacing that they could not be accorded the usual rights and privileges of a free society.”¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the feeling existed that there would be only one survivor in the conflict between free institutions and despotic societies such as Mormonism.

It was with this heavy baggage of already developed prejudice that the Mormons sought refuge in Hancock County. Locals at first seemed to be willing to disregard general anti-Mormon sentiments if the Saints would help their party win elections. However, as discussed earlier, the Mormons quickly dominated both the political and economic realms in Hancock County. Locals complained of being disenfranchised at the polls and of losing elections due to the powerful Mormon voting block. Similarly, businesses lost customers and were threatened by the economic success of Nauvoo. One result was that influential men in Hancock County, such as newspaper editor Thomas Sharp, picked up the hammer of anti-Mormon rhetoric and kept pounding it until the Mormons were driven from the state.¹⁶⁰ In one of his more rousing articles, on June 19, 1844, Sharp printed the

¹⁵⁹ Davis, *Some Themes of Counter-Subversion*, 213.

¹⁶⁰ Marshall Hamilton, “Thomas Sharp’s Turning Point: Birth of an Anti-Mormon,” *Sunstone* 73 (October 1989), 16-22; Roger D. Launius, “Anti-Mormonism in Illinois: Thomas C Sharp’s Unfinished History of the Mormon War, 1845,” *Journal of Mormon History* 15 (1989), 27-46.

following: "Strike them! For the time has fully come. . . . We hold ourselves at all times in readiness to co-operate with our fellow citizens . . . to exterminate, utterly exterminate, the wicked and abominable Mormon leaders."¹⁶¹

Thus, one reason why the mob stormed the Carthage Jail was that the Mormons were seen as a serious threat to the continued sovereignty of the United States. Other reasons exist as well. Just as the Mormon's quick acquisition of political and economic power was a primary source of contention in virtually every other place they lived, so it was in Hancock County. On this topic Illinois Governor Thomas Ford stated the following:

The great cause of popular fury was, that the Mormons at several preceding elections, had cast their vote as a unit; thereby making the fact apparent, that no one could aspire to the honors or offices of the country within the sphere of their influence, without their approbation and votes.¹⁶²

The Mormons also appeared to be creating an economic power bloc. In early 1844, Mormon Apostle John Taylor described Nauvoo as follows:

Great numbers of merchants have settled among us during the past year, and the amount of merchandise which has been imported, has placed goods within the reach of the citizens of Nauvoo, at as reasonable a rate as they can be purchased at any of our western cities.

Vigorous efforts are being made to improve our wharves, and facilitate the landing of steamboats on our shores. . . . This work when completed, will not only form one of the best harbors on the Mississippi river, making the whole of our shore accessible at all times to the largest class of boats; but it will at the same time afford the best mill privileges in the western country.

¹⁶¹ *Warsaw Signal*, June 19, 1844.

¹⁶² Ford, *History of Illinois*, 329.

Nor have our farmers been idle. Very great improvements have been made during the last year, in agricultural pursuits. Extensive farms are beginning to spread themselves for miles in every direction from our city, on the bosom of the great prairie, as far as the eye can reach; fencing, ploughing [plowing] and building, seems to be the order of the day.

Many branches of mechanism are going on; brick makers, carpenters, brick layers, masons, plaisterers [plasterers], black smiths, and many other branches of business have found abundance of employ.¹⁶³

In sum, Nauvoo appeared to be experiencing enormous economic success. As some of the leading politicians and businessmen in Hancock County, the mob had to have been concerned about the growing political and economic power of the Mormons. Moreover, these were not men who would stand idly by and watch their futures slip away. Many had proven themselves ambitious by moving to the western frontier, establishing themselves in respectable careers, and running for and holding public office. Yet, in June of 1844 their future prosperity appeared dependent upon the Mormons being removed from their midst—clearly a motive for storming the Carthage Jail.

There were also a number of other contributing factors such as destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, Joseph Smith's candidacy for Presidency, and polygamy.¹⁶⁴ While these fueled the fires of contention already burning in western Illinois, they do not appear to be central motivators for the mob. After all, threats and attempts to take the Smith brothers' lives were common in every place the Mormons had lived, long before the *Nauvoo Expositor* was destroyed and Joseph Smith announced his

¹⁶³ John Taylor, "City of Nauvoo," Editorial Address, *Times and Seasons*, January 1, 1844, 391-392.

¹⁶⁴ The *Nauvoo Expositor* was an anti-Mormon newspaper. The Nauvoo City Council ordered its press destroyed June 10, 1844, after its first and only edition.

candidacy.¹⁶⁵ It is also true that credible indications the Saints were practicing polygamy had only recently emerged, and while some mob participants mentioned it in their writings and correspondence, they spent little time on the subject.¹⁶⁶

One thing the mob was adamant about was that their actions were not religious persecution.¹⁶⁷ The Saints believed otherwise. The welcoming of French Icarian immigrants into Nauvoo in 1849, after the Mormon departure, suggests that Hancock County residents were tolerant of unusual religious beliefs. The Icarians, who built a strict communist community, remained in Nauvoo undisturbed by other county residents until 1860 when internal dissensions and financial difficulties forced them to disband. It is significant to note, however, that the Icarian population never reached above 500.¹⁶⁸ Ultimately, in spite of the Icarians and the mob's adamant assertions to the contrary, their crime was inherently religious simply as a result of whom they killed – a religious leader.

Because modern Americans are used to looking suspiciously at big corporations and special interests groups that seem to have enormous national power, it may not be difficult to relate to the fears and apprehensions Hancock County residents had as they watched the growth and power of the Mormons erode their own

¹⁶⁵ For examples of attempts on the Smith brothers' lives see Lucy Mack Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet," 1844-45 manuscript, book 15, pp. 8-10, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; Lucy Mack Smith, *The History of the Mormon Joseph Smith by His Mother and Devoted Member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 67-68.

¹⁶⁶ Flanders, *Nauvoo*, 261-77; Hallwas and Launius, *Cultures in Conflict*, 326; *Warsaw Signal*, June 9, 1841.

¹⁶⁷ *Warsaw Signal*, June 9, 1841.

¹⁶⁸ Robert P. Sutton, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Secular Communities, 1824-2000* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 58-64, 67.

influence in their community. Yet, fear that a group had subversive motivations or was threatening personal endeavors would hardly drive most people to commit murder. The Carthage mob, however, lived in a different era.

All things considered, the single most important influence on the actions of the Carthage mob has to be the tradition of mobbing that was then present in the United States. According to historian Gordon S. Wood, this type of violent American group activity has its origins in England. He explains that

these were not the anarchic uprisings of the poor and destitute; rather they represented a common form of political protest and political action in both England and the colonies during the eighteenth century by groups who could find no alternative institutional expression for their demands and grievances, which were more often than not political.¹⁶⁹

Although America tried to divest itself of many English traditions after the Revolution, it embraced mobbing, and the incidences of mobbing continued to rise until the Civil War.¹⁷⁰

It is unlikely the Carthage Mob members were strangers to this tradition of mobbing. In 1837 abolitionist editor Elijah Lovejoy was killed by a mob in Alton, a small town on the Mississippi River just south of Hancock County.¹⁷¹ Additionally, in 1841 a group of men began what later became known as the Northern Illinois Regulator Movement. Through a campaign of “whipping, hanging, and firing squads,” this vigilante mob effectively rid northern Illinois of gangs and

¹⁶⁹ Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 320.

¹⁷⁰ Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 5-6.

¹⁷¹ Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*, 3.

counterfeiters.¹⁷²

Thus, the Carthage mob lived in an era when mobbing was an oft-used way to seize control of a situation. Although some prominent Americans such as Abraham Lincoln spoke vigorously against this phenomenon, participants justified their activities in a number of ways.¹⁷³

Revolutionary War philosophies provided one means of justifying violent mob activity. As historian Paul Gilje explains, “under certain circumstances—to oppose tyranny, for instance—many Anglo-Americans held that they had a right, almost a duty, to riot.”¹⁷⁴ Popular sovereignty was another theme that was commonly found justifying mob activity. Specifically, “those who held to the ideology of ‘popular sovereignty’—and particularly those who proclaimed themselves the vigilant protectors of property, law and order—claimed an exclusive democratic heritage that transcended the confines of the ordinary processes of government.”¹⁷⁵ And in frontier regions such as Hancock County vigilante mobs often justified their existence by pointing to the lack of adequate law enforcement.¹⁷⁶

With a definite awareness of reigning mob philosophies, Thomas Sharp, who served as the voice of the mob, wrote and published the following editorial justifying

¹⁷² Brown, *Strain of Violence*, 119.

¹⁷³ Paul M. Angle and Earl Schenck Miers, comps., *The Living Lincoln: The Man and His Times, in His Own Words* (New Brunswick, NJ: The Trustees of Rutgers College, 1955), 21.

¹⁷⁴ Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 8.

¹⁷⁵ Paul A. Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 86.

¹⁷⁶ Brown, *Strain of Violence*, 96.

the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith:

We hold it to be a self-evident proposition, that laws are enacted for the safety and protection of the rights, lives and property of those who are to be governed by them. We hold, moreover, that so long as those laws can afford such protection, it is the duty of every good citizen to abide by their direction and to uphold their supremacy; but that whenever, by a train of circumstances, which our legislators never could have anticipated, the law is rendered ineffectual and cheated out of efficacy, there is an impulse planted by God and Nature in every bosom, which prompts men to throw themselves, for protection, on their reserved rights. The law owes us protection, in consideration of which we owe it allegiance. If it fails to perform its offices towards us, we are, to the extent of that failure, absolved from its requisitions. . . . Our citizens have regretted, and still regret the necessity that existed for taking the law in this particular instance, into their own hands; but that it would sooner or later have to be done, no one acquainted with the facts of the case, could deny. It was inevitable, and the only question was as to the proper time.¹⁷⁷

The preceding quote makes it clear that at least some mob members felt the laws had failed to protect them and that their only option, in fact their duty, was to take the law into their own hands. It is also clear that they considered themselves to be good citizens who acted in a noble manner to protect and maintain their natural rights. Sharp's arguments could be easily dismissed as an attempt at escaping justice if this same type of rhetoric was not informing mob activity throughout the antebellum United States. These same attitudes were also prevalent throughout Hancock County as evidenced by the fact that the court sided with the accused assassins and ultimately determined that they had performed a service for the community. In sum, the Carthage mob was not alone in its sentiments. Mob violence was a socially acceptable means of dealing with certain matters in antebellum

¹⁷⁷ *Warsaw Signal*, July 10, 1844. See also Roger D. Launius, "Anti-Mormonism in Illinois: Thomas C Sharp's Unfinished History of the Mormon War, 1845," *Journal of Mormon History* 15 (1989): 27-46.

America.

Essentially, national anti-Mormon sentiment, political disenfranchisement, and economic grievances were amongst the several reasons why the Carthage mob stormed the Carthage Jail. Since the mob was composed of over two hundred men, it is nevertheless likely the specific reasons for murdering Joseph and Hyrum Smith varied from man to man. Some may even have simply been swept up in what is now regarded as “mob mentality.” The mob’s grievances, however, would probably have not resulted in the deaths of two individuals had they not lived in an era when collective violence was common and even justifiable in certain circumstances.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study disputes the general belief that the men in the Carthage mob were rabble-rousers from the lowest socio-economic ranks of society. Although this characterization may accurately describe a small number of the participants, the mob overwhelmingly consisted of men who ranked amongst the middle and upper societal classes. In fact, a defining number were professionals, leading businessmen, and/or politicians in Hancock County.

This study also disputes the notion that those responsible for the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith suffered horrific fates. Collectively speaking, the mob participants lived normal life spans during which they prospered economically. Moreover, many enjoyed successful careers and held political office after their participation at Carthage.

These findings create a new and more accurate portrait of the Carthage mob, one that closely conforms to that of other antebellum mobs. A lack of adequate law enforcement, widely held notions regarding popular sovereignty, and residual post-Revolutionary War fervor combined to create an era in which vigilante mobs were common and largely supported by the general antebellum populous. Additional factors, such as widespread anti-Mormon ideologies and local power struggles, also influenced the Carthage mob.

Further research on the Carthage mob should include a thorough examination of onsite sources in an attempt to identify more members of the mob. Since Joseph Smith was a Master Mason, and there has been speculation that his last words were a plea for protection to fellow Masons in the mob, that aspect of the mob's character should also be looked at. It would also prove interesting to compare the Carthage mob with the mobs that forced the Mormons out of Ohio and Missouri. A few of the questions that might be answered from such a study are: Was their collective profile like that of the Carthage mob? What were their motives? And, did they prosper after participating in vigilante activities? Clearly, some interesting and enlightening research lies ahead.

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