
BOOK REVIEW

WILLIAM P. MACKINNON, ed. *At Sword's Point, Part I: A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858*. Vol. 10, *Kingdom in the West Series: The Mormons and the American Frontier*, ed. Will Bagley. (Norman, Oklahoma: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2008, 546 pp., illustrations, editorial procedures, bibliography, index, \$45.00 hardback.)

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William P. MacKinnon began studying the conflict between Mormons and Federal officials as an undergraduate and earned a BA degree magna cum laude from Yale University. In 1962, he received an MBA degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration. During his career MacKinnon has published nine important articles on various phases of the Utah War.

At Sword's Point, Part I covers 1849 to 1857 and is the first volume of a two-part historical documentary on the Utah War. The first two chapters cover two themes of conflict—the the soldiers' sexual misconduct with Latter-day Saint women and federal officials' attack "on Governor Brigham Young's theocracy" (53).

The subsequent sixteen chapters focus on a number of complex issues between the Mormons and federal officials. For example, MacKinnon documents Young's attempt to convince James Buchanan's administration to make political appointments from Utah. When Buchanan took office, he at first acted indecisively. Before learning of Federal Judge W. W. Drummond's condemnation of Young, Buchanan made his decision to replace him and send troops based on "at least three batches of material received in Washington during the third week of March 1857" (100). This decision created two dilemmas—finding a military command and selecting a new governor for Utah. Documents reveal the temporary selection of General William S. Harney as the first commander for the Utah Expedition, and then after several men declined the territorial governorship, Alfred Cumming accepted.

Lengthy excerpts from the *Deseret News*, letters, and public discourses illustrate Young's volatile response to these decisions. Young mobilized Mor-

mon forces to patrol the western trails, alerted all Nauvoo Legion units, urged the population to save grain, evacuated stations on the plains and colonies in Carson Valley, San Bernardino, San Francisco, and Hawaii, sent George A. Smith to warn Southern Utah of the situation, and urged Native Americans to join the Mormons.

MacKinnon notes that Young's intentions for declaring independence in August 1857 are debatable, but writes that it "is incontestable . . . [that] his choice of words, as a highly visible leader with a large audience and printing press at his disposal, led people to perceive that he had declared Mormon independence" (238). A lengthy unpublished discourse Young gave on August 16, 1857, and James H. Martineau's transcriptions, show how Young expressed his views, bought arms, placed orders with non-Mormon transportation firms, and had agents smuggle these supplies to Utah.

When the military moved west of Fort Laramie, Nauvoo Legion records reveal the Mormons' response. Young announced martial law, sent scouting patrols, constructed defensive barriers, and ordered military actions in Utah, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oregon, and California.

Diaries and letters disclose the troops' frustration with the commanding officers. Colonel Edmund Alexander began leading his troops along the Bear River to the Salt Lake Valley, but he then changed his mind and returned to Blacks Fork. When Albert S. Johnston took command, he wintered the troops near Fort Bridger. Meanwhile, the government made plans to invade Utah via the Colorado River, California, and Oregon. Furthermore, rumors circulated that the Mormons planned to migrate to Mexico, Central America, Dutch East Indies, Hawaiian Islands, Montana, Alaska, and Vancouver Island.

In the last chapter, "To Avert A War of Extermination," MacKinnon inserts the message Buchanan gave to Congress as justification for intervening in Utah, charging Young with having absolute power over church and state, forcing federal officials to flee Utah, tampering with Indians, and declaring martial law.

MacKinnon includes Young's message to Utah's legislative assembly which denounced corrupt federal appointees, condemned Buchanan for sending troops to sustain them, and claimed the right to resist tyrants. After including documents on this conflict, MacKinnon inserts sources telling how Thomas L. Kane became involved in mediating difficulties between Mormons and the federal government.

MacKinnon makes several very important contributions. He inserts hundreds of primary sources—many previously unpublished—and provides abundant background information, as well as the location of other published documents that he omitted from inclusion. Instead of endnotes, he uses reader-friendly footnotes which provide excellent documentation and detail. Howev-

er, some data in the footnotes should have been included within the narrative. For example, footnote five on page fifty-four provides a relevant summary of the debate among historians over the Mormon Reformation and the teaching of blood atonement.

Even though this volume makes significant contributions, readers should be aware of several weaknesses. He publishes many long excerpts from documents on violence, but unfortunately fails to include Indian Agent Garland Hurt's letter to Jacob Forney on December 4, 1857 regarding the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

MacKinnon asserts that his goal is to tell "the complex story of what the Utah War was, how it came about, how the two sides prosecuted the war, and its results" (35). To avoid misconceptions, he claims his intention is to let the documents "largely speak for themselves . . . [and leave the verdict] to the reader's judgment." Thus the result will simply "present a balanced explanation of the Utah War through its participants' voices" (38). Despite such claims, MacKinnon's commentary in each chapter shapes what he wants readers to think when they read the documents.

In the chapters on violence, MacKinnon holds Young responsible because of Young's speeches and choice of words which implied killing people. Also, MacKinnon blames Young for using the Nauvoo Legion as terrorists as well as notorious individuals who committed a string of murders, including the Iron County militia, which butchered some 120 people at Mountain Meadows.

For this tragic event, he blames Young's lack of leadership. In chapter twelve, MacKinnon writes:

This chapter—is a series of killings that soon followed those at Mountain Meadows and the ineffective leadership that enabled them. This little-examined violence, together with the pre-war Ambrose-Betts Affair and the Parrish-Potter murders, firmly links the Mountain Meadows massacre to the broader context—the military campaign and the territorial culture of violence that spawned it. An understanding of these earlier atrocities and what prompted them, together with the enormity of the immediately preceding Mountain Meadows massacre, should at long last belie the appalling myth of the Utah War as a bloodless conflict—an expensive but basically harmless affair (297).

MacKinnon also fails to provide a national context for the use of violence to solve the problems in Utah. Newspapers, congressional debates, and government documents show wide-spread desire to crush the Mormons. In response, Wilford Woodruff recorded "that all Hell is boiling over against us. Among the rest Wm. Smith Called upon the Government to furnish him with an army & money. He would Come to Utah & subdue the mormons."¹

Furthermore, MacKinnon uses the term *theocracy* as a metaphor to interpret the documents without clearly explaining how church and state relations actually operated in Utah. He implies that no separation existed between church and state. For example, many journalists and some historians have charged that probate judges were virtually all LDS Church officials, but Jeffery O. Johnson has demonstrated that a very high percentage of Utah probate judges in 1856, 1865, and 1874 did not hold any ecclesiastical position. Johnson also notes that Young requested citizens to use probate courts rather than Church courts in cases involving property and marital disputes.² Even though many assemblymen held Church positions, most federal government officials were non-Mormons.

MacKinnon also injects an inaccurate perception of Utah's territorial relationship with the federal government. In the pre-Civil War era of the 1850s, popular sovereignty over local issues such as slavery existed in Utah, New Mexico, and Kansas. Territorial leaders insisted they were not subjects to a central government in the same sense as the British colonies. Viewing Young's rhetoric from this perspective helps explain his behavior better than passing judgment from a post-Civil War paradigm.

The rhetorical warfare that existed between Mormon and non-Mormon newspapers also needs to be considered in explaining why Young made the choices he did during this violent era. Even with these limitations, professional scholars, history buffs, and general readers will find the narrative, documents, commentary, footnotes, and bibliography helpful to understanding the Utah War; and they should look forward with anticipation for the publication of the second volume of *At Sword's Point*.

Notes

1. See the May 31, 1857 entry in *Wilford Woodruff's Journal 1833–1898, Typescript*, 9 vols., edited by Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 5:54.

2. Jeffery O. Johnson, "Was Being a Probate Judge in Pioneer Utah a Church Calling?" unpublished paper presented at the Mormon History Association conference, Casper, Wyoming, May 26, 2006.