

INTERPRETER

— ∞ —
A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 3 · 2013 · Pages 197-222

New Light and Old Shadows: John G. Turner's Attempt to Understand Brigham Young

Craig L. Foster

Offprint Series

© 2013 Interpreter Foundation. A nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

The goal of the Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication. Visit us at MormonInterpreter.com

NEW LIGHT AND OLD SHADOWS: JOHN G. TURNER'S ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND BRIGHAM YOUNG

Craig L. Foster

Review of John G. Turner, Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), viii, 500, map, photos, notes, index.

Brigham Young has repeatedly been described as larger than life and most people, critics and supporters, would agree. Brigham Young (1801–1877), second president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, led the Saints like a modern-day Moses from the turmoil of Nauvoo to the Great Basin. He then oversaw the settlement of over three hundred communities in the intermountain west. He directed the growth and development of the LDS Church and left an indelible mark on both Mormonism and the western United States. Brigham Young was, indeed, larger than life.

With such a complex and dynamic individual as Brigham Young, undertaking the writing of his biography is very difficult with many possible pitfalls. Leonard J. Arrington's award-winning work, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (1986), was excellent in some ways but fell short in other aspects of analyzing Young's life. Other Brigham Young biographies, including the well-researched, very readable, and certainly enjoyable *Brigham Young and the Expanding American Frontier* (1986) by Newell G. Bringhurst, have also fallen short to one degree or another.

John Turner's *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* has attempted to go beyond the previous Brigham Young biographies,

and in some ways he has succeeded. The depth and breadth of Turner's material is certainly impressive and the fact he was allowed "access to the entirety of the massive Brigham Young Papers and several other key collections" (p. 487) adds to the richness of the biography. Unfortunately, this book too falls short in some areas. It is uneven: some sections of the book, such as the prologue and first chapter, are very well written and flow beautifully. Other parts of the book are plodding and redundant, leaving the reader both disappointed and frustrated.

John G. Turner comes to this biography with an impressive background, having earned degrees in theology and history at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Notre Dame. He was able to approach Brigham Young and early Latter-day Saint history from both a theological and historical perspective and, because of his diverse training and research expertise, was able to place Brigham Young's and the Mormon experience into a broader social and historical context. This helps readers to have a better understanding of what happened and why.

Perhaps one of the best features of the book is the extent to which Turner spent time discussing the wives of Brigham Young. About fifty pages of the biography are dedicated to discussing both the wives and the complex relationships which Brigham had with them. The lack of discussion about Brigham Young's home life was one of the weaknesses of Arrington's Brigham Young biography and, while Bringham had some excellent information regarding the wives and children, he was limited by time and space. Turner was able to discuss this aspect of Brigham's life in much greater depth.

Unfortunately, while the book certainly spends more pages discussing Brigham Young's family life, it did not live up to its potential. This is particularly the case when it comes to its treatment of Brigham's fifty-seven children. Despite the non-Mormon caricatures of Brigham Young as an unloving, uncaring despot who neither knew the names nor personalities of

his numerous wives and children, Brigham Young was actually very loving and caring, particularly when it came to his children.¹

Furthermore, while there was information about the various wives, such as Miriam Works and Mary Ann Angell, both of whom he married monogamously, and such plural wives as Lucy Ann Decker, Clarissa Decker, Emily Partridge, Emeline Free, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Zina D. Huntington, Harriet Amelia Folsom, and (naturally) Ann Eliza Webb, some of the wives seem to have received less attention than they merited, while others were examined in more detail than necessary.

For example, Augusta Adams Cobb, who left her non-Mormon husband and married Brigham Young, received almost as much attention in the book as Zina D. Huntington and Eliza R. Snow, both of whom served as general presidents of the women's Relief Society. Cobb received more attention than Emmeline Free, significantly more than either Clarissa or Lucy Ann Decker, or Emily Dow Partridge, all of whom bore Young a number of children and who would have been considered more important in the Young household. In fact, Augusta Adams Cobb had more attention in the text than Harriet Amelia Folsom who was supposed to have been Brigham Young's great love in his old age. Cobb even had more attention than Ann

1. Artemus Ward, American author and humorist, wrote in *Artemus Ward: His Travels* (New York: Carlton, 1865), "He don't pretend to know his children, there is so many of um, tho they all know him. He sez about every child he meats call him Par, & he takes it for grantid it is so." <http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/roughingit/map/morward.html>. For more examples of the negative portrayal of Brigham Young and plural marriage, see Craig L. Foster, "Victorian Pornographic Imagery in Anti-Mormon Literature," *Journal of Mormon History* 19 (Spring 1993): 115-32 and Douglas McKay, "The Puissant Procreator: The Comic Ridicule of Brigham Young," *Sunstone* 7/6 (November-December 1982): 14-17. For examples of Brigham Young's actual relationship with his children, see the following: Susa Young Gates, "How Brigham Young Brought Up His 56 Children," *Physical Culture* (February 1925): 29-31, 138-44; Dean C. Jesse, "Brigham Young's Family: The Wilderness Years," *BYU Studies* 19:4 (1979): 1-23; and Jesse, *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974).

Eliza Webb who gained notoriety for suing Brigham Young for divorce and then traveling the country talking about the horrors of polygamy. Admittedly, Cobb was an extremely colorful individual of questionable sanity whose prolific writing is a fertile reservoir for provocative quotes, such as her request to be sealed to Jesus Christ or at least Joseph Smith and then complaining to Brigham Young about his sowing “holy seed [with younger wives]” (p. 192) and referring to Brigham Young as “Lord Brigham,” “his Excellency,” and “Mr. Proxy” (p. 193). Nevertheless, given Brigham Young’s rocky relationship with her, which limited the interactions which they shared, as well as her lack of historical importance, the reader is left to wonder why Augusta Adams Cobb received so much attention.

In general, John Turner did a fairly good job in retaining a neutral posture regarding plural marriage. Still, there were places in the book where the claim of neutrality seemed strained. While discussing Joseph Smith’s relationship with Fanny Alger, Turner described it as Smith’s “first well-documented nonmonogamous relationship” and then quoted Oliver Cowdery calling the relationship a “dirty, nasty, filthy affair” (p. 88). He concluded his discussion about Fanny Alger by stating, “Whether Smith was motivated by religious obedience or pursued sexual dalliances clothed with divine sanction cannot be fully resolved through historical analysis” (p. 88).

Turner’s approach to Fanny Alger is problematic for a couple of reasons. The first is that describing her as the “first well-documented nonmonogamous relationship” (p. 88) is certainly not neutral in tone or implication, since the unspoken suggestion is that Joseph had been involved in other non-documented

relationships prior to Fanny.² This has long been a trope used by hostile voices, but the evidence for it is scant.³

The second problem is that while Turner cited some primary documents—Oliver Cowdery’s letter to his brother, Warren Cowdery—the only two secondary sources cited were Todd Compton’s *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (1997) and George D. Smith’s *Nauvoo Polygamy* (2008). For some reason, Turner chose not to cite the excellent essay by Don Bradley, titled, “Mormon Polygamy Before Nauvoo? The Relationship of Joseph Smith and Fanny Alger.” In this groundbreaking essay, Bradley showed that Oliver Cowdery had first written “scrape,” which at that time could mean a problematic

2. There was at least one reader/reviewer who felt Turner “overreaches when he describes Joseph Smith’s seduction of the teenage servant girl Fanny Alger as the prophet’s ‘first well-documented nonmonogamous relationship.’ The business was more sordid than that.” This according to Alex Beam, “Latter-day Patriarch,” *The New York Times* (19 October 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/21/books/review/brigham-young-pioneer-prophet-by-john-g-turner.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0. Beam took issue with Turner’s handling of plural marriage which he described as “squishy in the extreme.” Beam, a columnist for the *Boston Globe* is presently writing a book about the death of Joseph Smith. His review of Turner’s book might give people a hint of the tone his book on Joseph Smith will take. As a part of his review of Turner’s book, Beam wrote, “For over a century, the church cleaved to ‘faith-promoting’ histories about heroic Joseph and Brigham, and the evil Gentiles who persecuted them. As recently as 19 years ago, Salt Lake’s guardians of the Sainly flame excommunicated several prominent writers and historians for what the old-line Soviets would have called ‘deviationist’ points of view.”

3. A good example is Richard Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 4–5. See a similar style in George D. Smith, “Nauvoo Polygamy: ‘. . . but we called it celestial marriage,’” (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008), 44–45. Even Van Wagoner’s endnotes somewhat undercut this narrative. For a detailed discussion of the evidentiary problems with this approach, see Gregory L. Smith, “Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Plural Marriage* (*but were afraid to ask),” FAIR Conference presentation, Sandy, UT, 7 August 2009, <http://www.fairlds.org/fair-conferences/2009-fair-conference/2009-everything-you-always-wanted-to-know-about-plural-marriage-but-were-afraid-to-ask>. See also a review of the 2008 volume’s treatment in Gregory L. Smith, “George D. Smith’s *Nauvoo Polygamy* (A review of “*Nauvoo Polygamy: . . . but we called it celestial marriage*” by: George D. Smith),” *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): 60–68.

event or mess, rather than “affair” but had crossed out what was considered “a low word” and replaced it with “affair” which was considered a more sophisticated word. Realizing that “scrape” was the word originally used, however, changes the popular interpretation of Cowdery’s description of the relationship and supports Bradley and others’ argument that Fanny Alger was Joseph Smith’s first plural wife.⁴

While discussing possible sexual relations in polygamous marriages, Turner wrote, “There is some, but not as much, evidence that Smith consummated his marriages to plural wives who already possessed husbands” (pp.89–90). Once again, Turner could have enriched the discussion by citing Brian C. Hales’s argument in, “Joseph Smith and the Puzzlement of ‘Polyandry’.” Hales argues persuasively that Joseph Smith did not engage in sexual activity with any already married woman to whom he was sealed except for Sylvia Sessions Lyon, who was estranged and regarded herself as divorced from her husband. This was the same marriage for which Turner cited Compton’s *In Sacred Loneliness*,⁵ but he has missed the additional data provided by Hales.

The Smith-Alger relationship and the question of sexuality in polyandrous marriages were not the only aspects of plural marriage about which John Turner appears to have been less than neutral. While discussing how the “marital stampede” of the Mormon Reformation of 1856–1857 “led to a decrease in the marriage age,” Turner wrote, “Although marriages of fourteen-year-old girls were not unheard of in the rest of the United States (the legal age of consent was often twelve for girls), such unions were very rare. Mormon lead-

4. Don Bradley, “Mormon Polygamy Before Nauvoo? The Relationship of Joseph Smith and Fanny Alger,” in *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy* ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2011), 32.

5. Brian C. Hales, “Joseph Smith and the Puzzlement of ‘Polyandry’” in *Persistence of Polygamy*, 99–151.

ers, by contrast, blessed an unusual number of early marriages, especially during the reformation [*sic*]” (p. 257).

Unfortunately, Turner did not adequately source his statement regarding the commonality of early age of marriage. Two endnotes later, however, he cited Todd Compton’s essay, “Early Marriage in the New England and Northeastern States, and in Mormon Polygamy: What was the Norm?” which appeared in Bringhurst and Foster, *The Persistence of Polygamy*.⁶ Apparently he used Compton’s essay as source information regarding the age of marriage. Amazingly, it appears that Turner’s use of material from *The Persistence of Polygamy* was somewhat selective. As seen above, he chose not to cite Don Bradley’s essay regarding Fanny Alger and he also chose to ignore the essay by Craig L. Foster, David Keller, and Gregory L. Smith, “The Age of Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives in Social and Demographic Context,” which argues that while marriage to fourteen-year-old girls was not as common as to older teenage girls, the relatively young marital ages among nineteenth-century Saints did, indeed, fit within the larger historical context of American society, especially on the frontier.⁷ It is a pity that Turner focused on Compton’s analysis, which relied on the New England states, rather than the arguably more relevant data about the American frontier. Nauvoo-era Mormons were on the frontier, and those of Reformation-era Utah were even more so. Because of this, readers miss a vital bit of historical context.

It should be noted that in a discussion between the reviewer and John G. Turner in Salt Lake City on 20 October

6. Todd M. Compton, “Early Marriage in the New England and Northeastern States, and in Mormon Polygamy: What was the Norm?,” in *Persistence of Polygamy*, 184–232.

7. Craig L. Foster, David Keller, and Gregory L. Smith, “The Age of Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives in Social and Demographic Context” in Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster, *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2011), 152–83.

2012, Turner stated that *The Persistence of Polygamy* came out too late for him to really use or cite it much in his book. This claim, however, is problematic given the fact that he was able to cite the essay that agreed with his assumption that marriage to fourteen-year-old girls was “very rare” while ignoring the essay that counters this assumption. If one essay was able to be cited, why not others?

Turner also dwelt quite a bit on what could be termed the *culture of violence* among the early Latter-day Saints, in both word and deed. In fact, the subject was brought up so often in one context or another that it seemed to be a key sub-theme of the book. To his credit, Turner attempted to place some of these examples of violence within a broader cultural and historical context. He did not, however, go far enough.

For example, while Turner cited Kenneth W. Godfrey’s “Crime and Punishment in Mormon Nauvoo, 1839–1846” and Glen M. Leonard’s *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise*, as well as a couple of other sources, he still made it sound as if counterfeiting and other crimes were only a Nauvoo problem and that they might specifically have been a uniquely or particularly Mormon problem. After describing an indictment for counterfeiting issued against Brigham Young and other prominent church leaders, Turner wrote, “It remains unclear whether Young or only lower-ranking church leaders like Turley had sanctioned the bogus-making operation in Nauvoo” (p.127). Turner also explained there were “serious instances of vigilantism” in Nauvoo (p.122).

The historical record demonstrates that counterfeiting and extralegal violence did exist in Nauvoo. But not only does Turner appear to make some assumptions, he should also have placed Mormon Nauvoo within the social milieu of that time by explaining how the Mississippi River Valley was a “rough and tumble society” and that “counterfeiters congregated” in

the Mississippi River Valley and “along the borders of states and territories, seeking refuge in the cracks and crevices of the federal system.”⁸ (We note, as with the age of plural wives, that Turner is again ignoring the frontier nature of Mormon society.) Nauvoo, in spite of its taverns, brothels, petty criminals, and other social ills, actually seemed to generally fare better than other places in the Mississippi River Valley where life could be “poor, nasty, brutish and short, [and] was certainly filthy, chaotic and dangerous.”⁹

In other words, while activities and cultural climate should certainly have been better in a community founded on religious principles, Nauvoo was no different than other Mississippi River communities and perhaps even better than most. The Latter-day Saint culture of violence, according to Turner, continued and even expanded when they settled in the Great Basin. Furthermore, the violence was not only condoned but encouraged by Brigham Young who preached beheading as punishment (p. 186) and the concept of blood atonement which was explained that “adulterers, murderers, violators of the covenants made in the endowment, and those who had committed the biblically opaque sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit” should pay by the shedding of their blood “that the smoke thereof might ascend to God as an offering to appease the wrath that is kindled against them” (p.258).

Turner gave a number of examples of acts of extra-legal violence or vigilantism which included beatings, castration and death. Extra-legal justice was meted out for an array of crimes

8. Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 17, 159.

9. Roger K. Miller, “No romanticizing of life on Mississippi” *Chicago Sun-Times* (October 2010?), <http://www.suntimes.com/entertainment/books/2830250,SHO-Books-wicked24.article>. The article discusses Lee Sandlin, *Wicked River: The Mississippi When It Last Ran Wild* (New York: Pantheon, 2010).

and sins including apostasy, theft, adultery and seduction, as well as murder (pp.258–59, 262, 349). Regarding extralegal justice and violence, Turner wrote:

Utah, of course, differed in important ways from other parts of the mid-century American West. Unlike in San Francisco, there were no widespread political or ethnic divisions fueling vigilantism, and there was no apparent popular demand for extralegal violence. In comparison to other western states and territories, indeed, Utah was remarkable for its lack of organized vigilante activity. In Utah, though, the governor and head of the territory's quasi-established religion lent his approval—at least after the fact—to shadowy acts of retribution that alarmed even some loyal Mormons. Ordering the deaths of horse thieves was unremarkable in the American West, but Young also condoned the castration of Thomas Lewis and the Parish-Potter murders and suggested that an unspecified number of other individuals deserved to die. Brigham Young, who had feared for his life while in the margins of Illinois society, created a climate in which men and women on the margins of Mormon society lived in a similar state of fear. (p.262)

Turner's description of territorial Utah, while generally correct, verges on the melodramatic. It is true that extralegal justice took place, at times with the blessings of community and religious leaders. It is also true that punishment not only involved beatings and expulsion from the community, but also castration and even death. But, as Turner, noted, Utah's acts of vigilantism were remarkably lower than surrounding states and territories. Furthermore, Turner does attempt to place Utah's acts of violence within historical context, but he falls short of adequately doing so.

First of all, while Brigham Young's preaching and rhetoric might seem strange, even offensive, to modern ears, it was what a rougher, less gentle group of people needed at that time. In his article, "Raining Pitchforks: Brigham Young as Preacher," Ronald W. Walker explored Young's preaching, explaining that he did not want the people to be complacent, especially in their weaknesses and sins. Instead, Brigham Young stated, "You need, figuratively, to have it rain pitchforks, tines downwards. . . . Instead of the smooth, beautiful, sweet, still, silk-velvet-lipped preaching, you should have sermons like peals of thunder."¹⁰

Brigham Young's tough talk was especially strong during times of real and perceived problems.

During the Mormon Reformation of 1856 he delivered what was described by Wilford Woodruff as "one of the strongest addresses that was ever delivered to this Church & Kingdom." Young denounced the Saints "for lying[,] steali[n]g, swaring, committing adultery, quarelli[n]g with Husbands wives & Children and many other evils[.] He spoke in the power of God & the demonstration of the Holy Ghost & his voice & words were like the Thunderings of Mount Sina."¹¹

In spite of a celebrated temper and strong sermons, Brigham Young was known for having a loud bark but not a strong bite.¹² In spite of raining pitchforks and preaching blood-curdling threats, Brigham Young tended to be kind, sagacious, and forgiving when dealing individually with sinners and members with problems. This did not, however, mean

10. *Journal of Discourses* 3:222–223 as quoted in Ronald W. Walker, "Raining Pitchforks: Brigham Young as Preacher," *Sunstone* 8 (May–June 1983): 7.

11. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 14 September 1856, as quoted in Walker, "Raining Pitchforks," 7.

12. Walker, "Raining Pitchforks," 8.

there was no bite. Brigham, like other leaders of his time, could be hard when needed.

Again, this was a different, rougher time where physical punishment was more common and certain levels of violence were not only expected but accepted. Richard Maxwell Brown wrote that “a salient fact of American violence is that, time and again, it has been the instrument not merely of the criminal and disorderly but of the most upright and honorable” and “Americans have never been loath to employ the most unremitting violence in the interest of any cause deemed a good one.”¹³ What is more, many vigilante groups and movements were led by and included some of the most upstanding and respected men in the community.

Another point that Turner should have noted is that while there were certainly examples of extralegal justice and violence among Latter-day Saints, they were not alone. Other religious denominations also experienced and participated in the culture of violence that permeated America to one degree or another from the time of colonial settlement throughout the nineteenth century and arguably to the present. For example, the Ulster Presbyterians who settled on the American frontier were known for their violence. It has been suggested that they may “have been a product of their strict Calvinist heritage. Like many religious groups, orthodox Scottish and Irish Presbyterians were firmly wedded to the notion of an unvarying religious truth, but the manner in which they defended that truth often gave their institutions an unusual rigidity.”¹⁴

13. Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1977), 4, 7.

14. Joanna Brooks, “Held Captive by the Irish: Quaker Captivity Narratives in Frontier Pennsylvania,” *New Hibernia Review* 8/3 (2004): 31; and Ned C. Landsman, “Roots, Routes, and Rootedness: Diversity, Migration, and Toleration in Mid-Atlantic Pluralism,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2/2 (2004): 294.

The Ulster Presbyterians were not alone in their heritage of violence. Methodists were both the recipients and the perpetrators of sectarian and extralegal violence that included rioting, jeering, rock throwing, and even lynching.¹⁵ In fact, some early nineteenth-century Methodist writings “emphasized the moral value of defending the self and others.” Methodists were, of course, influenced by an American culture in which “dominant images of masculinity and the cultural fascination with violence in the West and South also made it easier to justify the use of violence as a reasonable and even necessary responsibility.”¹⁶

Some of the aforementioned violence involved Methodist confrontations with Baptists—the war of words would sometimes turn physical. Among the Baptists, particularly the Southern Baptists, violence was both inter- and intra-denominational. “Mainstream Southern religion has rarely been distinguished by either restraint or lethargy.”¹⁷ The entire nineteenth-century saw examples of Baptist mob violence that included intimidation, beatings and even murder.¹⁸

Religious violence certainly was not confined to the South and West. Even staid New England and the eastern seaboard experienced examples of extralegal and religious-influenced violence. In the early colonies, Puritans “turned their violent energies against members of their own community by

15. Richard Carwardine, “Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War,” *Church History* 69/3 (September 2000): 593, 604–605. For examples of anti-Mormon violence similar to what the Methodists experienced, see Patrick Mason, *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

16. Jeffrey Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 128.

17. Charles Wellborn, “Brann vs the Baptists: Violence in Southern Religion,” *Christian Ethics Today* 33 (27 December 2010): 14. The article may also be accessed at <http://www.christianethicstoday.com/cetart/index.cfm?fuseaction=Articles.main&ArtID=786>.

18. Wellborn, “Brann vs the Baptists,” 14.

banishing, torturing, and killing those Puritans who embraced the Quaker doctrine of the inner light or who were accused by their neighbors of witchcraft.”¹⁹ In Philadelphia, a series of Protestant-Catholic conflicts over Bible-reading in public schools escalated into full-blown violence in the summer of 1844 leading to “a series of violent confrontations in which churches and homes were destroyed by arson and at least seventeen people were killed.”²⁰ Other eastern cities also experienced Catholic-Protestant violence. Boston, for example, experienced religious rioting brought on by evangelical Protestant evangelizing as late as 1895.²¹

Noted historian Anne M. Butler wrote, “One almost cannot speak of western history without taking into account the place and power of violence in the heritage of the west.”²² In reality, while the Old West is famous for a high level of real and imagined violence, what happened in the West only reflected an earlier heritage that was carried from the Old World into the colonies and then traveled westward with the pioneer migration. While the Scotch-Irish have a reputation of having transported with them to America a violent tradition that stemmed from centuries of having lived in the Celtic fringe of northern England, Scotland, and Ireland, they were not alone. Even those living in other parts of England had a heritage of violent reaction to real and perceived crimes and injustices.²³

19. Daniel P. Buchanan, “Tares in the Wheat: Puritan Violence and Puritan Families in the Nineteenth-Century Liberal Imagination,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 8/2 (Summer, 1998): 205.

20. Tracy Fessenden, “The Nineteenth-Century Bible Wars and the Separation of Church and State,” *Church History* 74/4 (Dec. 2005): 784.

21. Margaret Bendroth, “Rum, Romanism, and Evangelism: Protestants and Catholics in Late-Nineteenth-Century,” *Church History* 68/3 (September 1999): 643.

22. Robert R. Dykstra, “Body Counts and Murder Rates: The Contested Statistics of Western Violence,” *Reviews in American History* 31/4 (2003): 554.

23. For examples of an English culture of violence see: Craig B. Little and Christopher P. Sheffield, “Frontiers and Criminal Justice: English Private

An example of what would be viewed as a violent tradition transported from the Old World to the New was castration. In *Brigham Young*, Turner repeatedly invoked the castration of Thomas Lewis (pp.258–59, 262, 307, 345, 375). While such an act is viewed as barbaric and repulsive by modern readers, it was used as legal and extralegal punishment in both the Old and New World. In early Britain, castration was punishment for rape as a part of *lex talionis*, “the law of retaliation.”²⁴ This type of punishment was brought to the colonies: Connecticut had several cases of castration as a lesser punishment than death. Not all of the cases of castration involved rape. At least one was punishment for committing mayhem.²⁵ An example of castration as a form of extralegal justice was the castration of two Methodist ministers in North Carolina in August 1831. The two men were accused of having adulterous relations with the wife of a North Carolina Congressman. The Methodists were attacked and castrated by a mob.²⁶

While it is debatable whether or not castration was better than death, death was certainly not ruled out for both legal and extralegal punishment. Naturally, death was usually the punishment for crimes like murder and horse stealing, but could also be meted out to people guilty of rape, sexual assault, or even seduction. The extent of public outrage and the subsequent punishment naturally varied depending upon region

Prosecution Societies and American Vigilantism in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *American Sociological Review* 48/6 (December 1983): 796–808.

24. Cyndi Banks, *Punishment in America: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 10. For the definition of *lex talionis*, see “*Lex Talionis*,” *New World Encyclopedia*, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Lex_talionis.

25. “Whipping and Castration as Punishment for Crime,” *The Yale Law Journal* 8/9 (June 1899): 380–84.

26. David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828–1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford, 1993), 93.

of the country, with reaction and retribution generally being harsher in the South and West.

At the very least, a man guilty of sexual dishonor could be jailed and fined, and those known or even believed to be guilty of such conduct were in danger of much worse. “Friends and relatives of a woman who had been ‘unlawfully shocked, or whose feelings have been wounded’ would feel an almost instinctual urge to avenge her honor.”²⁷ Across the country during the middle of the nineteenth century there was a “so-called ‘unwritten law’ [which] decreed that a man had the right to avenge the sexual dishonor of a wife, mother, daughter, or sister.”²⁸ It was recognized and accepted that “an outraged husband, father, or brother could justifiably kill the alleged libertine who had been sexually intimate with the defendant’s wife, daughter or sister.”²⁹

Unfortunately, John Turner recounted the murder of Newton Brassfield without placing it in context of the belief that seducers and adulterers must pay a penalty up to and including death, and that friends and relatives could avenge that honor. Brassfield, a non-Mormon, was shot shortly after a marriage to Mary Emma Hill, a plural wife of a “Mormon then absent on a church mission” (p.349). While Brigham Young

denied any involvement in or knowledge of the crime, but he condoned the murder by adding that were he “absent from home,” he “would rejoice to know that

27. Lawrence M. Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 220.

28. Friedman, *Crime and Punishment*, 221.

29. Robert M. Ireland, “The Libertine Must Die: Sexual Dishonor and the Unwritten Law in the Nineteenth-Century United States,” *Journal of Social History* 23/1 (Autumn 1989): 27. According to John A. Peterson, Thomas Lewis was guilty of a sexual crime for which he was being transported to the territorial penitentiary and it was for that reason he was intercepted and castrated, “Warren Stone Snow, a Man in between: The Biography of a Mormon Defender,” MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1985, 112–22.

I had friends there to protect and guard the virtue of my household.” As Young had previously done on a number of occasions, he stressed that husbands—and friends on their behalf—had the right to take vengeance on their wives’ seducers. (p.349)

Brigham Young was repeating a commonly held belief in America at that time. Not only did Turner not place this event and attitude within the proper cultural and historical context, he stated that this and another murder explained later “raised fears among Utah’s non-Mormons that Young was making a renewed effort to intimidate Gentiles through violence” (p.349).

To his credit, Turner mentioned that “Utah was remarkable for its lack of organized vigilante activity” (p. 262). Going a step further, in spite of the examples Turner gave in his biography, the number of violent incidents appears to have been less than in most surrounding states and territories. For example, cases of lynching between 1882 and 1903 are as follows: Arizona had 28, California 41, Colorado 64, Idaho 19, Montana an incredibly high 85, New Mexico 34, Oregon 19, Washington 26, and Wyoming 37. Of the states and territories surrounding Utah, only Nevada, with 5, had less than Utah’s 7 recorded cases of lynching.³⁰ Methods of ministering the ultimate judgment could be brutal. Along with hanging, some people were burned, others beaten to death, shot, and mutilated.³¹ In Mississippi, a mob beheaded a victim, played kickball with the man’s head, and threw his body to hungry pigs.³² Grisly as such acts are, it is hard to see how a mere seven deaths in Utah could

30. Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York: Knopf, 1929; repr. New York: Arno, 1969), 254–59 and Frank Shay, *Judge Lynch: His First Hundred Years* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1969), 141, 144–47, 150, as quoted in Craig L. Foster, “Myth vs. Reality in the Burt Murder and Harvey Lynching,” *Journal of the West* 43/4 (Fall 2004): 54.

31. “Lynching,” <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/L/LY001.html>.

32. Grimsted, *American Mobbing*, 16.

successfully “intimidate” non-Mormons when the risks were higher elsewhere. This is especially true if such lynchings followed genuine crimes and offenses, such as rape and murder, instead of being mere persecution targeted at non-Mormons. A non-Mormon who did not rape or commit other outrages was almost certainly safer in Utah than most other places in the West, and one suspects that most knew it. Turner’s portrait smacks more of 19th century anti-Mormon sensationalism.

The emphasis on a culture of violence continued in the chapter discussing the Utah War and Mountain Meadow Massacre. John Turner naturally used a number of sources, two of which were Will Bagley’s *Blood of the Prophets* (2004) and Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley, and Glen M. Leonard’s *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (2008). The two books take different approaches to this tragic event, with *Blood of the Prophets* being highly critical of Brigham Young and the Mormons, claiming Brigham Young ordered the massacre and that there were no Indians involved.

Turner appears to have done an awkward tap dance between the two approaches, usually falling ungracefully onto the side of *Blood of the Prophets*. In describing accusations that some members of the Baker-Fancher wagon train that was eventually massacred might have poisoned Indians and livestock, Turner mentioned the theory propounded by Walker et al. that the “poisoning” of the cattle and subsequently the Indians was actually caused by anthrax, but people at that time naturally would not have known about anthrax.³³ Yet after stat-

33. Turner did not mention the death of Proctor Robison who became ill shortly after skinning one of the cattle thought by people at that time to have been poisoned. Robison died on 21 September 1857, well after the wagon train had left Corn Creek and was later massacred. Nevertheless, cattle continued to become ill and local people thought it might still be from the supposed poisoning. A detailed study was conducted with inconclusive findings but suggestions for further, more detailed research, was probably published too late for Turner to have used in his book. The article is Ugo Perego, et al., “The Mountain

ing that it might have been anthrax, Turner wrote, “Later on, Young and others repeated false rumors that members of the Arkansas company had brought trouble upon themselves by poisoning the creek and an ox they had given to the Indians” (p.276). Such a statement forces us to ask how these men could have been spreading false rumors if they sincerely did not understand about microbes and infectious diseases and had instead reached a conclusion that seemed plausible? Mistaken they could have been, but this does not mean they were intentionally spreading “false rumors.”

The tap dance continued with Turner writing that “Mormons and possibly some remaining Paiutes butchered the women, wounded, and most of the children” (p.278). Possibly? The Indians either were or were not present. Walker et al. claimed Indians were present while Bagley insisted they were not. The awkward dance continued with Turner explaining that Will Bagley, “proud of his ‘Mormon heritage’ but no longer a church member . . . documented a long history of denial, obfuscation, and obstruction on the part of church leaders in relation to the massacre,” concluded that Brigham Young had planned and ordered the massacre. Turner then turned around and stated that “more recently, three historians employed by the Church History Department depicted the massacre as the work of local church leaders” (p. 279). He either knowingly or unknowingly biased the readers by painting Bagley as a “proud of his ‘Mormon Heritage’” historian who dutifully performed an enormous amount of research vs. Walker, Turley, and Leonard, “three historians employed” by the LDS Church who “depicted,” not documented, “the massacre as the work of local leaders.”

Meadows Massacre and ‘poisoned springs’: scientific testing of the more recent, anthrax theory;” *International Journal of Legal Medicine* (2012), http://download.springer.com/static/pdf/574/art%253A10.1007%252Fs00414-012-0681-y.pdf?auth66=1355104594_f2a654aa019f1fab540c738cedd3f24b&ext=.pdf.

He then continued, “They [the three church historians] allow that ‘errors were made’ by Young, but they include his mistakes among those of James Buchanan and many others (pp.279–80).” The reader is left to assume that all blame and mistakes must rest with Young and no others. Were there not mistakes made all around? Most historians of this tragic event certainly think so. Ultimately, continuing the awkward tap dance, Turner admitted “there was no good reason for Young to order a massacre” but then later added, and probably rightfully so, “Young bears significant responsibility for what took place at Mountain Meadows” (p.280). Thus Turner had a foot on either side in his strange dance.

In spite of Turner’s minimal attempts to place Mormon examples of violence into a greater context, there seemed to be an over-emphasis on Mormon foibles and problems that reinforced not only a subtheme of a Mormon culture of violence but also brought into question the intellectual, spiritual, and moral fortitude of the Latter-day Saints as well as the character of Brigham Young. The following examples provide justification for such a strong statement.

Turner emphasized Brigham Young’s lack of patience with people, as well as mistreating and being “vindictive for years toward those who crossed him (5).” He later commented, “In order to illustrate the hazards of apostasy, Young publicly humiliated those who strayed” (p.330). He then described how Brigham Young had publicly humiliated Thomas Marsh, “Young’s former apostolic superior” who had returned to the church after years away from it. He then concluded, “After Marsh became thoroughly submissive, Young showed charity and mercy to his former superior” (p.330).

Regarding Brigham Young’s continued theological and personality conflicts with Orson Pratt, Turner wrote, “Young wanted the Latter-day Saints to embrace him as the church’s living oracle, to see him as the font of true doctrine. Ideally, he

wanted a submission that flowed from sincere acceptance, not grudging obedience” (p.332). But acceptance by church members of Brigham Young as a prophet might have been difficult, given the man portrayed by Turner.

Young was portrayed as irascible, mean-spirited, vindictive, and, as was shown in several different places of the biography, also vulgar and routinely used swear words. Turner pointed out that “Young sometimes said he only swore from the pulpit, but he also employed profanity in private councils” (p.177). In explaining his bad language, Brigham Young explained, “I acknowledged in Nauvoo I was not so good a man as Joseph” (p.178).

Whether or not Brigham Young “was not so good a man as Joseph” Smith, the previous examples seem calculated to call into question the character of Young. Moreover, given the repeated negative emphasis placed on Brigham Young’s character flaws and some questionable decisions and actions, the book implicitly casts doubt on the judgment of Latter-day Saint contemporaries who accepted Young as an inspired man, even a prophet. If Turner’s portrait of Young is a fair and balanced one, why did so many follow him and even love him despite his character flaws? What did they see that Turner does not show us? “The biographer is more than the equal of his subject,” warned Gertrude Himmelfarbe, “he is his superior. ‘Raised upon a little eminence,’ as Woolf says, he can look down upon his subject, the better to observe his petty, all too human features.”³⁴

This is not to suggest that Brigham Young’s character flaws and mistakes should not be discussed. To the contrary, it is vital that they should be. Otherwise, it would not be an honest attempt to truly understand the man and his life. Nevertheless, Turner’s tone at times, as well as his dwelling on the negative,

34. Gertrude Himmelfarbe, *On Looking Into the Abyss: Untimely Thoughts on Culture and Society* (New York, Vintage Books, 1994).

leaves the reader to wonder whether or not John Turner actually liked Brigham Young. If not, biography will generally suffer, as British poet Carol Rumens noted: “The ideal biographer must admire his subject but remain clear-eyed.”³⁵

The Brigham Young portrayed by John Turner was not a likable person. Indeed, he was a most unlikable individual. Other readers had similar reactions. Doug Gibson announced “I don’t care much for Brigham Young the man.”³⁶ Julie M. Smith wrote how she had felt an increased appreciation for previous church presidents after reading their biographies. With this book, she declared, “I can’t say the same about Brigham Young; I liked him—and respected him—less. Much less.”³⁷ Jason Lee Steorts was even more descriptive in his distaste for “a man both great and greatly flawed.” He began his review of the book by stating, “If a magnetic, irritable, and occasionally horrifying Moses were the main character in a quite bloody western, watching it might be something like reading this new biography of Mormonism’s second prophet.”³⁸

If John Turner’s goal was to dissuade readers from liking or admiring Brigham Young then he was quite successful. It is doubtful that was his goal. Still, the Brigham Young portrayed in this book is not as multidimensional as he could have been and is more negatively portrayed than he should have been. It was not only right but necessary for Turner to address controversial issues and teachings like the Adam-God theory, denying

35. Carol Rumens, “[review of] *The Bard*, By Robert Crawford,” *The Independent* (16 January 2009), <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-bard-by-robert-crawfordbr-a-night-out-with-robert-burns-ed-andrew-ohagan-1379914.html>.

36. Doug Gibson, “Brigham Young biography portrays a great leader and an unpleasant man,” *Standard-Examiner* (8 October 2012), <http://www.standard.net/stories/2012/10/05/brigham-young-biography-portrays-great-leader-and-unpleasant-man>.

37. Julie M. Smith, *Times and Seasons* (10 September 2012), <http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2012/09/book-review-brigham-young-pioneer-prophet-by-john-g-turner/>.

38. Jason Lee Steorts, “The Mormon Moses,” *National Review* 64/20 (29 October 2012): 42.

blacks the priesthood, the Mormon Reformation of 1856–1857, the movement to boycott non-Mormon businesses as a way of encouraging them to leave Utah, and a host of other issues. The fact that Brigham Young sometimes swore like a sailor and used violent language like “cut their throats” is also necessary in order to get a well-rounded picture of Brigham Young.

But was there not enough room to also include some of Brigham Young’s other teachings and statements? Certainly Turner, in the process of studying the *Journal of Discourses* and other publications of Brigham Young’s numerous speeches would have found and could have included some of Young’s teachings about Jesus Christ and His gospel. For example, Young stated, “Our faith is concentrated in the Son of God, and through him in the Father.”³⁹ He also taught, “The Latter-day Saints believe in the Gospel of the Son of God, simply because it is true”⁴⁰ and “This Gospel will save the whole human family; the blood of Jesus will atone for our sins, if we accept the terms he has laid down; but we must accept those terms or else it will avail nothing in our behalf.”⁴¹

Brigham Young didn’t stop there in his teachings about and personal faith in the atoning sacrifice. He explained how God’s plan of salvation affected all of His children:

Millions of [people] have passed away, both in the Christian and in the heathen worlds, just as honest, just as virtuous and upright as any now living. The Christian world say they are lost; but the Lord will save them, or at least, all who will receive the Gospel. The

39. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 26, as quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 32.

40. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 30 as quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, 38.

41. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 7-8 as quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, 39.

plan of salvation which Jesus has revealed, and which we preach, reaches to the lowest and most degraded of Adam's lost race.⁴²

With his own personal failings in mind and certainly with a hope in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Young preached:

We rejoice because the Lord is ours, because we are sown in weakness for the express purpose of attaining to greater power and perfection. In everything, the saints may rejoice ... Do you ask if I rejoice because the Devil has the advantage over the inhabitants of the earth and has afflicted mankind? I most assuredly answer in the affirmative; I rejoice in this as much as in anything else. I rejoice because I am afflicted. I rejoice because I am poor. I rejoice because I am cast down. Why? Because I shall be lifted up again. I rejoice that I am poor because I shall be made rich; that I am afflicted because I shall be comforted, and prepared to enjoy the felicity of perfect happiness, for it is impossible to properly appreciate happiness except by enduring the opposite.⁴³

In spite of Brigham Young's prickly personality and obvious character flaws, he taught an upbeat gospel of love and hope. "How do you feel, Saints, when you are filled with the power and love of God? You are just as happy as your bodies can bear."⁴⁴ "The whole world are after happiness. It is not found in gold and silver, but it is in peace and love."⁴⁵ Julie M.

42. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 60-61 as quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, 52.

43. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 228 as quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, 178.

44. *Millennial Star Supplement*, 15:48 as quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, 184.

45. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 235 as quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, 184.

Smith complained that the reader is “not left with any reason as to why people would have made the enormous sacrifices that were part of believing that Brigham Young was the prophet.”⁴⁶ If Turner had included just some of Brigham Young’s other sermons and teachings, the reason for the Saint’s devotion and support would have been more obvious.

Thus John G. Turner’s *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* falls short of portraying the whole person, and lacks vital contextualization that help us to understand some of his less appealing traits. Because of the negative tone and apparent over-emphasis on the darker side of Brigham Young and Mormonism, as well as some factual errors,⁴⁷ I cannot recommend this book for the average reader. I do, however, strongly recommend the book for experienced students and scholars of Mormon history in general and Brigham Young in particular.

46. Smith, *Times and Seasons*.

47. Among a number of factual errors are two examples. The first was on p. 85 in which Turner stated that Brigham Young and others were introduced the Endowment ceremony in “the same upper room in the lodge,” meaning the Masonic lodge. Both the Masonic lodge and the endowments were held in the upstairs room of Joseph Smith’s Red Brick Store. Construction on the Masonic Hall or lodge was not started until 1843 and not completed until 1844. Turner should have been more specific if he was aware of the difference between these two buildings. The second example is on p. 273 in which he quoted Brigham Young speaking about Johnston’s Army approaching Utah in 1857, “I shall lay this building [the Salt Lake Tabernacle] in ashes.” The problem with Turner’s added note to the quote is that construction on the now standing Salt Lake Tabernacle was not started until 1864 and it was completed in 1867. Brigham Young was probably have been speaking in the third bowery constructed on Temple Square. The first two boweries had outlived their use and the Old Tabernacle was completed in 1852. It proved, however, to be too small and a third, much larger bowery was constructed in 1854 and was used when the weather was warm. As Young gave the quoted speech on 19 August 1857, the meeting was probably not in the smaller, more cramped Old Tabernacle. See Stewart L. Grow, “Buildings in Kirtland, Far West, Nauvoo, and Miller’s Hollow,” in *The Tabernacle: “An Old and Wonderful Friend,”* ed. Scott C. Esplin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2007), 107–136, <http://rsc.byu.edu/archived/tabernacle-old-and-wonderful-friend/thesis/3-buildings-temple-block-preceding-tabernacle>, accessed 8 December 2012.

Craig L. Foster earned a MA and MLIS at Brigham Young University. He is also an accredited genealogist and works as a research consultant at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. He has published articles about different aspects of Mormon history. He is the author of two books, coauthor of another and coeditor of a three volume series discussing the history and theology of plural marriage. Foster is also on the editorial board of the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal.

