TARRED AND FEATHERED: MORMONS, MEMORY, AND RITUAL VIOLENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

During the nineteenth century Mormons were attacked and persecuted for their religious, social, and political differences. Tar-and-feathering was a ritual of violence used against Mormons, and remains a central part of the Mormon persecution narrative.

This thesis explores the origins and meaning of tar-and-feathering. During the Revolutionary War Americans used tar-and-feathers as a way to intimidate and attack, while simultaneously branding opponents as outsiders. During the mid-nineteenth century, people who violated social, political, or moral norms were tar-and-feathered by groups attempting to enforce community morals. In like manner, Mormons were tar-and-feathered by their opponents in Ohio, Missouri, Mississippi, and Alabama. This thesis analyzes the context and aftermath of the attacks and places them within the broader history of tar-and-feathering in America. Opponents of Mormonism wished to convey to Mormons and the surrounding public a violent message of displeasure in response to perceived violations of communal values. Mormons took the message and integrated the attacks into a persecution narrative that played a role as Mormons' separated themselves from the rest of the United States. In the retelling, details disappeared and generalizations replaced specificity to the point that tar-and-feathering became cultural persecution discourses that loomed large in Mormon memory, well beyond their historical proportions.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1993, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints commissioned the production of a film titled *Legacy*. The film follows the experience of a fictional family named Williams that joins the LDS church shortly after its founding in upstate New York in 1830. The family moves with the Mormons to Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and eventually to the Great Basin where the story ends. At least one purpose of the movie is to portray the legacy of violence and persecution that early converts to Mormonism endured. The film highlights an emerging Mormon culture and lifestyle, including the customs of adherents to the new religion, especially their determination, courage and faith in the face of opposition. Although the lead roles are fictional, viewers are informed that "The characters depicted in this film are based on the experiences of pioneer men and women. The scenes are based on actual events."

An early scene depicts a large group of Mormons who moved to Jackson County Missouri in 1831 and the subsequent discord that arose between them and the Missourians. As tension mounts between the two groups, a mob of angry men, bearing torches and flags, approaches Mormon homes and buildings. Women and children flee in the face of the advancing crowd. The mob confronts a fictional Mormon character named Jacob and demands that the Mormons leave Jackson County. In response Jacob declares, "This is impossible!" Members of the mob then throw him into the mud, and

while part of the mob enters a nearby building bearing torches and axes, others tear at Jacob's clothes, removing his shirt. A Missourian approaches with a bucket of tar and spreads the black substance onto Jacob, covering his shoulders and back. Mobbers then liberally coat the tar with feathers procured from a pillow. Jacob is then left abandoned in the street while the mob continues to destroy the building.[1]

This attack, played out in detail on the silver screen, had at its roots both a part of the history of Mormon persecution and of a national pattern of mob violence. The *Legacy* scene is based on the actual tar-and-feathering of two Mormons in Jackson County in 1833, yet the context of the attack, and particularly the composition, motives and actions of the mob require a much closer look than the movie allows. The types, cases and circumstances of violence in American history vary across time and space and are best understood when grounded in their respective historical contexts. Too frequently, however, the tar-and-feathering of Mormons is repeated in Mormon circles as a nearly ubiquitous component of the faith's persecuted past. Sometimes in the retelling, tar-and-feathering becomes a stock part of the Mormon story, floating as it were, unanchored to specific people, places or events, a seemingly universal step in the Mormon expulsion process, experienced by all Mormons everywhere.

The dramatized scene in the film *Legacy* reinforces the notion that tar-and-feathering was a common incident among early Mormons. The fictional character Jacob is intended to imitate the average Mormon experience, including the various forms of persecution that Mormons faced. The *Legacy* version and other retellings, when shorn of

[1] *Legacy*. DVD. Directed by Keith Merrill (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1993).

their broader national contexts imply that tar-and-feathering was used specifically against Mormons, created for their humiliation and pain alone.

In total only four Mormons were tarred-and-feathered before the Latter-Day Saints' forced removal to the Great Basin. A few more cases of tar-and-feathering against Mormons took place later in the nineteenth century when southerners employed this unique form of ritual violence against Mormon missionaries. Here, too, the retellings fail to understand the meaning and intent of tar-and-feathering among those who practiced it. What message did those who tarred-and-feathered Mormons intend to convey and with what meanings did perpetrators imbue this violent act?

This study seeks to identify and contextualize tar-and-feathering perpetrated against Mormons. It offers a close analysis of the tar-and-feathering incidents that occurred before persecutors drove Mormons to the Great Basin. Attacks happened at Hiram, Ohio in 1832 and at Jackson County, Missouri in 1834. Each case offers new insights into the context of persecution and the importance of symbolic violence. Tar-and-feathering happened again to Mormon missionaries while they preached in the Southern States Mission during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Each case of tar-and-feathering offers a deeper understanding of the political, social, and economic situations that resulted in these attacks against Mormons. This study places these experiences within a broader context of American violence and traces this specific practice from its ancient European roots to its unique manifestations and meanings in the United States. For Mormons, tar-and-feathering holds a sometimes larger than life place within their persecution narrative. This study explores the growing importance that tar-

and-feathering assumed in Mormon memory and traces the Mormons' eventual embrace of these attacks as central acts in their persecuted past.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF TAR-AND-FEATHERING

Tar-and-feathering is a ritualized form of mob violence that has its own history, meaning, and context stretching back hundreds of years. It has close ties to other violent practices that reach back across the Atlantic into Europe. It was a form of mob action intentionally used for its symbolism and deep historical meaning. For Jacksonian Americans, tar-and-feathers linked them to their Revolutionary era ancestors and in the process conjured images of patriotism against treason. As used against the Mormons, however, the intimidation tactic evolved and adopted new meaning. The actual act of applying tar-and-feathers was but a small part of an entire ritual, or series of rituals, that composed various forms of communal attacks. A more complete understanding of communal punishment, ritual, justice, and forgiveness is required in order to grasp American mob violence employed against Mormons and to understand how tar-and-feathering functioned within a larger context.[2]

The American administration of mob justice is rooted in its European heritage and originates as far back as medieval times, perhaps earlier. Over the centuries the

[2] David Grimsted, "Rioting in Its Jacksonian Setting" *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 77, No. 2 (Apr., 1972); Carl E. Prince, "The Great "Riot Year": Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834," *Journal of the Early Republic,* Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1985), 1-19; Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); David Grimsted, *American Mobbing 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

practice of communal punishment against the violation of certain norms created, normalized, and even occasionally legalized, violence and harassment. When people violated community standards and there was no way to legally prosecute the community members developed rituals that allowed them to show displeasure and assert themselves in defining moral, social, and religious boundaries.[3]

Eventually these extralegal means took on regional characteristics, but primarily maintained a general pattern, particularly throughout England and France, which eventually served as models for the traditions that developed in America. Among several common names used to describe these extra-legal forms of social control, the most common were skimmington and charivari. While both terms describe virtually the same types of practices, there developed a regional American variation in the usage of the two words. Skimmington is an English term that was most commonly employed in New England, while charivari is a French word that came to describe social control practices used in the southern United States.[4]

Overtime members of European communities developed a variety of violent rituals that they used to publicly shame those who violated social norms. Communities generally tailored the degree of violence they employed to the perceived seriousness of the offense and to fill perceived gaps in the legal code. For example, in eleventh century England when a husband beat his wife, the law stipulated punishments such as fines or whipping. But if a wife beat her husband, there was no law to govern the offense. There

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[3] William Pencak et al eds. *Riot and Revelry in Early America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Gabriele Gottlieb, "Theater of Death: Capital Punishment in Early America, 1750-1800" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2005).

[4] Steven J. Stewart "Skimmington in the Middle and New England Colonies" in Pencak et al. *Riot and Revelry*, 41-86; Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France," *Past and Present* 50 (February 1971), 41-75.

were also no legal penalties against gossips, child-abusers, gamblers, sexually immoral individuals, or against marriage partners deemed unfit to wed. Given such voids in the legal system, townspeople took matters into their own hands and developed various forms of extra-legal social control. The marriage of an older man to a much younger woman might prompt a group of people, probably friends and relatives, to kidnap the couple in the middle of their honeymoon, blindfold and separate them by a couple of miles in the dark. A large group of neighbors might forcefully take violators of community standards from their homes at night, dress them as animals and parade them around town in a cart or on a donkey, all the while singing or making animal sounds in an effort to shame deviants and publicly mark them as different. More serious offenses such as prostitution or bestiality resulted in expulsion from the community and occasionally death.

Skimmington was sometimes called "loud music" or "rough music" because of the various instruments community members used to make noise and sing raucous songs. In 1796 Francis Grose described skimmington in his *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* as "Saucepans, frying-pans, poker and tongs, marrow-bones and cleavers, bulls horns, etc. beaten upon and sounded in ludicrous processions."[5] This type of punishment could be particularly fierce. Howard Cunnington studied a case from 1618 in North Wilts, England where a man had married a girl much younger than himself. The townspeople performed a serenade of "loud music" for three successive nights, preventing anyone in the house from sleeping.[6] The loud noise of charivari and skimmington allowed

[5] Francis Grose, *The Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London: Beard Publishing, 1931) Under entry titled "ROA."
[6] B. Howard Cunnington, "A Skimmington in 1618," *Folklore*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Sep. 30, 1930): 287-290.

community members to literally voice their opposition to violations of community standards.

Yet frequently noise was not a strong enough deterrent for many throughout Europe, a problem that led some communities to develop more violent forms of social control. These more extreme punishments generally manifested themselves in Europe as anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim violence. Mobs abused, killed, or drove Jews and Muslims out of medieval European communities and eventually the practice emerged as a common form of ostracism and social cleansing.[7] Charivari and skimmington became a way for communities to also rid themselves of other unwanted citizens. French historians and folklorists Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt argue that a significant aspect of charivari and skimmington was directed against religious outsiders. Linking pagan spiritualism with Christianity, Le Goff and Schmitt argue that for French villagers, spirits had a direct influence on the good or ills of everyday life. Spirits could protect individuals or the entire community, but they could likewise attack or threaten. Community members could easily offend these spirits, a belief that required policing of social boundaries in order to keep the spirits pacified. For example, if a widower remarried too soon following his wife's death, locals feared retribution from the deceased spouse's spirit. They could either discourage the marriage by abusing the newly engaged couple, or appease the angry spirit by showing their discontent.[8]

In short, Christianity required that communities be whole, an ideal that demanded the removal of social deviants. Communal cleansing and communal protection therefore became significant aspects of charivari and skimmington rituals, especially as these

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[7] Natalie Zeanon Davis, "The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in 16th Century France," *Past and Present* No. 59 (May 1973).
[8] Jacques Le Goff; Jean-Claude Schmitt, *"Le Charivari," Folklore*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (1983).

rituals crossed the Atlantic and took root in American soil. Overtime the early settlers of North America used European practices in new ways. As a result distinct American versions of skimmington and charivari emerged. Specifically, the Puritans in New England and the early French, Cajun, and English settlers in the South produced refined and regional forms of American communal violence.[9]

Alfred Young argues that American Puritans refined skimmington to suit their own needs of social control. The Puritans articulated and defined their skimmington rituals in their legal codes. They legalized some of their most cruel practices such as branding, dunking (to be repeatedly dipped in water), earcropping, (the complete or partial removal of the ear), the pillory (a wooden machine that restrains the head, hands and feet), and the wearing of letters. Local mobs always played a role in these legal punishments, and public torture attracted large crowds and often became highly attended social events.[10]

Charivari was brought to the Americas during the sixteenth century through the French colonies of the New World, especially those along the Mississippi river.[11] As a result of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the United States acquired French lands and French citizens. The French soon mixed with American farmers who migrated to the South. Out of this milieu charivari emerged with distinct practices from those employed in New England. Southerners regulated the virtues of honor, family, chastity and also race through the threat of public humiliation and the pain of charivari. It became a

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[9] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 14.
[10] Alfred E. Young, "English Plebeian Culture and Eighteenth-Century American Radicalsim," in James R. Jacob and Margaret C. Jacob, eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London: Humanity Books, 1991), 184-212.
[11] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 14.

particularly appropriate form of control when employed against the political or religious deviant, such as Mormons and abolitionists.

Charivari became increasingly associated with religious rituals of purification and repentance. In this regard a member of a close knit society who violated social, sexual, or racial norms might be subjected to various forms of torment through charivari. In a fashion common throughout America, charivari required a specific ritual for communal outrage to be satisfied and justice administered. Mild offenders could be dressed as animals and forced to ride an ass or a goat, while some might endure severe beatings, whippings, or tar-and-feathering.[12]

Skimmington, charivari, and rough music were similar practices that used the fear of pain and public shame to regulate societal and moral values. Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues that the fear of shame, particularly in the South, was a much stronger deterrent than pain and further contends that the shame of charivari, or skimmington served the same purpose in a tight-knit community that gossip does today.[13] Fear of being exposed to friends and neighbors still serves a powerful deterrent to those who might transgress community beliefs and morals.

Americans would eventually develop even more violent and deadly forms of mob justice that were not only based on moral or religious principles, but on political, social and racial issues. For example, America's long history of lynching grew out the context of charivari and skimmington. Historian James Cutler argues that the South used lynching as the strictest form of social control in response to the perceived threat of the

[12]Ibid., 192.
[13] Ibid., 198.

rising power of blacks.[14] When used against Anglo-Americans, charivari created a religious rite and ceremony that could manage girls' wandering affections, a disliked marital choice, or public drunkenness. Wyatt-Brown describes charivari as being "less bloodthirsty" and "more festive" than lynching. [15] In short, the practice of charivari was a mild form of punishment intended for use on whites, while lynching was most commonly used against blacks.

Tar-and-feathering as a form of communal social control emerged from this same historical context. Situating the attacks that happened against the Mormons in 1831 and 1833 within this broader context is crucial to understanding how and why the mobs acted the way they did. Attackers were not spontaneously lashing out in random acts of violence. Mobs in Ohio and Missouri followed a set of rites that were well established, and well understood by the surrounding communities and the Mormons themselves. The use of tar and the application of feathers has a significant meaning and history of its own, an understanding of which will locate the Mormon experience within a broader framework and imbue it with meaning beyond that which is traditionally included in Mormon accounts.

Tar-and-feathering as a form of skimmington and charivari did not become popular in America until the end of the eighteenth century on the eve of the American Revolution. Yet it may have origins as far back as post-Homeric Greece, perhaps earlier. The application of tar or pitch is mentioned in connection with the ridiculing of homosexuals, which resulted in the removal of body hair. The Greeks' intent was to

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[14] James Elbert Cutler, *Lynch-Law:An Investigation Into the History of Lynching in the United States* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1905), 89.
[15]Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 192.

humiliate and effeminize the victims.[16] The first historical reference to tar-and-feathers was made in 1189, when King Richard I of England declared on his way to fight in the Crusades that "thieves were to have their heads shaved, to have boiling Pitch dropped upon their crowns; and after having Cushion Feathers stuck upon the Pitch, they were to be set on shore, in that figure, at the first place they came to."[17] During the latter part of the seventeenth century, tarring and feathering was a prominent practice in the port towns of the Atlantic world. With easy access to tar (a commodity used for waterproofing,) sailors would tar-and-feather those who did not pay their debts, those who snitched on smugglers, or those who were party to condemned sexual practices such as bestiality.[18]

Sailors and merchants from the Atlantic world imported the practice of tar-and-feathering onto American soil, although initially it was only used in port towns. When the first victims were tar-and feathered in the American colonies, the majority of colonists were unfamiliar with the practice, suggesting that it was not a well known form of mob violence. Newspaper accounts from the late 1760s describe tar-and-feathering incidents in rich detail, in a step by step fashion. Colonial historian Alfred Young concludes that "the assumption underlying the rich detail is clear: it would not have been enough to say simply that an informer had been tarred and feathered; no one would have known what that meant."[19] It was during the various tax rebellions prior to the Revolution that tar-and-feathering became a common act of mob violence.

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[16] K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 7.
[17] *Diary of Frederick Mackenzie*, (New York: The New York Times and Arno Press,1930), 11 quoted from Rymer's Faedera, Volume 1:65.
[18] Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, p. 14.
[19] Alfred F. Young, "English Plebeian Culture and Eighteenth-Century American Radicalism," *The Orgins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 186.

The place of tar-and-feathering in the narrative of American history is most significant during the American Revolution. The symbolic meaning was clear; the act was meant to terrorize and threaten perceived public enemies and mark them as outsiders. Tar-and-feathering during the Revolution was virtually the same throughout the colonies. It was more prominent in some areas, such as Massachusetts, and was usually employed against the British or British Loyalists.[20]

When Parliament passed the Townshend Revenue Act in 1767, the Sons of Liberty found in tar-and-feathers a powerful tool of protest, violence, and public humiliation.[21] Many attribute the rise of the trend to an enraged community in Salem, Massachusetts who tarred and feathered a British informant in June of 1768. The widely publicized event resulted in dozens of other cases across the eastern seaboard in 1769. American Patriots began to target customs officials and informants, and due to its rise in popularity and symbolic meaning, "the tar-and-feather trend caught on."[22] Hundreds of people were tarred and feathered during the course of the Revolution. The fear of tar-and-feathering was an effective deterrent against British law enforcers, which some historians argue played a role in repealing some unpopular British taxes.[23] Tar-and-feathering rose quickly in popularity partly because Americans had a rich heritage of reacting through communal forms of violence. That, coupled with the fervor of the

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[20] Bnjamin H. Irvin, "Tar, Feathers and the Enemies of American Liberties, 1768-1776," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (Jun., 2003), 229.
[21] Alfred F. Young "George Robert Twelves Hewes (1742-1840): A Boston Shoemaker and the Memory of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3rd ser., 38 (October 1981): 561-623; Irvin, "Tar, Feathers and American Liberties," 201.
[22] Irvin, "Tar, Feathers and American Liberties," 201.
[23] James Elbert Cutler, *Lynch-Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States* (New York: Negro University Press, 1905), 8.

Revolution, created an atmosphere in which tar-and-feathering and other forms of mob violence became prominent.[24]

Due to the Revolution, Americans transformed the act of tar-and-feathering into an act of public protest and unity against their enemies. According to historian Benjamin Irvin, tar-and-feathering became an important ritual of unification through which the colonists relinquished their British identities and pledged their allegiance to one another and to the new country.[25] The act of tar-and-feathering became a symbolic representation of American patriotism and unity. It branded the betrayer and the unpatriotic as outsiders at the same time that it strengthened the bonds of unity among the patriots. For those suspected of disloyalty to the American cause it also created legitimate fear of violence and torture. It ultimately helped to foster a sense of community and nationhood as large mobs spread across the young country who identified with each other through actions of ritual violence. The practice fit perfectly into the well-worn tradition of skimmington and charivari. Young Americans knew the significance of joining voices with fellow community members to commit ritual forms of violence in retribution.

As the Revolution wore on, The Sons of Liberty responded to international opinion that attacks against humans were too violent. They modified the ritual and began to tar-and-feather horses, wagons, and even buildings. This strongly emphasizes the new and powerful symbolic meaning that tar-and-feathering had for the Sons of Liberty. They altered the practice for fear of negative opinion, yet the unifying symbolism persevered.

After the Treaty of Paris in 1783, violence and mob action also had a large impact on the formation and administration of the new American government. The people-at-

[24] Young, *American Radicalsim*, 186.
[25] Irvin, 229.

large could and did act out in violent ways against disliked policy or legislation. Gordon S. Wood explained that the people "were only pretending to give up their authority to their representatives, since they reserved the right of making and of judging of all their laws themselves." The practices that the young country learned during their resistance to the British became a major part of American politics.[26]

In many ways the end of the Revolution was the end of tar-and-feathering in New England. The number of cases dropped dramatically and by the end of the eighteenth century all but stopped. There is a lack of scholarly work to address why this happened, but it appears to be a combination of urbanization, fear of international disapproval, and the rise in popularity of churches during the Great Awakening which adopted different approaches toward punishment of moral offenses. Tar-and-feathering as well as skimmington and charivari-like-acts of mob violence were virtually nonexistent during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.[27] By the 1830s, however, mob violence returned in full force. Jacksonian era democracy resulted in political, economic and religious riots across the American landscape.[28]

It is within this fluid and shifting context that Mormonism emerged as a new religious tradition and intersected in important ways with the history of tar-and-and feathering in America. An examination of the two Mormon antebellum tar-and-feathering cases that took place in Ohio and Missouri demonstrates the ways in which non-Mormon communities reacted to the Mormons, and how the Mormons in turn

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[26] Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 368, 384.
[27] See Grimsted, "Rioting in Its Jacksonian Setting," 362.
[28] See Grimsted, "Rioting in Its Jacksonian Setting"; Carl E. Prince, "The Great "Riot Year": Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834," *Journal of the Early Republic,* Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1985), 1-19; Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); David Grimsted, *American Mobbing 1829-1861: Toward the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

interpreted and later remembered the actions committed against them. Both Mormons and their detractors thereby became tied to the history of tar-and-feathering, charivari, skimmington, and the evolving rituals of communal regulation.

MORMON LEADERS ATTACKED IN OHIO

In November of 1830 an influential Campbellite minister named Sydney Rigdon joined the infant Mormon Church. Rigdon was from Pennsylvania but had moved to Ohio were he was a well-known preacher. After meeting Joseph Smith in New York, Rigdon returned to Ohio to preach the Mormon faith. The conversion and subsequent preaching of Sydney Rigdon and others resulted in the baptism of many people in and around Kirtland, Ohio. This influx of members to Ohio motivated Smith and many other Mormons to relocate there in early 1831.[29] John Johnson, a former member of Rigdon's Campellite congregation, and several members of his family, joined the Mormon movement. Soon Sydney Rigdon and Joseph Smith and their families moved onto the Johnson property. During 1831 Smith and Rigdon stayed at the Johnson farm while they worked on a revision to the Bible and preached in the surrounding areas.

In the early summer of 1831, two ministers in the area, Ezra Booth and Symonds Ryder, joined the Mormon fold. Booth and Ryder soon became fervent supporters of Smith and Rigdon.[30] The two leaders subsequently sent Booth to Jackson County, Missouri, the proclaimed Zion of Mormonism. While there, Booth witnessed a dispute between Edward Partridge, Bishop of the Mormon Church in Jackson County, and Joseph Smith. Disillusioned, Booth returned to Ohio to report what he had seen in Missouri.

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[29] Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* Edited by Bingham H. Roberts. 7 vols., 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1951), 1:120-125.
[30] Ibid., 1:157.

Symonds Ryder became similarly disaffected after Joseph Smith reported a revelation calling Ryder to serve a mission. Smith and Rigdon both signed the official call but misspelled Ryder's name. Ryder believed that a true revelation from God would never contain such an error.[31]

When Booth and Ryder met in the fall of 1831, they shared their experiences and concluded that they had been misled. They decided to leave Mormonism and return to their former faiths. Both men became staunch opponents of Mormonsism in Ohio, with particular angst directed against Smith and Rigdon. Booth, at the request of a Reverend Ira Eddy, wrote a series of nine letters to the *Ohio Star* newspaper that appeared between October and December, 1831.[32]

The letters attacked Mormon doctrines, the character of Smith and Rigdon, and accused the Mormon leaders of a scheme to get control of their followers' property. The letters were widely circulated and generated fierce local opposition to the Mormons. By December of 1831, Smith and Rigdon temporarily suspended their Bible work and engaged in a campaign against the accusations put forth by Booth and Ryder. Rigdon responded with his own letters to the *Ohio Star* challenging Booth or Ryder to discuss their charges in public. In one article, Rigdon purposefully misspelled Ryder's name as "Rider" in an attempt to goad him, and continued to write that "[Ryder] had been called upon before the same public, to support his accusations; and does he come forward and do it? Nay, but seeks to hide himself behind a battery of reproach, and abuse, and low insinuations."[33]

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[31] Ibid., 1:158.
[32] The letters are reprinted in their entirety in Eber Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed* (Painesville: E.D. Howe, 1834).
[33] *Ohio Star*, Plainesville, Ohio, 12 January 1832

This war of words eventually erupted into physical threats and intimidation against Smith and Rigdon. In one case, a hole was bored in the door of the house where Rigdon was staying and filled with black powder in an attempt to kill Rigdon.[34] A few days later, the contention erupted into a direct attack against Smith and Rigdon. On 24 March 1832 a group of thirty to fifty men gathered around the Johnson Farm in the dead of night. Symonds Ryder, probable leader of the group, explained that "Some who had been dupes of this [Mormon] deception determined not to let it pass with impunity; and, accordingly, a company was formed of citizens from Shalersville, Garrettsville, and Hiram, in March, 1832, and proceeded to headquarters in the darkness of night."[35] Some of the mob entered the small house where Rigdon slept and pulled him outside. Rigdon was severely beaten and most, if not all, of his clothes were removed. Rigdon later recounted that "they dragged me over the wood pile, and on they went my head thumping on the frozen ground."[36] The mob dragged the now unconscious Rigdon near to where other men were entering the Johnson Farm, where Smith lived with his family.

Members of the mob entered the Johnson home and pulled Smith out of bed by his hair. It took several men to seize him, and Smith reportedly freed one leg and kicked a man named Waste, sending him sprawling into the street outside.[37] The mob then choked Smith until he passed out, and carried him away from the farmhouse perhaps as far as five hundred feet to where the rest of the mob held Rigdon.[38] Smith wrote that

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[34] *Portage County Democrat*, Ravenna, Ohio 15 February 1860.
[35] Symonds Ryder, "Letter to A.S. Hayden," 1 February 1868, in Amos Sutton Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve* (Cincinnati: Chase and Hall, 1875), 220-21.
[36] Manuscript Minutes of 6 April 1844, General Minutes Collection, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Archive.
[37] *Millenial Star Vol. XXVI* 1864, 834-835.
[38] Joseph (*History of the Church*, 263) said it was about 30 rods (495 feet) while Luke Johnson *(Millenial Star Vol. XXVI* 1864, 834) estimated it was about 40 rods (660 feet); for a detailed account of the layout of

"After I came to,…I saw Elder Rigdon stretched out on the ground, whither they had dragged him by his heels. I supposed he was dead."[39] Luke Johnson, son of John Johnson, said "they tore off the few night clothes that he [Smith] had on, for the purpose of emasculating him, and had Dr. Dennison there to perform the operation; but when the Dr. saw the Prophet stripped and stretched on the plank, his heart failed him, and he refused to operate."[40]

The mob attempted to force a vial of aqua forte (nitric acid) into Smith's mouth chipping Smith's teeth. The vial broke and spilled onto the ground killing the grass, and marking the place of the attack.[41] Smith wrote that the mob then met together to discuss whether or not to kill him. They decided against murder, but resumed beating and scratching him instead. The mob then waited while some mobbers went "back and fetched the bucket of tar"[42] The majority of the mob tried to force tar into Smith's mouth, and, failing, covered Smith's head, shoulders, and body with tar. Rigdon was likewise tarred. The mob then covered both men with feathers from a pillow procured from Rigdon's house. The mob left Rigdon and Smith for dead on the frozen ground.[43]

The brutality and severity of this attack left both men with serious injuries. Sydney Rigdon was mentally traumatized for a number of days, possibly with brain damage and permanent psychological effects.[44] When Rigdon next appeared publicly in

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the Johnson farm and surrounding buildings see Mark L. Staker *Hearken, O ye people: the historical setting for Joseph Smith's Ohio revelations* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 357-363.

[39] *History of the Church*, 1:262.

[40] *Millenial Star Vol. XXVI* 1864, 834-835.

[41] Ibid, 834.

[42] *History of the Church*, 1:263.

[43] Ibid., 265.

[44] See Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 114-118 for an excellent analysis of Rigdon's mental health and head trauma.

a church meeting, his incoherent ramblings during prayer lead to the temporary loss of his priesthood license. He afterward claimed no memory of the event.[45]

Joseph Smith stayed up all night after the attack while several people worked to remove the tar from his body. In an event particularly important to Mormons, Smith appeared the next morning to preach his Sunday sermon with members of the mob present and performed baptisms later in the day.[46] Some historians argue that because Smith was able to appear the next morning to preach, the attack must have been fairly mild.[47] However, other evidence suggests that the beating was very severe and that he suffered long-term effects. In 1834 Smith wrote to his wife Emma, and said he was in good health except for blisters and "a little touch of my side complaint." In a later letter he connects the "side complaint" to a mob attack, likely the 1832 tar-and-feathering. He wrote about "having once fallen into the hands of a mob, and been wounded in my side" and explained that after a tussle with his brother in late 1835, his side "gave way" and hurt so much that he was "not able to sit down, or rise up, without help."[48]

Symonds Ryder later defended his actions against Smith and the Mormons, explaining that the attack was not a manifestation of religious intolerance. In fact, the people of Hiram were "liberal" and "disposed to turn out and hear" the Mormons and other religions. The attacks, Ryder argued, came in response to "the horrid fact that a plot was laid to take their property from them and place it under the control of Joseph Smith the prophet." Ryder defended his actions and was pleased with the result of the violence:

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[45] Lucy M. Smith, *Biographical Sketches of the Joseph Smith: The Prophet and his Progenitors for Many Generations* (London: Latter-Day Saints' Book Depot, 1853), 95-96.
[46] *History of the Church*, 264.
[47] See Van Wagoner, *Sydney Rigdon*, 113; Mark Mckiernan, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: Sydney Rigdon, Religious Reformer 1793-1876* (Lawrence, Kansas: Colorado Press, 1971), 51.
[48] Joseph Smith, Pike Co., IL to Emma Smith, Kirtland, OH, 9 June 1834; Joseph Smith, Kirtland, OH to William Smith, Kirtland, OH, 18 Dec 1835, in Joseph Smith Journal, 18-19 Dec 1835 from Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984).

"This had the desired effect, which was to get rid of them. They [the Mormons] soon left for Kirtland."[49]

Ryder's analysis of the people of Hiram as religiously tolerant appears to be correct. The violent episode against Smith and Rigdon also appears to be an anomaly in Ohio religious history. One state history of Ohio suggests that very little violence took place during the settlement of Ohio and argues that the citizens of Ohio were more peaceful and nonviolent than those of any other state.[50] The night of 24 March 1832 was the only attack against Mormons in Ohio and therefore begs further questioning: What motivated generally peaceful and tolerant Ohioans to attack and why did they ultimately resort to tar and feathers as a means to express their anger?

The motives of the mob are best understood as a public manifestation of the personal feud between Smith and Rigdon, and Ryder and Booth. When Booth and Ryder left Mormonism, they seemed to believe that their attacks against Smith and Rigdon would go unchallenged and result in the fall of Mormonism. One man wrote that Booth gave Mormons "such a coloring, or appearance of falsehood, that the public feeling was, that 'Mormonism' was overthrown."[51] Yet Smith and Rigdon launched a campaign against Booth and Ryder that rebuffed their accusations and discredited both men. Particularly Ryder, the likely organizer and leader of the mob, seemed determined to pursue a personal vendetta against Smith and Rigdon. Ryder claimed that the central factor was property, especially the perceived loss of property among Smith's followers and the corresponding accumulation of property in Smith's hands. The doctrine of

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[49] Symonds Ryder, "Letter to A.S. Hayden," 1 February 1868, in Amos Sutton Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve* (Cincinnati: Chase and Hall, 1875), 220-21.
[50] Andrew R.L Clayto, *Ohio: The History of a People* (Ohio State University Press, 2002), 21.
[51] Journal History, Letter of Ambrose Palmer 31 December 1831 (Salt Lake City: Church History Department, 1909).

Mormonism that would come to be called the Law of Consecration required members to deed their property to the Church to be used collectively for the benefit of all Mormons under the oversight of Mormon leaders. Individual Mormons would then receive land back from the Church as "stewardships' from which they were to provide for their families and then distribute any excess for the care of the poor. This redistribution of property and wealth caused a fury amongst some Mormons who viewed private property ownership as a central component of their broader American identity. Ryder and Booth's war of words against Smith and Rigdon, combined with charges of property aggrandizement against Smith, generated an atmosphere wherein generally peaceful Ohioans resorted to violence in an effort to protect both reputation and property.

Close scrutiny of the attack against Smith and Rigdon also reveal important lessons about the place and meaning of tar-and-feathering in the episode and should prompt a rethinking of its place in Mormon history. The sequence of events is crucial to this new understanding. The mob first considered killing Smith, or at least castrating him. When the doctor refused to carry out the castration and the phial of poison broke, the mob then seems to have changed plans. They waited while others fetched tar. They also had to take feathers from Rigdon's home to complete the ritual. The mob's unpreparedness suggests that its original intent went unfulfilled and that tar-and-feathering happened as an afterthought. Tar-and-feathering as a ritualized form of public humialiation and social control was typically performed in the light of day in full view of the community for maximum effect.

The broader context of tar-and-feathering answers various questions about why the mob chose to tar-and-feather and how it occurred to them that tar-and-feathering

would be an effective alternative to killing or castration. The mob's hasty choice was widely publicized and helped form public opinion against Smith and the Mormons, thereby fulfilling at least part of the mobs original intent.

In 1832 the American Revolution was still fresh in the minds of Americans, especially those from New England. Not only were there many instances of tar-and-feathering during the Revolution, but the publicity surrounding them ensured that they were widely known. A local history of Portage County (where Kirtland is located), indicates that by 1840, over 76 percent of county settlers came from New England.[52] It is highly probable that at least some members of the mob, if not all of them, had an understanding of the significance of tar-and-feathers as an important American ritual through their New England origins. Certainly the Mormon populace, the majority of whom had recently migrated from New England, understood the national significance of the act. By using tar-and-feathers, the mob transformed itself from a group of angry men determined to commit violence for personal vengeance into a group of patriots defending the American ideals of freedom and, in this case, property.

This mob also had underlying motives. Most of the people in and around Kirtland had yet to develop animosity against the Mormons. Smith had only personally offended Booth and Ryder and perhaps a few others. The mob did not have popular support in their attack against Smith and Rigdon, which likely explains why the mob acted at night and why its members are so difficult to identify. The mob's original intent was murder or castration, violent crimes far more serious than tar-and-feathering.[53] The cover of darkness was necessary in order to keep the mob identities secret. Yet when the attempts

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[52] Elmer F. Pfaff, *ReDiscovering Mantua: The First 100 years of Survival* (n.p. 1985), 32-34.
[53] Some historians claim that tar-and-feathering was the original intent of the mob, see: Mark L. Staker *Hearken, O ye people,* 348-352.

failed, the mob resorted to something that sent an entirely different message to Mormons and non-Mormons alike. In resorting to tar and feathers, the mob attempted to brand Smith, as the leader of the Mormons, as unpatriotic, an outsider and a betrayer, in the same way colonials branded English tax collectors. It also helped to sway the citizens of Ohio, and perhaps the rest of the country, to perceive Smith in the same way those who tar-and-feathered him did. A local paper, *The Geauga Gazette* published a letter to the editor that captured the local opinion:

> On Saturday night, March 24, a number of persons, some say 25 or 30, disguised with coloured faces, entered the room in Hiram, where the two Mormonite leaders, Smith and Rigdon were sleeping, and took them, together with the pillows on which they slept, carried them a short distance and after besmearing their bodies with tar, applied the contents of the pillows to the same.
>
> Now Mr. Editor, I call this a base transaction, and unlawful act, a work of darkness, a diabolical trick. But bad as it is, it proves on important truth which every wise man knew before, that is, that Satan has more power than the pretended prophets of Mormon. It is said that they, (Smith and Rigdon) had declared, in anticipation of such an event, that it could not be done – that God would not suffer it; that those who should attempt it, would be miraculously smitten on the spot, and many such like things, which the event proves to be false.[54]

The unknown author of this editorial provides a way for the citizens of Ohio to show their outrage at such a cruel attack, yet still condemn the Mormons and their beliefs. The Ohio tar-and-feathering took place in the dead of night and only as an alternative to murder and castration. The *Geauga Gazette* letter writer condemned the act as diabolical and unlawful, an inappropriate means to a justifiable end. The mob was successful because it branded Joseph Smith as an outsider and someone devoid of divine power to stop the assault. By extension, it was not just Smith that was marked as suspect, but his religion as a whole.

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[54] *The Geauga Gazette,* Plainsville, Ohio, Tuesday, April 17, 1832.

A MOBBING IN MISSOURI

While Smith was living in Ohio, many Mormons began their religiously motivated migration to Jackson County, Missouri. Smith promised that the Mormon people would be given a land called Zion, where they could settle and build up the Kingdom of God. During his first visit to Jackson County, Joseph Smith reported a revelation on 20 July 1831which pronounced the creation of sacred space for Mormons to gather. Smith recorded the Lord's declaration that "This land, which is the land of Missouri . . . is the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the saints. . . Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place.'[55] During the same visit, Smith observed the original Missouri settlers and described the "degradation, leanness of intellect, ferocity, and jealousy of a people that were nearly a century behind the times."[56] Smith's "center place," the town of Independence and the surrounding area, contained about one thousand settlers at the time of this pronouncement.[57] Mormons began to move and purchase land in the small town shortly thereafter. They soon owned two stores and a printing press, and by 1833 approximately 1200 Mormons lived in and around Independence, with more arriving every month.[58]

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[55] Joseph Smith, *The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1957), 57:1, 3.
[56] History of the Church, 1:189.
[57] *History of Jackson County, Missouri* (Kansas City: Union Historical Co., 1881), 643.
[58] *The Evening and the Morning Star. Extra* Kirtland, Ohio, February, 1834.

Initially there seemed to be little contention between the Missourians and the newly arrived Mormons. One man remembered that "At first they were highly received by the good people of the county, who looked upon them as a set of harmless fanatics, very susceptible of being molded into good and honest citizens."[59] The Mormons' good reception was short lived, and almost immediately serious contentions arose between the two groups. Various factors contributed to the perhaps inevitable disagreements, and a brief overview is necessary to understand the later attacks against Mormons and the eventual use of tar-and-feathers. Cultural, religious and political differences all contributed to the strife between the Mormons and Missourians.

Cultural disparity can largely be attributed to American regional differences that were increasing throughout the antebellum era. Non-Mormon Missourians mostly migrated from the deep South, whereas the majority of Mormons were from New England. The observation of Smith that Missourians were "nearly a century behind the times" illustrates the cultural rift and potentially condescending attitudes on the part of the newly arrived New Englanders. Mormons also wanted to convert the Indians, and advocated peace with them, which, according to Missouri historian Paul C. Nagel, "was alone sufficient to prove the Saints either seditious or insane, or both."[60] Missourians also viewed Mormons as abolitionists, and discord surrounding slavery and free blacks would eventually become the spark that set anti-Mormonism aflame in Missouri.[61]

Mormon doctrinal oddities, clannishness and potential political power made Mormons a very threatening force to other Missourians. Mormons called all non-

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[59] Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies* (Richmond: Citadel Press, 1926), 218.
[60] Paul C. Nagel, *Missouri: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976).
[61] Newell G. Bringhurst, and Darron T. Smith, *Black and Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 13-34.

Mormons "gentiles," and central to their doctrine was the formation of Zion, an all Mormon community where their faith could be practiced the way they wished, apart from the rest of the world. This meant to the Missourians, and many Mormons, that there would be no place for the Missourians in Jackson County if the Mormon "Zion" came to full fruition. One newspaper reported: "We are told, and not by the ignorant alone, but by all classes of them, that we [the Gentiles] of this country are to be cut off, and our lands appropriated by them [the Mormons] for inheritances. Whether this is to be accomplished by the Lord or the destroying angel, the judgments of God, or the arm of power, they are not fully agreed among themselves."[62] The Mormons never enacted any policy to take land from Missourians or drive them out of the county, but the perception that they planned to do so sowed riotous discontent amongst Jackson County residents.

The Missourians also had strong beliefs about the type of community that they wished to create, and the Mormons seemed incompatible with that vision. The economy of the Missouri community was made up of expanding mercantilism, advancing agricultural pursuits, and land speculation.[63] The Mormon goal was to build a tightly-knit, highly organized communitarian society, apart from the established individualistic frontier community. As a result of Mormon settlers, Missouri was not blossoming into a homogeneous group of people with similar religious, political, and economic views. Rather, the Mormon presence challenged the societal norms that these southerners were struggling to maintain.

Patricia A. Zahnizer eloquently explained that

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[62] *Missouri Intelligence,* Columbia, Missouri. August 10, 1833.

[63] Patricia A. Zahniser, "Violence in Missouri, 1831-1839: The Case of the Mormon Persecution" (MA Thesis Florida Atlantic University, 1973), 91.

> the real source of the difficulties lay not so much in what the Mormons were doing, but what the Missourians perceived them to be doing. Even more important was what the old settlers could envision them doing in the future. The Missourians did not doubt that the Saints would soon gain total control of the state if they continued to grow as a body.[64]

The perception of Mormon power and eventual dominance in Jackson County was a very real threat to the Missourians even if the actual power or intent of the Mormons was overestimated or misunderstood.

The smoldering discontent between these two groups of settlers erupted two years after Mormons began to settle in Jackson County. In early July 1833, William W. Phelps, editor of the Mormon newspaper, the *Evening and Morning Star,* published an article titled "Free People of Color" in which he reprinted the very strict Missouri laws regarding freed slaves. The people of Missouri took this to be an invitation to free blacks to come to Jackson County and settle amongst the Mormons. Their reaction was such that the *Evening and Morning Star* published an extra that explained that "the intention in publishing the article, "Free People of Color," was not only to stop free people of color from emigrating to Missouri, but to prevent them from being admitted as members of the church."[65]

Yet the special issue of the Mormon newspaper did little to calm the situation that was quickly escalating toward violent disagreement. On Saturday, 20 July, four or five hundred disgruntled citizens met at the Independence Missouri courthouse to discuss the Mormon problem. They chose officers and selected a committee to draft a document outlining their demands. The officers and committee members were some of the leading

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[64] Ibid., 96.
[65] *Evening and Morning Star, Vol 2:242.*

citizens of Jackson County. According to Mormon Accounts, "they were the county officers—the county judge, the constables, clerks of the court and justices of the peace."[66]

The document they produced, which Mormons called the "Secret Constitution", outlined the demands of the local citizens and sheds light on how Missourians perceived and justified their own actions. They understood that what they were doing was illegal, yet they felt that they were right in taking the actions that they did, and were "justified by the law of nature as by the law of self-preservation."[67]

> They openly blaspheme the Most High God, and cast contempt upon his holy religion, by pretending to receive revelations direct from heaven—by pretending to speak in unknown tongues by direct inspiration…We therefore agree, that after timely warning, and upon receiving adequate compensation for what little property they cannot take with them, if they refuse to leave us in peace as they found us, we agree to use such means as may be sufficient to remove them. And intending as we do to rid our society, peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must; and believing as we do that the arm of the civil law does not afford us a guarantee, or at least a sufficient one, against the evils which are now inflicted upon us, and seem to be increasing, by the said religious sect; deem it expedient and of the highest importance, to form ourselves into a company for the better and easier accomplishment of our purpose; a purpose which we deem it almost superfluous to say, is justified as well by the law of nature as by the law of self-preservation.[68]

The Missourians, openly admitting that they were resorting to extra-legal actions, demanded that the Mormons leave the county and sell all of their property. They were to immediately close their printing office, stores and all other "establishments." A select committee of twelve Missourians presented the document to the Mormon leaders. The Mormons requested three months to consider the terms of the agreement and consult with the Mormon superiors in Ohio. The Missourians refused, and so the Mormons asked for ten days. The extra time was again denied, and the men concluded that fifteen minutes would be allowed for the Mormons to decide. The Mormon men, left with little other

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[66] History of the Church. 1:189

[67] Ibid., 1:374-377; *Evening and Morning Star,* Kirtland, Ohio, December, 1833.

[68] Ibid., 1:374-377; *Evening and Morning Star,* December, 1833.

choice or time to consider, refused the terms of the "secret constitution." The Missourians returned to the courthouse and reported the Mormon response to the group of 500 men who awaited news of the outcome. The Missourians mockingly omitted the details of what would happen should the Mormons not meet the terms of the affidavit: "those who fail to comply with these requisitions be referred to those of their brethren who have the gifts of divination, and of unknown tongues, to inform them of the lot that awaits them."[69]

The group outside the Missouri courthouse then proceeded to the printing office of the *Evening and Morning Star.* They surrounded the printing office "with demoniac yells" and threw furniture into the street and garden, broke the press, scattered the type, and destroyed nearly all the printed work.[70] The mob then completely leveled the two-story printing office using crowbars, hammers and their bare hands. They then turned to the Mormon owned store Gilbert & Whitney Co., and proceeded to throw goods into the street and destroy them. The mob, searching for Mormon leaders, took Bishop Edward Partridge and dragged him back to the Courthouse in the public square. They also seized 27 year-old Charles Allen. The mob demanded that they renounce Mormonism, particularly the Book of Mormon, or leave the county immediately. Both men refused to do either, and their coats and shirts were removed. In front of a crowd of possibly over one thousand, in the town square and in broad daylight, Partridge and Allen received their punishment from the mob. The men were partially covered in tar mixed with skin-eating lime or pearl ash, and then doused with feathers. Shortly thereafter, the mob dispersed,

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[69] Ibid.
[70] B.H. Roberts, *Missouri Persecution* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons Co., 1900), 85.

fearing Mormon retribution. There is no evidence to suggest that either men suffered permanent injury.[71]

According to Mormon accounts, the mob returned the next day: "about five hundred men" strong. The men were armed with rifles, dirks, pistols, clubs and whips; one or two companies riding into town bearing the red flag, raising again the 'horrid yell."[72]

In the ritual of charivari, Missourians tar-and-feathered Mormons, branding them as violators of accepted norms and practices. But Mormons remained steadfast in their convictions and peculiarities, so the persecution did not stop. Charivari was just the beginning of Missouri mob violence for the Mormons. While there were periods of calm before the Mormon expulsion in 1838, the attacks steadily increased until the Mormons were completely driven from the State. Perceptions of this Mormon persecution strengthen the tie between mob violence against the Mormons and charivari. The *Ohio Republican* reported on the incident:

> You have no doubt heard of the Mormonites. A few days since, the people residing in and near their village on the Missouri, became exasperated at some specimens of their *predatory* habits, and proceeding in a body to their village demolished their printing establishment, and the dwellings of the High Priest, and inflicted considerable injury upon the persons and property of the whole brotherhood. The High Priest was tarred and feathered and paraded through the village in a cart.[73]

While the main points of the article are correct, no firsthand account indicates that Partridge and Allen were ever "paraded through the village in a cart." A major aspect of

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[71] For similar versions of this account see *Times and Seasons,* Nauvoo, Ill, March 1, 1845; B.H. Roberts, *Missouri Persecutions*, 82-87; History of the Church 1:374-390; *Edward Partridge Papers*, LDS Church Archives; Clark V. Johnson, ed. *Mormon Redress Petitions: Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict (*Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992).
[72] History of the Church, 412.
[73] *The Ohio Republican,* Zanesville, Ohio, Saturday, Aug. 24, 1833.

charivari involved the public display and "parading" of victims around town, an aspect which reaches back through the Revolution and into Medieval France. The people in and around Missouri considered the mob attacks against the Mormons as a common act of charivari, an act of humiliation, pain, and public denouncement of behavior. For the Missourians, Mormons were community members who had violated community boundaries. They were branded as transgressors, tarred, feathered, and ostracized. It is important to note that they were simply forced out of Jackson County, and into a neighboring Clay County, a county created specifically for the Mormons by the State Legislature.[74] Mormons were outsiders, not yet deserving of death, but in rituals of exclusion their bodies were marked with tar and feathers and then sent away as punishment for their peculiarities. Lynch-like violence and death came later, after charivari failed to solve the Mormon problem in Missouri.

In 1838 the Mormons fled Missouri as a result of continued persecutions and an extermination order issued by Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs. This forced exodus resulted in the loss of lives and property in ways that do not compare to the tar-and-featherings that took place in 1833. The violence had escalated to such a degree that Missourian's cast aside symbolic methods of charivari and the governor declared a war of extermination against the Mormons.[75]

From Missouri the Mormons fled to Illinois where they built a new community on the banks of the Mississippi River. However, tension between the Mormons and older Illinois settlers culminated in the martyrdom of Joseph Smith in 1844 and the Mormon

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[74] Steven C. LeSueur, "Missouri's Failed Compromise: The Creation of Caldwell County for the Mormons." Journal of Mormon History, 31 (Fall 2005).
[75] Steven C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987); Alexander L Baugh, *A call to arms: the 1838 Mormon defense of northern Missouri* (Provo, Utah: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 2000).

removal to the Great Basin under the direction of Brigham Young beginning in 1846. By 1875 the Mormon Church began sending missionaries to the American South where once again Mormons experienced multiple forms of persecution and violence. Yet the nature of violence and mob action had changed in the United States from the antebellum 1830s and 1840s, to the racial, religious, and political violence that emerged following the Civil War.

Meanwhile, within the broader American context, tar-and-feathering remained rare. In 1838, a group of Irish Catholics in La Salle, Illinois tarred-and-feathered a man named Bangs who had been accused of selling false land deeds. Reverend Thomas Shaw explained that

> Bangs, the imposter, being caught, an enraged people inflicted the punishment of tarring and feathering on the swindler. Yet the Catholic spirit prevailed for the natural spirit, had either thrown the murderer into the river, or summoned Judge Lynch to hang him on the first tree.[76]

Shaw indicates again how tar-and-feathering was seen as a less serious act of violence, especially when compared to the summoning of "Judge Lynch." In another antebellum incident, a freed slave named Lunsford Lane returned to North Carolina in 1842 in an effort to buy his family's freedom. The local populace reacted to his return by tar-and-feathering him and forcing him to leave town.[77] Similar to the tar and feathering of the two Mormons in Missouri, those in South Carolina used tar and feathering as a ritual of community cleansing, to mark someone as unwelcome and banish him.

Charivari-like acts of violence continued to take place in the 1840s and 1850s, but the ritual began to change as violence became primarily directed against abolitionists,

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[76] Tomas A. Shaw, *Story of the La Salle Mission, First Part* (Chicago: M.A. Donohue & Co. 1857).
[77] William G. Hawkins, *Lunsford Lane; or, Another Helper from North Carolina* (Boston: Crosby and Nichols, 1863).

blacks and other religious minorities such as Jews and Catholics.[78] Mob violence, vigilantism, lynching and other types of violence increased in lethality and frequency especially after the Civil War. Paul Gilje explained that "rioting in the nineteenth century entailed more physical violence as the century wore on."[79] In particular, lynching became an institution that resulted in the illegal executions of thousands of people, mostly blacks.[80]

Due to the escalation of physical violence in general, it became more common for mobbings to result in death rather than in tar-and-feathering or other forms of charivari or skimmington. The elaborate acts of violence and public shaming that were so common during the colonial and revolutionary periods diminished during the decades leading up to the Civil War and then changed considerably following the war as communities became much more willing to use illegal execution to enforce their social, political and moral standards.[81] It is from within this shifting historical context that Mormons once again endured the humiliation of being tarred and feathered. This time the targets were missionaries in the South.

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[78] For a comparison between the rise of religion and violence in the South, see Patrick Q. Mason, *Sinners in the Hands of An Angry Mob: Violence Against Religious Outsiders in the U.S. South, 1865-1910* (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2005), 4-8.

[79] Paul Gilge, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 86.

[80] Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[81] See for example Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); James Elbert Cutler, *Lynch-Law*.; Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); David Grimsted, *American Mobbing;* Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*; Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American society, 1874-1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch*; Lorri Glover*, Southern Sons:Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2007); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analyis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

SOUTHERN STATES MISSION

In the charged post Civil War southern atmosphere, race became the most significant contributing factor leading to violence, but it certainly was not the only factor. Betram Wyatt-Brown argued that the purpose of violence in the South was to "ensure the permanence of popular white rule by means of charivari and lynch law."[82] Wyatt-Brown further contends that the acquiescence of local leaders, the need to shame others in order to satisfy Southern honor, and the communal sense of revenge which violence and death served to satiate were significant factors in Southern violence. Lorri Glover further emphasized the role of honor in Southern violence, and claimed that the outbreak of the Civil War itself, and the determination to fight and win, was based on deeply seeded notions of family, religion, and slavery.[83]

In the minds of at least some Southerners, Mormon missionaries represented significant threats to southern values. To Americans in general, Mormons embodied the un-American and anti-democratic principles and practices of polygamy and theocracy, perceptions which gave rise to vehement anti-Mormon sentiment throughout the nation.[84]

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[82] Bertram Wyatt-Brown. *Southern Honor,*188.

[83] Lorri Glover. *Southern Sons:Becoming Men*, 179; Michael J. Pfeifer. *Rought Justice.* Ritual mob violence, vigilantism, and lynching greatly decreased by mid-twentieth century. Pfeifer explained that this type of "rough justice" did not simply disappear, but it was replaced by legalized State systems of capital punishment and due process of law.

[84] Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Particularly in the South, Mormons posed a direct threat to the ideals of family, community and religion.[85]

The LDS Church opened the Southern States mission within this context in 1875. Over the next 25 years hundreds of missionaries preached throughout Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. Both missionaries and members in the South encountered violence and faced different types of persecutions, including murder, beatings, whippings, and tar-and-featherings.[86] Even still, Patrick Q. Mason analyzed 320 cases of violence against Mormons from 1876-1900 and found that only three resulted in tar-and-feathering. Verbal threats, the interruption of Mormon meetings, beatings, and whippings were much more common. Five missionaries were murdered during this time, and fifteen churches or other meeting places were destroyed.[87] Notions of charivari and communal violence persevered in the South and continued to be acted out against the Mormons. Yet tar-and-feathering was one of the least common forms of violence utilized against Mormons in the South and even then elements of its ritualization had changed.

In May of 1884, a Mormon missionary named Charles Flake was awaiting a train on a platform in Jasper County, Mississippi. Some community members had threatened

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[85] Patrick Q. Mason, "Sinners in the Hands of An Angry Mob," 129; Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[86] There are several histories of Mormon Missionaries in the South during this time period, see for example Heather M. Seferovich, "History of the Southern States Mission, 1875-1898" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1996); William Whitridge Hatch, *When Push Came to Shove: Mormon Martyrs in an Unrelenting Bible Belt, 1821-1923* (Inkwater Press, 2005); Gene A. Sessions, "Myth, Mormonism, and Murder in the South," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 75 (Spring 1976), 212-225; Leonard J. Arrington, "Mormon Beginnings in the AmericanSouth," *Task Papers in LDS History*, No. 9 (Salt Lake City: Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976); LaMar C. Berrett, "History of the Southern States Mission 1831-1861" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1960).

[87] Patrick Q. Mason, "Sinners in the Hands of An Angry Mob," 281 Table 2.

Flake with physical violence if he did not leave. According to John Morgan, Flake's mission president and ecclesiastical leader, as Flake waited to board his train, with no indication of "any mischief, a tub of two gallons of tar was dumped over his head without warning."[88] Apparently, Flake boarded the train anyway, or left shortly afterward, because he arrived at mission headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia the next day. His ability to travel suggests that he was not seriously injured. His attackers were not identified and it seems that no local newspaper reported the incident. Five years later a group of five missionaries were attacked in Dale County, Alabama. They were reportedly given "a sound switching with a tar-and-feather sequel." Apparently only one of the men was tarred-and-feathered, while the others were whipped.[89]

Mormons were sometimes threatened with tar and feathers as a means of intimidation. For example, the men who killed four Mormon missionaries in Cane Creek first "threatened them with tar feathers and a hanging if they did not leave the area."[90] John H. Gibbs, a missionary serving in Georgia from 1883-1887, was never tarred-and-feathered, but received at least three different threats.[91] The symbolism and importance of tar-and-feathering was certainly present in the mind of both the Mormons and the Southerners. Both groups were aware of the historic and symbolic meaning, and even the threat conjured up imagery powerful enough to relay the displeasure of the Southerners, and perhaps intimidate the Mormons enough to leave the area. Frequently, however, threats were not enough and many Mormons missionaries in the South were whipped,

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[88] Southern States Mission Manuscript History Archives, 16 May 1884. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
[89] *The Illustrated police news, law courts and weekly record.* Vol. 46, no. 1176 May 4, 1889, London, England
[90] Gene A. Sessions, "Myth, Mormonism, and Murder," 216.
[91] Ibid., 217-218.

beaten, pelted with rocks, or fired at with guns, all of which were more convenient, and also much more common than tar-and-feathering.

In both the actual use of tar and feathering and in Southerners using it as a threat, it is clear that the antebellum ritualistic aspects of the practiced had changed. There was less community involvement and public humiliation. Gone were the daylight trips to the town square and the parading of the victims through jeering crowds. These post-war attacks were carried out by relatively small groups of men. When tar-and-feathering did occur, much of the ritual and communal aspects that were so essential during the Revolutionary war were missing. Charles Flake's experience waiting for a train is an example where almost every aspect of charivari and public humiliation were absent. Flake did not even have a chance to see his attackers before the tarring took place. There certainly was no time for a mob to stop and enjoy the sense of communal justice that was so essential in the earlier versions of tar-and-feathering. In most cases the primary intent of the Southerners was to simply force the Mormons to leave, something that required violence, but not ritual, to perform.

In total, then, this study has documented seven Mormons who were tarred and feathered in the nineteenth century, four before the Mormons' expulsion to the Great Basin and three missionaries serving in the Southern States Mission. While recognizing that there could be more incidents that escaped the historical record, this evidence shines in the face of collective Mormon memory about the rates of tar and feathering as an almost universal aspect of Mormon persecution and expulsion from the Midwest. In a 2009 informal discussion several employees of the Family History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, were asked how many Mormons had been tar-and-feathered in LDS history. "Over a hundred" replied one. "I think it was more than that" said another. "It can't be more than fifty" replied a more conservative guesser. When asked for specific examples, only the Smith and Rigdon case in Ohio and the Partridge and Allen case in Missouri were cited. This is admittedly a small anecdotal sampling, but is likely representative of the collective Mormon memory of tar-and-feathering as a more prevalent component of persecution against Mormons.

It is difficult to know all the reasons for tar-and-featherings' larger than life status in Mormon minds. As least part of the answer can be found in the way Mormons remembered and recorded these attacks long after they happened. Mormons are a historically conscious people who exert great effort and resources toward preserving their

history.[92] Almost immediately after the tar-and-feathering of Joseph Smith and Sydney Rigdon, Mormons began to record and remember the violence perpetrated against them. These retellings became the most significant factor in the formation of Mormon memory about tar-and-feathering.

In response to the 1831 case Smith wrote or dictated a detailed account. This became the major primary source of Mormon accounts of the matter, and it was printed in the Mormon newspaper *The Times and Seasons*[93] and later printed in the Church published *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.*[94] Because of the broader meaning, context and sensationalism of tar-and-feathering, the attack against Smith and Rigdon was reprinted and retold many different times. It became part of the broader persecution narrative of Joseph Smith's life that included physical violence, unlawful imprisonment, and murder. Mormons see this type of persecution as proof of Smith's divine calling, arguing that prophets in all ages received similar persecution. In turn, Mormons used this same rhetorical tactic to explain all persecution against Mormons. David Grua argues that "Latter-day Saint authors used the language of martyrology to create a group identity based on the memory of shared suffering and

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[92] For further reading on historical memory in general see Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* trans. And ed. Lewis A. Cosner (Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1992) as the groundbreaking work on collective memory; Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Burlington, Vermont: University Press of New England, 1993); David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (March 1989); and David M. Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres, *Religion, Violence, Memory, and Place* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006). For work on Mormon Memory and Mormon historical conscience see Roger D. Launius, "Mormon Memory, Mormon Myth, and Mormon History," *Journal of Mormon History* 21 (Spring 1995); Charles S. Peterson, "Beyond the Problems of Exceptionalist History," in *Great Basin Kingdom Revisited,* ed. Alexander; and David W. Grua Memoirs of the Persecuted: Persecution, Memory, and the West as a Mormon Refuge (MA Thesis BYU University, 2008); Kathleen Flake, "Re-placing Memory: Latter-Day Saint Use of Historicl Monuments and Narrative in the Early Twentieth Century," *Religion and American Culture*, 13 (Winter 2003), 69-109.

[93] *Times and Seasons* 15 March 1845 vol. 5

[94] Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints,* Edited by Bingham H. Roberts. 7 vols., 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1951).

resistance against future oppression."[95] Over time, certain details of the Ohio attack against Smith become emphasized. For example, five days after the attack the Smith's baby died from symptoms related to the measles. Some retellings link the death of the Smith baby to the mob violence and suggest that the baby died as a result of exposure to the cold during the attack. This detail further condemns the attack by blaming the mob for the innocent baby's death and emphasizes the personal trials that Smith endured and overcame.[96] Mormons also tend to emphasize that the next day Smith was able to preach and baptize with members of the mob present. Mormons see this as an important detail because it emphasizes Smith's personal character and attributes, particularly his physical strength, God's sustaining hand, and his apparent willingness to forgive members of the mob. A lesson about forgiveness printed in the 1918 Mormon children's magazine *The Children's Friend* uses the example of Smith's tar-and-feathering to emphasize forgiveness and the desirability of not seeking retribution.[97]

Within the many histories and biographies written by and about Mormons and Joseph Smith, virtually all contain versions of the tar-and-feathering. The repetition of the story as a central element in Smith's life and therefore in Mormon history contributes to the notion that tar and feathering was an integral component of Mormon persecution. In many of the retellings, the role of Sydney Rigdon is down played, and many fail to mention that Rigdon was also tar-and-feathered, and that much of the animosity of the

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[95] David W. Grua, Memoirs of the Persecuted, 20. Mormons are not unique in using this tactic, rather it is a common religious defense mechanism, see Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004)

[96] The Joseph Smith Priesthood/Relief Society Manual reads, "Joseph and Emma's son, Joseph, died five days after the mob attack as a result of being exposed to the cold night air while suffering from the measles."
Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve Inc. 2008), 229

[97] *The Children's Friend*, Vol. 17 (Salt Lake City: Primary Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1918), 444

mob was directed at him. This is most likely due to Rigdon's eventual fall from power and estrangement from Mormonism.[98]

An important difference between the tar-and-feathering in Ohio and in Missouri is that in Ohio, the attack was an isolated incident. There was no more violence against Mormons in Ohio. In Missouri, however, there were years of violence that directly affected thousands of Mormons. Persecution did not happen to the bulk of the Mormons until the Mormon War in 1838. Prior to that, attacks had been made almost exclusively against Mormon leaders, perhaps with the exception of the forced exodus from Jackson County in 1834. After 1838, there was an outpouring of articles, journals, speeches, poems and songs that detailed the cruel treatment Mormons received. This began a process of memory shaping that helped the Mormons use these acts of violence to preserve and strengthen their faith by comparing themselves with ancient Christian martyrs. Within this outpouring, the earlier acts of tar-and-feathering of Mormon leaders were retold, and they became part of the communal Mormon experience. Mormons recorded their stories and articulated the violence, cruelty, and particularly the loss of property which they endured.[99]

As Mormons constructed their version of the Missouri persecutions, most retellings began with the tar-and-feathering of Partridge and Allen in 1833, and ended with the extermination order and exodus in 1838. Parley P. Pratt wrote a piece on the Missouri Persecutions that follows this pattern, from tar-and-feathering to the Mormon-

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[98] See Van Wagoner,*Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess*; Mckiernan, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness.*

[99] Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions;* Roberts, *Missouri Persecutions*.

Missouri War.[100] Mormon intellectual, B.H. Roberts wrote another account that followed the same pattern.[101] These records emphasize that the persecutions were based exclusively on religious belief, that the local and state governments did nothing to intervene, and that the Mormons lost considerable property as a result.

Joseph Smith directed church members to record their losses in an attempt to seek redress from the federal government. Smith and the Mormons clearly felt that they were due recompense for their suffering and expulsion. Mormons wrote and compiled their stories into what came to be called the *Mormon Redress Petitions* and sent them to Congress and President Martin Van Buren.[102] Because virtually all of these sources begin with the tar-and-feathering in 1833, the attack became an integral part of the Mormon story and over time Patridge and Allen stood in for most Mormons in the developing Mormon memory of their persecution. The peace experienced by the Saints in Missouri from 1834-37 seems lost on many, and the tar-and-feathering in 1833 became part of the 1838 Mormon War as part of a longer story of "Missouri Persecutions." Violence that happened at a different time and place came to be remembered as the same story because they were compiled in the same persecution narratives. The narrative of tar-and-feathering became part of the ubiquitous Mormon persecution experience retold and remembered by Mormons up through the twenty-first century. What happened to only two men early in the Mormon experience in Missouri became integral to how the

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[100] Parley P. Pratt, *History of the Late Persecution Inflicted By the State of Missouri Upon the Mormons, In which Ten Thousand American Citizens were robbed, Plundered, and Driven from the State, and Many Others Murdered, Martyred &c. for Their Religion, and All This By Military Force, By Order of the Executive* (Detroit: Dawson and Bates, 1839).

[101] Roberts, *Missouri Persecutions*; Other versions also follow a similar pattern, see *Times and Seasons,* Nauvoo, Ill, March 1, 1845; History of the Church 1:374-390; *Edward Partridge Papers*, LDS Church Archives, Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions.*

[102] The original documents are located in the LDS Church Archives in Salt Lake City but can be found in Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions.*

Mormons told the story of their Missouri sojourn. As it was repeated over time, tar and feathering transformed from something that happened to Partridge and Allen into something that happened in general to Mormons as a part of the Missouri persecutions.

As Mormon leaders later retold the story they began the process of generalizing tar and feathering. In 1842 Joseph Smith wrote a letter to John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat* newspaper in response to an inquiry about the beliefs and practices of the Latter-day Saints. The letter became doctrinally significant as it contained thirteen basic beliefs that came to be called the Articles of Faith and are present in the canon of LDS scripture. In this letter, Joseph Smith also described Mormon persecutions in Missouri in general terms. He wrote that "a mob assembled and burned our houses, tarred and feathered, and whipped many of our brethren and finally drove them from their habitations."[103] While the statement is accurate, it does not specify that only two men were tar-and-feathered and does not name them. Combined with what follows Smith's reference to tar and feathering—"and whipped many of our brethren"—it potentially creates a mistaken impression that "many" brethren were also tarred and feathered. It further includes tar-and-feathering—something that happened to two Missouri Mormons—with house burning, whipping, and forced expulsions, all the things that happened to countless other Mormons.

Another example is manifest in a poem written by James Mulholland in 1841 titled *An address to Americans: A Poem in Blank Verse*:

> In winter's blast, exposed on prairies bare,
> They wander forth unfriended by the world.
> Spoiled of their goods, deprived of house and home,
> Their children barefoot tread the frozen ground,
> And leave their footsteps red with infant blood.

[103] Reprinted in *The Times and Seasons Vol. 3 No.9* 1 March 1842

> Mean time a few more honored than the rest,
> Stripped of their clothes, and tarred and feathered o'er,
> Are thus sent forth; as living monuments
> Of mob-law charity, and mercy great;
> Whilst yet, lest ought be wanting, to conclude,
> a few are butchered, that the scene be sealed
> With blood—to cry to heaven—
> Like unto Abel's in the days of Cain[104]

The poem is an example of various different memory mechanisms. It evokes a sentiment suggesting that those who are persecuted will be honored and are on par with Abel in the days of Cain at the same time that it condemns mob rule. Once again tar-and-feathering is used broadly to describe attacks against Mormons in general, giving the impression that it was widespread. It was an idea that took root early in Mormon memory and continues to dominate collective retellings of Missouri persecutions.

Other statements illustrate how the idea of widespread tar-and-feathering became ingrained in the minds of the Mormon populace. In a speech delivered to the body of the Church in Salt Lake City in 1855, Mormon leader George A. Smith related that "the Very first thing that Joseph told the brethren, when they were going out to preach, was that their salary would be tar and feathers, abuse and persecution. You will be driven from house to house, and from country to country, and be hated of all men because of your religion; and this has been fulfilled, and that too by the people in free America."[105] Two years later George A. Smith expressed a similar sentiment, again to a congregation in Salt Lake City: "Our Elders have preached the Gospel freely throughout the world, and they

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[104] James Mulholland, *An Address to Americans: A Poem in Blank Verse* (Nauvoo: E. Robinson Co., 1841), 5.

[105] Elder George A. Smith, "Arguments of Modern Christian Sects Against the Latter-Day Saints." Delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, June 24, 1855. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 2:331

have tarred and feathered them and put them to death."[106] Smith's remarks come decades before the opening of the Southern State Mission and offers no specific supporting evidence to suggest that others besides Smith, Rigdon, Partridge, and Allen were tarred-and-feathered before 1857. George A. Smith was simply reinforcing and perpetuating an idea that was already in the minds of many Mormons, that tar-and-feathering was a common act of violence used against them.

A similar notion is repeated in an 1888 Mormon manual intended for the education of Mormon youth. "In the United States tar and feathers are frequently resorted to, sometimes accompanied by cruel beating; and it has occurred several times that Mormon Elders have been shot down in cold blood."[107] In this version, the writer references violence in the South against missionaries, but once again makes tar-and-feathers a punishment "frequently resorted to." Tar-and-feathering was a common topic of discussion for early Mormons, and the retention and creation of their memory narrative is in many ways alive and well today.

The LDS Church has weekly Sunday meetings where members gather to worship and learn. Part of that meeting includes Priesthood for men and Relief Society for women. Each week a lesson is taught from a manual that is distributed by the Church on a yearly basis. In 2009 the curriculum focused upon the teachings of Joseph Smith and included experiences from his life. One of the lessons was titled "Stand Fast through the Storms of Life" and included as a major theme the tar-and-feathering of Joseph Smith. The account emphasized the trials faced by Smith, and also his fortitude and forgiveness

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[106] Elder George A. Smith, "Report of a Visit to the Southern Country" Delivered in the Bowery, Great Salt Lake City, September 13, 1857. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 5:221

[107] Junius F. Wells, ed., The Contributor: Representing the Young Men's and Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Assoctiations of the Latter-Day Saints Vol. 9 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1888), 121.

towards those who attacked him.[108] The attack is still present in the formation of Mormon memory, preserving the violent ritual within a Mormon historical context, creating a tale that frequently lacks broader themes and perspective.

In like manner, the popular film *Legacy* continues to shape Mormon memory since its release in 1993. The portrayal of the tar-and-feathering of the fictional character Jacob adds to the perception that tar-and-feathering was a common act perpetrated against early Latter-day Saints. The production of the film demonstrates that the LDS Church is interested in remembering the sacrifice and legacy of early Mormon converts at the same time that it constructs a collective memory of what that past might mean for the present generation of Mormons. Context and analysis are missing from the narrative, leaving a story shorn of any sense of the changing role that tar-and-feathering played in American ritual violence.

[108] *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve Inc. 2008), 227-236.

CONCLUSION

For hundreds of years, Europeans and their American descendants used communal acts of violence to enforce collective rules and intimidate and attack transgressors. Certain rituals developed that could satisfy the vengeance of the community. These practices crossed the Atlantic with the earliest North American settlers and were manifest in charivari and skimmington. In particular tar-and-feathering was a ritual that saw a unique rise in popularity because of the American Revolution. For the Revolutionary generation, tar-and-feathering held deep patriotic meanings infused with protest and the creation of unity. While the practice dwindled in popularity during the revolution, it resurfaced during the rise of Jacksonian democracy in the 1830s. Within this violent context, four Mormons fell victim in two attacks. Later when Mormons returned to the South as missionaries, Southerners once again resorted to tar-and-feathering in three cases.

For Mormons, tar-and-feathering seems to be especially rooted in their historical memory. It sometimes stands in for all the attacks that Mormons suffered at the hands of fellow Americans. Yet during the nineteenth century only seven Mormons were tar-and-feathered. When compared to other types of violence employed against Mormons, tar-and-feathering composes a small proportion of the whole.

Placing the attacks within their separate geographical and chronological contexts also adds significant meaning. In Ohio, Smith and Rigdon engaged in a religious debate that became public and personal. This resulted in a night attack apparently intent upon murder or castration with tar-and-feathering an unplanned afterthought. In Missouri, the Mormons faced a uniquely Southern culture that emphasized honor and community. As was typical of charivari rituals, Mormons faced public humiliation and chastisement that included a formal declaration against them, the destructions of their buildings, and a parade that included hundreds of participants and ended in the tar-and-feathering of Partridge and Allen in the town square. Years later, as Mormon missionaries returned to the South, they were again attacked and even killed. Three of them were tar-and-feathered, but by that time the ritual had changed. Gone were the daylight parades to the town square with an entire community present to relish the communal justice, but rather small groups of men who retreated unknown. In all of these cases tar-and-feathering branded Mormons as outsiders, people who would either have to abandon their faith or leave their community.

For their part the Mormons found meaning in the tar-and-feathering all their own. As they sought western refuge, they remembered tar-and-feathering as integral to their persecution narrative. In the retelling, details disappeared and generalizations replaced specificity to the point that tar-and-feathering became cultural persecution discourses that loomed large in Mormon memory, well beyond their historical proportions.

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